

Tidenham Parish Lent Course 2024

Session 4: Truth Speaking Worship

Introduction Psalm 8:1

O LORD, our Lord,
your greatness is seen in all the world!
Your praise reaches up to the heavens

Song O Lord my God, when I in awesome wonder

Part I Who speaks truth to us as individuals? (led by Revd Miri Keen)

The Psalmist found perspective on his place in God's world by looking at the natural world, the wilderness and the farmland, the seas and the skies.

Psalm 8: 3-9

*When I look at the sky, which you have made,
at the moon and the stars, which you set in their places—
4 what are human beings, that you think of them;
mere mortals, that you care for them?
5 Yet you made them inferior only to yourself;^[b]
you crowned them with glory and honour.
6 You appointed them rulers over everything you made;
you placed them over all creation:
7 sheep and cattle, and the wild animals too;
8 the birds and the fish
and the creatures in the seas.
9 O LORD, our Lord,
your greatness is seen in all the world!*

Paul's letter to the church in Rome confirms that nature helps us to see God and ourselves in relation to him and that what we see in wild places enables us to see through the lies and deceptions we tell ourselves and the fake news that we receive. The wilderness demonstrates God's awesome power and creativity and leads us to worship him.

Romans 1 Ignoring God Leads to a Downward Spiral

18-23 But God's angry displeasure erupts as acts of human mistrust and wrongdoing and lying accumulate, as people try to put a shroud over truth. But the basic reality of God is plain enough. Open your eyes and there it is! By taking a long and thoughtful look at what God has created, people have always been able to see what their eyes as such can't see: eternal power, for instance, and the mystery of his divine being. So nobody has a good excuse. What happened was this: People knew God perfectly well, but when they didn't treat him like God, refusing to worship him, they trivialized themselves into silliness and confusion so that there was neither sense nor direction left in their lives. They pretended to know it all, but were illiterate regarding life. They traded the glory of God who holds the whole world in his hands for cheap figurines you can buy at any roadside stand.

In this context 'getting back to nature', 'rewilding', 'exploring the wilderness' lead us into worship.

Time for reflection and focus

Share a favourite scene, place or experience in the wild – wilderness or nature – that has enabled you to meet with God.

Imagine yourself there now. Breathe gently. We use this prayerful filter for viewing the wildernesses we encounter.

Prayer together

Feed me with your wisdom,
lead me with your love,
shake me with your reality,
break me with your perspective
and rebuild me with your Holy Spirit's power.
Amen.

(From 'Word of God' responsive prayer www.engageworship.org/wilderness 5th Sunda)

Part II Speaking Truth within our worshipping community (led by James Parsons)

To start with we considered "What is truth?":

John 16: 7 – 11, 13a

"But I tell you the truth: It is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Advocate (the Holy Spirit) will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. And when he comes, he will prove the world wrong about sin and righteousness and judgement: about sin, because they do not believe in me; about righteousness, because I am going to the Father and you will see me no longer; about judgement, because the ruler of this world has been condemned.

When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; ..."

Jesus is deeply concerned with the truth. Within the Gospels Jesus says, "I tell you the truth" about 80 times. In King James Version this is, "Verily, verily" and in other versions, "Truly, truly." In the Greek it is, "Amen, Amen" – so be it! It also means, "Be assured of this." It signifies that what Jesus is about to say is true, it's very important, and the listener then, and today, should pay attention.

John 18: 37-39

Jesus before Pontius Pilate.

Jesus answered, "You are right in saying I am a king. In fact, for this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me."

"What is truth?" Pilate asked. With this he went out again to the Jews and said, "I find no basis for a charge against him."

Pilate is likely being rhetorical, and dismissive. He's not seeking further information from Jesus. Instead, with his possibly snide question, Pilate appears to be brushing off the concept of "truth"

as relative, unsure, and ultimately unimportant. One can imagine him shrugging his shoulders and holding up his hands in a gesture of uncertainty.

Jesus is concerned that Pilate sees that he is the light and the truth. Pilate, in the end, is more concerned with his career and standing in society.

Ephesians 4: 11-16

¹¹ It was Christ who “gave gifts to people”; he appointed some to be apostles, others to be prophets, others to be evangelists, others to be pastors and teachers. ¹² He did this to prepare all God's people for the work of Christian service, in order to build up the body of Christ. ¹³ And so we shall all come together to that oneness in our faith and in our knowledge of the Son of God; we shall become mature people, reaching to the very height of Christ's full stature. ¹⁴ Then we shall no longer be children, carried by the waves and blown about by every shifting wind of the teaching of deceitful people, who lead others into error by the tricks they invent. ¹⁵ Instead, by speaking the truth in a spirit of love, we must grow up in every way to Christ, who is the head. ¹⁶ Under his control all the different parts of the body fit together, and the whole body is held together by every joint with which it is provided. So when each separate part works as it should, the whole body grows and builds itself up through love.

The passage discusses Christian Maturity:

Knowing our calling – Christian service, building up the body

Working with others – each with a part to play, each with a gift from Christ.

“by speaking the truth in a spirit of love” plays a part in both of these things

2 Timothy 3: 16-17

¹⁶ All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching the truth, rebuking error, correcting faults, and giving instruction for right living, ¹⁷ so that the person who serves God may be fully qualified and equipped to do every kind of good deed.

When in the wilderness and challenged (or lied to) by Satan, Jesus relied on and used scripture to counter Satan.

Reflection time (1):

Jot down some truths about God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, that are precious to you.
If you know where they come from, don't be shy, add the Bible reference (or Google it!).
Share your jottings within your groups.

Reflection time (2):

Thinking about our worshipping community:

Can you recall a time when someone's courage in speaking the truth changed your understanding of yourself?

How can we guard our “truth telling” so that it is always qualified by love?

Song How deep the Father's love for us

Part III Speaking truth in God's World (led by Revd Miri Keen)

Ezekial 37: 1-14

New International Version

The valley of dry bones

37 The hand of the LORD was on me, and he brought me out by the Spirit of the LORD and set me in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones. ² He led me to and fro among them, and I saw a great many bones on the floor of the valley, bones that were very dry. ³ He asked me, 'Son of man, can these bones live?'

I said, 'Sovereign LORD, you alone know.'

⁴ Then he said to me, 'Prophesy to these bones and say to them, "Dry bones, hear the word of the LORD!" ⁵ This is what the Sovereign LORD says to these bones: I will make breath^[a] enter you, and you will come to life. ⁶ I will attach tendons to you and make flesh come upon you and cover you with skin; I will put breath in you, and you will come to life. Then you will know that I am the LORD.'"

⁷ So I prophesied as I was commanded. And as I was prophesying, there was a noise, a rattling sound, and the bones came together, bone to bone. ⁸ I looked, and tendons and flesh appeared on them and skin covered them, but there was no breath in them.

⁹ Then he said to me, 'Prophesy to the breath; prophesy, son of man, and say to it, "This is what the Sovereign LORD says: come, breath, from the four winds and breathe into these slain, that they may live.'" ¹⁰ So I prophesied as he commanded me, and breath entered them; they came to life and stood up on their feet – a vast army.

¹¹ Then he said to me: 'Son of man, these bones are the people of Israel. They say, "Our bones are dried up and our hope is gone; we are cut off." ¹² Therefore prophesy and say to them: "This is what the Sovereign LORD says: my people, I am going to open your graves and bring you up from them; I will bring you back to the land of Israel. ¹³ Then you, my people, will know that I am the LORD, when I open your graves and bring you up from them. ¹⁴ I will put my Spirit in you and you will live, and I will settle you in your own land. Then you will know that I the LORD have spoken, and I have done it, declares the LORD.'"

Poem

"Those Dry Bones Get Everywhere" (Written by Dave Hopwood)

Those dry bones get everywhere.
In the workplaces and job centres, in the homes and
high streets, in the schools and colleges.

Those dry bones get everywhere.
In the shops and sports arenas, in the places of
entertainment and the centres of leisure.

Those dry bones get everywhere.
Sprinkling their lifeless dust,
sapping energy and draining hope,
confusing minds and sowing discontent.

Those dry bones get everywhere –
but so does the breath of God,
and so does the hopeful life of the Spirit.

Gentle and powerful,
rushing and meandering,
transforming radically, and little by little,
resurrecting, encouraging, stirring, comforting.

Those dry bones get everywhere –
but so does the breath of God.

Reflecting Together

Are we aware of 'dry bones' in our communities? As a group, start a list of evidence or symptoms of "lifeless dust, sapped energy and drained hope."

What would we see and experience in our communities if these dry bones were filled with the breath of God and brought to life? Make another list with a different colour.

In what ways does our worship already speak truthfully to these dry bones?
What further truth may we be called upon to speak within our wider community, both as individual church members and as a body?

How do you think Ezekial felt about being sent to prophesy to the dry bones? How do you think his feelings changed in each scene of the vision? Be honest, how do you feel about being sent to speak truth in God's name?

Praying for God's world.

Take a moment to review the lists that your group have made. Add those situations in the wider world that have caused "lifeless dust, sapped energy and drained hope" and what would replace these when the Spirit of God is at work bringing life, health and hope. Pray out loud, or in the quietness of your heart, that we will see God at work. Pray for one another.

Final Prayer Together

Holy Spirit, breathe through us,
so that we might speak out
words of light and life
where we see only shadows and death.
Send us into this world of exile
with the promise of a world renewed
and the power of our risen saviour,
in whose name we pray. Amen.

Song

Shine Jesus Shine!