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First UMC

Springboro, Ohio

April 10, 2016

Series: “The Gifts of Easter”

Message: “The Gift of Truth”

Scripture: John 14:1-14

 During this season of Eastertide we are given 50 days to celebrate the resurrection of Jesus and the difference that it makes in our lives. As a way of doing that, we are looking at “The Gifts of Easter.” Each week we will take a closer look at one of these gifts. We’ll get it out of the box and figure out how it works and connects to our lives.

 Today we are looking at the gift of truth. Truth is something that is foundational to who we are as humans. We desire it deeply, but we also wrestle with it, avoid it, and withhold it from others. We philosophize with Pilate, often to justify our behavior or our guilt, “What is truth?”

 Truth is the foundation of who we are. Truth is what helps us to ‘get a grip’ and to move forward in life.

 When we don’t know the truth, when we’re avoiding the truth or hiding it, we struggle in life and begin to deteriorate physically, spiritually and emotionally.

 To know the truth and to be able to face it and live into it is hard, but it gives us life. It allows us to grow and thrive.

 We have all had those situations when we think, “If I could just know the truth, then I could move on.” Think of the difference in not feeling good, worrying about what it wrong with you, waiting to see what the test results say. Not knowing is exhausting.

 And I think of those who have been given a terrible diagnosis with only months to live. When they finally know and accept the truth of their situation, something changes in them. They muster the courage to fight the disease and to live each day to the fullest. They draw others near to them. They know they no longer have time to waste worrying or not feeling good. They live in the truth that every moment is precious.

 I think of that moment of receiving the gut wrenching news that a relationship is failing or over. It’s not what you want to ever hear. But in the end it’s better than pretending, than that deep down soul stealing worry that distorts and undermines who you are.

 I think of crime situations when you finally know the facts, who to be angry at, what to grieve. And once you can do that, you can begin to forgive and heal.

 Jesus, back in John 8:32 puts it this way, “You will know the truth and the truth will set you free.”

 This sort of moment is like finding a door in what you thought was a solid wall.

 And until we get to this place of facing, living in and sharing the truth, we will always be running away, restless, angry, anxious, depressed, hiding, hurting yourself or others.

 But it’s a hard door to open and walk through, this door of truth because there are two sides to it. First we have to realize the truth that is the brokenness and the sinfulness and the limitedness of ourselves and others. We are capable of breaking the hearts and destroying the souls of others and ourselves, of doing great harm. We have to accept the truth of disease and accidents that will shorten our lives. We have to accept the reality that there is darkness and desperation and evil. We have all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.

 We saw this in the very beginning in the Garden of Eden and then we saw it even more clearly on Good Friday. In the face of the purest gift of God with us, we chose the apple, we chose to cry out, ‘crucify him.’

 Are you depressed yet? If we stopped here, it would be a terrible reality to face. No wonder so many don’t want to face the truth.

 But the good news is that there is more to the story.

 Then came the truth of Easter.

 In response to the truth of our lives, the truth of the garden and Good Friday, God gives us the truth of Easter. In spite of all these things, Jesus has risen. Jesus is the final truth. And that truth has the power to correct, redeem and turn around all of the other truth of our lives.

 Death is true, but it is not the final truth. The final truth is resurrection.

 The end of a job or a relationship is true, but it is not the final truth. The final truth is that you are loved by a love that never fails and never ends.

 The darkness that we as humans are capable of and the impact of crime and sin is true, but it is not the final truth. The final truth is that God’s healing power is even more profound and far reaching. God’s healing power of the final truth.

 This is why Jesus can say, “Do not let your hearts be troubled” (or disturbed, upset, anguished). He doesn’t say it because everything is going to be okay, easy and happy. He says it just after he tells them he will be killed in a horrible, terrifying sort of way.

 “Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God and believe in me. In my Father’s house are many rooms.”

 Often we hear these words at funerals. They assure us that we will be with Jesus and those we love in heaven.

 But I think that Jesus intended for us to hear them in an even more far reaching way that that. He is telling us that even in this life, in any situation that we face, when our hearts are breaking, when we have seen the darkest side of humanity or our own soul, when we are terrified of what is to come, that even though these things are true, that there is a greater truth beyond what is true today in this moment. This truth is Jesus and the fact that when you stick close to him, when you are in him, God will bring resurrection and healing and love to every situation. It is the truth that God is drawing all things to his good and that God will in His time redeem even this situation, this moment.

 And so even when the way is dark and we’re not sure about the truth right now in this situation, we do know the truth of Easter. And it guides us in each and every situation that we face about how to live, love, and forgive. It allows us to trust Jesus and to live in his truth.

 Now if you’re like Thomas, you’re a concrete thinker. All of this sounds nice, but you want a map, or a checklist, or at least some clear instructions in each of these situations you might encounter in life.

 He says, “Lord, we don’t know where you are going, so how can we know the way?”

 But sometimes a map doesn’t work. You can get turned around so easily, especially under stress, in a big city. When I was young we went out east for a wedding and spent a day in New York City. Four adults who had never spent any time in the big city, and four young children. Picture is all on the train trying to read the map to get to the Staten Island Ferry, scared to death.

 After a while of observing the conversation, a business woman took pity on us. First she tried to help us understand the map: blank stares. Then she tried to tell us the directions with landmarks and rights and lefts: more blank stares. Finally she said, I am getting off near there. You can follow me but I walk very fast. Somehow we managed, all eight of us to follow her and get on that ferry.

 Jesus does this for us. The map of the Old Testament didn’t work very well. The Prophets giving directions based on the map didn’t work very well. But then Jesus comes and says, you can follow me and I will help you find your way through this life to the final destination of God’s truth, abundant and eternal life and never failing love. “I am the way, and the truth, and the life.” If you want to make it, just stick close to me and I’ll get you there.

 This verse reminds us that we can’t do it on our own. We’ve tried over and over and we’ve gotten hopelessly lost. We need a guide. And so this verse is about having that close relationship with him, trusting him, sticking close to him, especially in the hardest and most confusing times of life, but also in the good moments when we might be tempted to take our eyes off of him and sight see or try it on our own.

 Today as you think about your life, what hard truths are you dealing with in your life? What hard truths do you need to face? Jesus can help you face those truths squarely, and accept them, so that he can guide you through it into the even greater truth of God’s power and love. I invite you to hear his words again. Hear him speaking directly to you and the situations that you would rather not have to deal with: “Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me….I am the way and the truth, and the life.”