

“The truth. Does it matter?” Eph 4:1-16

I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit-- just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call – one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift. Therefore it says, “When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men.” (In saying, “He ascended,” what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower regions, the earth? He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.) And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

Today we will meditate on our reading from Ephesians. But even before we get to what Paul writes, let me ask you this question. Do you feel like we have lost something? Something very important. Something that is a matter of life and death, eternal life and death. Can you guess what it is? The truth.

Wait, wait pastor, how can we lose the truth? It is right here in the Word. Isn't it? It is revealed to us Christians. More it is brought to us by God's own Spirit, who also is called the Spirit of ... yes, the Spirit of truth. And the job of this Spirit of truth is to lead us to the truth.

And the truth is... yes, He is a person. Jesus from Nazareth. The Eternal Son of God. The One who says about Himself: “I am the way, the truth and the life.” And, indeed, the Spirit of truth is given to us, He comes to us, dwells with us and He does His job well.

He leads us to Jesus, gently persuading us, He reveals Jesus to us, His loving heart. The Spirit helps us to know the truth, and to see things as they are, and the truth then sets us free. There is so much written about the importance of the truth in the Bible.

And on one hand we could agree and say, sure, we still have the Word of God, it is not lost. Yet. The truth is here, available for anyone who cares about it. The question is, – do people care about it? Do even Christians care about it?

The society has changed a lot. Half a century ago people still believed that there is such a thing as the truth, and many tried to find it. Today more and more people embrace the idea that there is no such a thing as the truth.

That all that there is, is just different perspectives. You have your “truth” and I have my “truth”. Let’s not worry about that. Today it is not a virtue anymore to be certain about something, to stand firm for what you believe.

Today it is considered narrow. Especially if someone talks about faith, or God, or things that are right and wrong. Doubt is today’s virtue. Doubt, and disbelief. For there is nothing one can know for sure. Is it much different in our churches?

Do we still believe that there is such a thing that the truth? Do we still care about it? Paul cared about it a lot. Especially in his letters for his fellow pastors he reminds them to hold firm to the sound teaching of the Gospel.

The same was true for our Reformation fathers. The sound teaching of the Gospel was of the highest priority. How much do we worry about what is being preached and taught in the Church? Sure, we care about being comforted, and being encouraged. And that’s all good.

But, do we care about the truth, about the sound teaching? I guess the answer varies from one person to another. However, one is clear, many churches are guided by principles like: “Teaching divides, service unites.” Therefore, let’s focus on what unites us and let’s not bother about what divides.

I am sure most of you would have witnessed the same sentiment. Let’s not worry much about the teaching, about the truth, let’s focus on what we can do together. But is that what Jesus and His apostles teach us?

Today we heard from Paul that it is the truth that creates the deepest unity. It is the truth that brings people together. It is not the sound teaching that divides, it is lies and false teachings.

The truth not only brings Christians together in wonderful unity, but it also creates in us new hearts that desire to do good and then overflow in caring for our neighbours. The truth is the source from which the works of love spring up.

But today in so many churches and among so many Christians there is this destructive spirit of apathy. It whispers into our ear, – does it really matter what anyone teaches? What difference does it make, whether you are a Baptist, or an Anglican, or a Pentecostal, or a Catholic, or a Lutheran?

Who can know the truth anyway? There are so many interpretations... Let us think about this for a while. For these are very important questions. These are matters of life and death. Eternal life and death.

Answer to this one! How are we saved from eternal separation from loving God, and how are we brought into His Kingdom? How does it happen? First, this is not our doing. We wouldn’t even care about it. It is all God’s doing.

He knows the truth, He knows our hopeless situation. He makes the first step. He reconciled the world to Himself through His Son. That's a big picture view. Now, how does He save you? What does He do?

The Triune God sends you His Holy Spirit, the Spirit of truth, who then creates in us new hearts. How does He do it? How does God send His Spirit to us? How does the Spirit come to us?

Paul asked this question in his letter to Galatians. "Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law [meaning, by doing the right thing] or by hearing with faith? (Gal 3:2) Does the Spirit is given to us when we do some sort of service?

Or, when listen to God speaking to us? Of course, faith comes by hearing. Are you still with me? Let's continue! By hearing what? Anything? No! By hearing the Good News, the Gospel, the sound teaching, the truth.

The Holy Spirit doesn't come to us when we hear false teachings, when we hear lies about Jesus, or about the Triune God, or about His plan for our salvation, or about anything that the Word of God reveals to us.

This is quite simple. The Spirit of truth comes to us when we hear the truth, and then He creates faith in us. But when we hear false teachings, when we hear lies, then it is a very different spirit at work.

The spirit that comes from the father of all lies, the devil. It doesn't come to create faith, it comes to steal and kill and destroy. Knowing this, how could we be indifferent to what is taught in our churches? How could it not be a big deal?

The apostle warns us: "A little leaven leavens the whole lump." (Gal 5:9) Our Reformation fathers in 16th century used a very helpful picture to underscore the importance of the truth, of sound and faithful teaching.

They spoke about the message of the Bible as the body of teaching. We know that in one body you have many different members. Some are more important, and some are less important.

There are members without which you couldn't survive, and there are those you could lose and still be alive. But they all are connected. Now, think about your body. Think about the least important member of your body.

Now imagine that this member would be in pain. Or infected. Would that matter? Would that have any implications to your wellbeing and health? Most certainly, yes! Of course!

Would you ever say that that member isn't important for your wellbeing, that you really don't need it much? No! We care for wellbeing of our entire body. If one member hurts, the whole body hurts.

The same way our Reformation fathers taught us about the body of teaching. If one member hurts, the whole body suffers. Lies are no small matter in the Church. The truth unites and gives life, lies divide and destroy.

Paul wants us to understand this. He wants us to know and appreciate how much our Father does, so that we could know the truth. He sent to us His Son. The Son, Paul says, gave gifts to men.

What gifts? “He gave us the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers.” What unites all of them? One thing, – they all are called and sent to proclaim the truth, the Gospel. Why did Jesus send them?

“To build up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood...” To build us up. That’s the answer. How? In the faith and in the knowledge.

Okay, we can understand why faith. Faith saves. But why would Jesus bother giving to us that many gifts to build us up in knowledge? Are we saved by knowledge? Are you more saved if you know more, and less saved if you know less? Of course, not!

We are saved by God’s grace alone. It is the Holy Spirit that creates new hearts, not the amount of our knowledge. Why should then we bother about learning more, about growing in our knowledge of the Word?

Paul gives the answer, which is rather obvious. “... so that we may no longer be [like] children ... carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes.”

This is, why. Yes, our knowledge of the Word doesn’t save us, but the lack of it, can endanger our faith. Then we can be carried away by every wind of false doctrine, or human cunning, or craftiness.

And the LCA has suffered from this a lot. Where are our 50, 40, 30, 20 years old? What has happened to them? They have been carried away, in many cases because of the lack of knowledge.

They didn’t know the truth, and they were deceived by human craftiness. It is not the case that Jesus doesn’t have the answers. It is that we don’t know these answers and the society, hostile to the Gospel, challenged them, mocked them ... and they just didn’t know ... and their faith was destroyed.

How many times have you heard that young Christians lost their faith while in high school, or university ... learning something that carried them away. We are not saved by how much we know, but if we don’t know the Gospel, it may endanger our faith, for one. Also, if we don’t really know what we believe, how can then we tell others about Jesus?

This is, why Paul says these famous words. “Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ.” There is

indeed one body and one Spirit, one holy Christian church, as we confess it every Sunday. And it is by knowing and speaking the truth, the sound teaching of the Gospel that creates her, and enables us to grow up into Christ.

The truth about us. That we are sinners. Forgiven sinners. Accepted and loved by our Redeemer. The truth about God. That He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abundant in steadfast love. That He wants to be your God.

The truth about salvation. That our Father in heaven Himself brings us into His family by His grace alone, without any merit or worthiness of ours, and that there is no way we could earn this precious gift, we can only receive it by faith.

And when we know this truth, it makes us humble. It enables us to walk, as Paul says, “with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love.” It enables us to love our brothers and sisters in Christ. For Jesus has loved them first. It enables us to love our neighbours. For Jesus has loved them first.

When we are built up in the truth, the Spirit of truth has filled our hearts with love toward our God and with love towards one another and then we desire to speak about our Lord Jesus, and the Kingdom grows.

The truth matters. Whatever the world believes. For they both, the truth and love are the same. The same person, –your Teacher, your brother, your Redeemer, Jesus Christ. And He matters.

Amen.