

"Continue in the Truth"

John 8:31-36

October 25, 2009

There was a pastor who brought a jar full of beans to his first confirmation class each year. He asks his students to guess how many beans were in the jar, and on a big pad of paper writes down their estimates. Then, next to those estimates, he asked them to list their favorite song. When the students had all responded, he reveals the actual number of beans in the jar. They were quick to figure out which guess was closest to the true number of beans in the jar. The closest number was easy to figure out. Then the pastor had the class look at the list of favorite songs and asked: "And which one of these is closest to being right?" The students protest that there is no "right answer"; a person's favorite song is purely a matter of taste.

The pastor, who holds a Ph.D. in philosophy from Notre Dame asks, "When you decide what to believe in terms of your faith, is that more like guessing the number of beans, or more like choosing your favorite song?" Always, the pastor says, whether asking older people as well as young, he gets the same answer: Choosing one's faith is more like choosing a favorite song.

What do you think? Is there a right answer when it comes to God or is it just a matter of what feels good to you? If it is just about personal preference Then we can design God in any way we choose. We can shape a god that will be and do exactly what we want a god to do. But is that really how it works? Or is God just what God is and we try our hardest to get as close as we can to being right about how we understand God?

Jesus looked out at His disciples told them pretty plainly - - there is a truth. There is a right answer when it comes to knowing God. And if you want to know the truth you have to 'continue in God's Word.' By 85 A.D., when John was writing his account of the good news concerning the life of Jesus, the Jewish Christians had been expelled from the synagogue, rejected and condemned by their faith community for their belief that Jesus was indeed the Son of God, the long-awaited Messiah. They loved their church and hated the rift that had developed over their belief in Jesus as the Messiah. Their hearts were heavy and their minds were reeling: now what? Their very lives were in danger. Was what they believed true or not? Should they hold on to the faith that they had come to trust or not? John's underlying message was simple: Stand fast. You have the truth. Hold firm to what you have come to believe and know. God is with you.

Do you know the truth about God or not? - - - People the world over are busy guessing at the number of beans in the jar - guessing about the very nature of God. And I suspect that there are really just as many different answers as there are people trying to come up with the answer But there is a right answer. And

people the world over will try to convince you that their vision of God and consequently their understandings about life are the right one. Many times the various understandings might seem appealing ... You may well like the sound of that tune. But is it the truth? If God is just a matter of personal preference, we are all in trouble. There is truth And only as you continue in Christ [live with, walk with, eat and sleep and talk with Jesus] Only then will you begin to come closer and closer to knowing God.

Do you know the truth? Will you continue in Christ in such a way that you will find freedom in your ongoing life in Christ?

There was a woman who drove her red station wagon to a place where the circus was performing. Unfortunately, the car was crushed by an elephant at a circus. The owners of the animal apologized, explaining that the animal, for some reason, simply liked to sit on red cars. In spite of the damage, the woman's car was still drivable. So she drove it toward home with plans to stop at a garage to get an estimate on repairing the damage. But on the way to the garage she came upon an accident involving two other cars that had just happened a short time before. She pulled over to the side of the road and waited. When the ambulance arrived a few minutes later the attendants took one look at her car, then ran over to assist her.

"Oh, I wasn't involved in this accident," she explained. "An elephant sat on my car." The ambulance attendants quickly bundled her off to the hospital for possible shock and head injuries, despite the lady's vehement protests.

Do you know the truth? Are you willing and able to stick with the truth when those around you may want you to believe that you are losing your mind or that you are dumb for believing all of that 'God stuff'? How could the early Christians hold on to what they believed when they were being kicked out of their church for holding such a controversial belief as Jesus being the Savior? How can you and I hold on to our faith when the world around us want us to believe so many other things - things that may seem much more appealing?

Do you know the truth? Knowing the truth about God will truly make you free in ways that are hard to comprehend when we are often as slow to catch on as the disciples were. It is hard to imagine that the disciples just did not have a very good grasp on their lives or their history. The disciples who were bold to suggest that they had never not been free - forgetting their slavery in Egypt, the Babylonians and Assyrians captivity and years of slavery, and then there was the Roman overlords who ruled their land at that very time {not to mention their slavery to sin which Jesus was really talking about}. They just did not have a very good grip on the reality of their lives. How could they really believe that they needed any Savior if they were so perfectly free?

Do we know the truth about our lives and about our need for God? Do you know freedom from the enslaving power of sin, guilt, brokenness, hatred, unwillingness to

forgive and the like? Do you know the truth? Are you committed to continuing in Christ so as to come to know that freedom?

I remember a few years ago {quite a few years ago!!!} when I sat wearing a white robe on a Sunday morning ready to be Confirmed. I know that I knew that I was ready to be done - I knew enough of that 'God stuff' if I was lucky and I was asked at just the right moment I might have even been able to recite a few of the commandments. I had it down cold at least as much as I needed. Still I continued to be connected to the church and God in a variety of ways. And in those times when I became even more deeply connected I found out how much more there was to know, how much more I wanted to know. In the years that followed there were certainly side trips - there were people and things that were pretty enticing and sounded like they might be more fun but I always found myself coming back ... realizing I believed but knowing that I didn't know enough to stop struggling with the Word. Even in seminary I remember arguing with professors about various aspects of this 'God stuff' and coming to see even more clearly that I just need to continue with the journey with Christ because somewhere in there was the truth. In the 'continuing' God reveals the truth that will help me through one more moment of doubt, or struggle, or crisis.

Do you know the truth? Confirmation class of 2009 do you know the truth? Do you have it all figured out? Are you done with all of this God stuff? God is not done with you! God hold freedom and life before you. This is Good News that God wants you to have? Will you continue in God's Word? Know the truth and find freedom in His name.

AMEN