**Knowing the Road** Rev. Dr. Julia A. Carlson
Christ the King Sunday The House of Hope Presbyterian Church Psalm 42; John 18:33-37 Saint Paul, Minnesota
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I am a long-time fan of Martha Grimes’ mysteries. There are 25 Richard Jury books named for pubs around England, the last of which is called *The Old Success*. The second to the last is called *The Knowledge*. Within the story, Grimes teaches us all about The Knowledge, the real-life training for London taxi drivers; it’s been around since 1865 and said to be the most difficult test in the world.

According to their website, there are 25,000 streets in London. Those interested in becoming cab drivers begin their schooling with The Knowledge of London Blue Book. It comes with a second book containing advice on how to learn The Knowledge.

Among other things, all city cabbies are required to learn 320 routes called “the runs,” all of which are within a six-mile radius of Charing Cross; they have to know all roads, all landmarks, and all the starting and ending points. Their process asks, “Do you have the pride and passion it takes to become a London cabbie?”

In the ancient Greek, *-ology* means knowledge. *Theos* is God; theology is knowledge of God. Today is the day of Christology, the knowledge of Jesus Christ. Theology and Christology should never be separated from Pneumatology, the knowledge of Spirit; which all together is Trinitarian theology.

We are here today as an *ecclesia*, a community *en Christos*, this is Ecclesiology. The *ecclesia* is a meeting place of the knowledge and mystery; we know what we do here but we can’t explain all of what happens here. Here in church, what we know and what we cannot explain bring us into a conversation that goes beyond earthly knowledge. Theology takes us to a deeper and broader place because it encompasses not only what we know of God but what God knows of us; God knows each one of us to the core, all of human history–and God knows the future. God is always working to redeem and bring the kin-dom.

One of the great wonders and beauties of the Psalms is that they capture human nature so well. “As a deer longs for flowing streams, so my soul longs for you, O God.” From this poetic longing for the Holy One, the Psalm goes into a rhythm of faith to despair and back again. Within this one Psalm, the writer speaks of going out with “glad shouts” and great faith and praise on the way to the temple and then recounts his “downcast” soul. When he writes about deep calling to deep, I often think about it as the depths and movement of human feeling. But the Hebrew word used here is t*ehom* which is more accurately referencing the disorder, turmoil, and madness of the world; the “deeps” in the ancient Hebrew world were more precisely translated as, “Chaos is calling to chaos.”

I think we can relate to that. Chaos is on the rise. The unruly, the frenzied, and the anarchic are acting from their chaos in political, religious, and corporate arenas around the world. While the people and cities of Gaza are being pounded to ruble, Hamas shelters in underground tunnels–and in the deeps of their hate. The dictators of the world are romancing young politicians with images of control, order, influence, and wealth while normalizing a depth of depravity in their propaganda, and using the military against their own citizens.

We can also think of the deeps when Jesus is placed under arrest and tried by leaders both Jewish and Roman, who felt their power and way of life threatened by his teaching and presence. Pilate asks, “So, are you a king or not?” In Eugene Peterson’s translation, Jesus answers, “You tell me. Because I am King, I was born and entered the world so that I could witness to the truth. Everyone who cares for truth, who has any feeling for the truth, recognizes my voice.”

Do you feel the shift from the human to the divine; can you hear the invitation to go beyond human knowledge and desires to discern truth? This is the blue book knowledge we are invited to seek and practice. Because world events, power struggles, the values of capitalism–the chaos–will continue to pummel faith and create that pendulum swing from glad shouts to wondering where God is if we do not find firm grounding in Jesus, our King.

In his parlay with Pilate, Jesus asks us to differentiate the ways of Empire from the Kin-dom of God. Emilie Townes, now a dean at Vanderbilt Divinity School wrote this about today’s reading:

“Jesus expands on his messianic mission as the witness to the truth in wording that is distinctly Johannine. In intellectual terms, we tend to think of truth . . . as reliability and dependability. In religious terms, it expands beyond this to an unwavering conformity with God's will so that we think in terms of reality and understanding. In the New Testament, it is possible to speak of truth as something that is done rather than something that is simply believed or thought of. Indeed it is possible to set truth in contrast to unrighteousness. For contemporary Christians, the truth as revealed in Jesus Christ takes precedence over all other human understanding of truth.”

She described what I am calling chaos as unrighteousness, Townes sees this in our current culture as a “massive hijacking of the common good” and a “massive attempt to manipulate what we see, think, and feel.” In a more recent interview Townes said, “Knowledge is learning not to touch a hot stove. Truth is what’s in the heart and soul.”

Righteousness is most easily defined as right relationship with God and with one another. African American poet and writer Alice Walker said, “Whatever is currently happening to humanity, it is happening to all of us. No matter how hidden the cruelty, no matter how far off the screams of pain and terror, we live in one world.” This, I believe is a deep truth. For me, it echoes Martin Niemoller’s well-known quote, “First they came for the socialists, and I did not speak out—because I was not a socialist. Then they came for the trade unionists, and I did not speak out—because I was not a trade unionist. Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out—because I was not a Jew. Then they came for me—and there was no one left to speak for me.”

Christologically, John’s use of the word truth, is revelation and an offering of salvation. Rather than 320 routes, we have the One who said, “Everyone who cares for truth, who has any feeling for the truth, recognizes my voice.” However, in just a few short years of public ministry, he spoke about multiple routes to healing, he left us pathways of peace, and showed us preferred courses for a communal life that are humane, just, and loving. This is road to a healthy and open *ekklesia*.

Christ the King Sunday is an invitation to discern and claim our spiritual growth whether delivered through blessings, challenge, or loss. With eyes to see and ears to hear, wisdom is sifted into our lives from many experiences. Our transformation calls for introspection and integration. This day asks us to measure what we've seen and heard in this world next to the life of Jesus Christ so we can discern the things before and around us that are or are not of his truth.

The Psalmist is here to keep reminding us of the truth of human nature as he says to God in one and the same breath, “you are my rock/why have you forgotten me?” He brings his doubt and worry to God for catharsis; without that practice, we can get stuck thinking the past is better than the future which is an absence of hope. As they look out on the chaos of our time many in younger generations are in fact asking, “Where is your God?,” They are not looking for a quote from the Bible but showings of love from people who can see hope beyond cynicism. The Way of Jesus Christ is a labor of love. Christ the King Sunday tells us we love God in order to better love humanity.

Old Testament professor Cameron Howard put it this way, “Sometimes telling the truth does involve confronting a coming disaster, whether it is a global threat like climate change or nuclear war, or a more personal catastrophe, like those that come in the wake of addiction, cruelty, or apathy. Many other times, though, telling the truth involves affirming the radical promises of God: that all are beloved, that there is no shame that cannot be overcome, that there is no hurt that cannot be healed, that death does not have the last word” (Cameron Howard, The Working Preacher).

In the fuller trial story in John 18 and 19, Pilate did quite a dance to try to sidestep the responsibility of his position; he did everything he could think of not to be “That Guy” in this story. He did everything but tell the truth.

Redemption requires truth. Dr. Townes has called for “serious acts of belief” in standing up to evil, injustice, and fear. Dr. Howard says telling the truth involves affirming the radical promises of God: “that all are beloved, that there is no shame that cannot be overcome, that there is no hurt that cannot be healed, that death does not have the last word.” These are our truths and this is our walk.

Today, we are hearing the traditional Catholic Mass sung. We can let it carry us straight into the Trinitarian Mystery where we can know another truth: we first meet *tehom* in Genesis 1 as the spirit soars over the face of the deep. Chaos is a place God has done some of God’s most creative work. May it be so. Thanks be to God. Amen.