

Cell notes 18.8.19

Lovers of light and truth (John 8:12-18, 31-2)

I remember my maternal grandfather, Matthew Huntley, above all as a man who loved truth. He was the father of four daughters, my mother being the youngest, and although the First World War had put an early end to his formal education, he was widely read and ahead of his time in his interests, which included current affairs, foreign travel, photography, classical music and French cuisine and wine. He enjoyed the company of his 4 daughters and sons-in-law, 10 grandchildren and many friends, and was a renowned raconteur of amusing stories. Every day he read *the Times*, nearly cover to cover, and also subscribed to several periodicals including *Punch* and *New Yorker* magazines.

Though not a Christian (to my knowledge), he had a profound respect for truth and couldn't stand and kind of 'bunk', lies, hypocrisy, empty words or smooth-talking politicians. It may have had something to do with coming from the NE of England and the fact that, in his professional life, he was as an HM Inspector of Taxes! (As the youngest grandchild, when he told us he had '*been in taxes*', I used to think it meant he was a taxi driver!) I don't know whether he'd had much contact with the church in his earlier life, we never discussed the matter, but I suspect he may have been put off 'organized religion' by the fact that Christians' lives often didn't match up to their words. Honesty, integrity and truthfulness mattered deeply to him.

My grandfather is an example to all of us who follow the One who said, '*I am the light of the world*' which links closely in John's Gospel to '*I am the way, the truth and the life*'. Christians ought also to be lovers of truth. We should be deeply disturbed by the common belief that we are living in a '*post-truth society*' or that it's acceptable for public figures to frequently be '*economical with the truth*'. In John's Gospel, Jesus says '*I am the light of the world*.' And in his epistles John tells us to '*walk in the light*'. I think I'm right in saying that '*I am the light of the world*' is the only one of Jesus' '*I am*' sayings which occurs in two separate chapters in John: John 8:12 and 9:5. These two occurrences frame a lengthy discussion on the nature of truth, 'light' and 'truth' being very closely related ideas in this gospel. It's a long and complicated argument, taking up most of Chapter 8, but the gist is that the Father, the Spirit, and Jesus' own works all witness to the fact that he is the Truth (with a capital T).

Let's briefly think about what it means to be **lovers of truth** or, as John would put it, people who **walk in the light**.

1 When we say Jesus is 'the truth', we probably think mostly about the truth of God and salvation. Maybe we're saying he is the truth that we'd been looking for all our lives and only found when we came to Jesus. But if Jesus is The Truth (capital T) then in some sense, *all truth* must connect to him and be part of him – emotional truth, intellectual truth,

scientific truth... as well as spiritual truth. For instance, I find it more helpful to think of Biblical revelation and Science as complimentary avenues of truth, rather than being in conflict with each other, even if that means we have to live with a few, as yet, unanswered questions. People like Alastair McGrath and the Faraday Institute in Cambridge have done a lot to show how science and Christianity can complement one another.

2 Indeed, ***honest questioning*** can also be an expression of love for truth. We understandably get nervous when someone questions things we hold dear or appears to be having doubts about their faith. But it's all a matter of motive. If there is an underlying rebellion or an ulterior motive for their questioning, perhaps to excuse some behaviour the Bible doesn't sanction, then it isn't honest questioning. But if it stems from respect for the Truth, and is being done in a spirit of honesty and humility, then questioning can be a form of worship and reverence for God's truth, even when it's uncomfortable for us.

3 Loving truth/walking in the light also demands high standards of ***truthfulness honesty and integrity***. Sadly, Christians don't always live up to this ideal. For instance, *exaggeration* is a subtle form of dishonesty we are particularly prone to! When clergy get together, sooner or later, someone will always ask, *'how many do you get on a Sunday, then?'* The temptation to massage the number upwards, or give your best-ever attendance figure, is huge, because we all want to be seen as having a vibrant, growing congregation. Then there are testimonies. Testimonies are great; they encourage us, remind us that God is alive and active and build faith and expectation. But we must be scrupulously accurate. God isn't glorified when stories grow in the telling or inconvenient facts are changed to make it sound even more amazing, in our opinion.

This is a danger particularly with stories that circulate on the internet, where no one has verified the original information, and sometimes turn out to be completely untrue. Christians are naturally disposed to be trusting and accept whatever others tell us, but in this area we need to be cautious to be wise. If I sense a testimony is exaggerated or subtly designed to 'big up' the person giving it, it turns me off; but when they are transparently honest and humble, testimonies are powerful and moving.

4 Another area where loving the truth is not at all easy, is ***facing the truth about ourselves***. Self-deception is a common human failing, but Paul says;

For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you. (Romans 12:3)

It isn't easy to face the truth about oneself, but I have found it healing and life giving, particularly in light of the fact the God loves and accepts us as we are, unconditionally and unendingly. It's where forgiveness, healing and change begin. I've spoken at length recently about having to admit to a problem with anxiety, so I won't repeat myself. It was hard to

admit I've sometimes suffered from acute anxiety, because it didn't fit with the concept of manliness, or the image of a good Christian leader, I grew up with. But facing the truth has been liberating and life-giving. The fear that people will think less of me for it hasn't materialized... but even if they do, what does it matter if God likes me!

5 Here's an expression of love for truth that I'm not very good at: Speaking the truth (in love) to one another! The exact Scripture is Ephesians 4:14-15;

Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming. ¹⁵ Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ.

So in context, it's talking about doctrinal truth, but this verse is often applied to the area of loving confrontation, bringing uncomfortable truth which it may be necessary for another person to hear – if their behaviour is hurting others or plainly crossing a biblical 'red line'. Some people don't seem to have any difficulty with straight talking... but they often create havoc in the process! Others find it almost impossible to challenge others... and end up feeling frustrated or walked on. To be honest, I rarely seem to get the balance right. Often I simply duck the issue because it's too hard, but when I do pluck up the courage to speak, against all my natural inclinations, I tend to come across too strong because I'm so tense! So to be honest, I don't have a lot of wisdom to offer on this one, but it's a challenge to me and all of us. Is there a way we can occasionally speak uncomfortable truths to one another but genuinely in love?

So it's not easy to be a lover of the light, or a lover of the truth. It throws up awkward questions about Christianity and science or other intellectual disciplines. It demands a high personal standard of truthfulness and integrity. It forces us to face uncomfortable truths about ourselves and, occasionally, to confront others. But having talked about some of the difficulties, I want to focus on the **rewards or benefits of commitment to truth**, because they far outweigh any challenges there may be. John 8:12.

Jesus once again addressed them: "I am the world's Light. No one who follows me stumbles around in the darkness. I provide plenty of light to live in."

Left to ourselves, human beings simply don't have enough light to find our way through all the challenges and complexities of this world. But Jesus goes on to say we have his and his Father's word for it that **he will be all the light we need for our journey through life**. Have you found that to be true? I love the old hymn that goes,

*I heard the voice of Jesus say,
"I am this dark world's Light.
Look unto Me; thy morn shall rise
And all thy day be bright."*

*I looked to Jesus, and I found
In Him my Star, my Sun;
And in that Light of Life I'll walk
Till traveling days are done.*

He's all the light you'll ever need for your journey through this life... because he is the truth. Love for truth will keep you coming back to Jesus when life brings fresh challenges. And what's more, John 8:31ff, the truth will set us free.

³¹⁻³² Then Jesus turned to the Jews who had claimed to believe in him. "If you stick with this, living out what I tell you, you are my disciples for sure. Then you will experience for yourselves the truth, and the truth will free you... So if the Son sets you free, you are free through and through.

Back to my grandfather, who had such an obvious love for the truth. I have no evidence for this, but I've always liked to imagine that, after he died, he would have been greatly surprised to find himself welcomed into eternity by Jesus, saying to him, *'I'm the person you loved and followed all your life without realizing it... because **I am the truth. I am the light of the world.**'*

PowerPoint Summary

All truth leads to Jesus...
...even honest questioning
Demands a high standard of truthfulness
... facing the truth about ourselves
... and occasionally confronting others

But...

He will be all the light you need for your journey through life
... and the truth will set you free!

For discussion

1. If all truth leads to Jesus, how should we cope with (apparent?) conflicts between Science and the Bible?
2. Do you find it easier to face the truth about yourself or to speak uncomfortable truth to others (in love)?!
3. When has the light of Christ been most necessary/helpful in your life? Can you give specific examples of the truth setting you free?