

Sermon

'Expectant waiting is grounded
in spiritual reality not of this world'

Sermon by Stephanie Gotze, The Reign of Christ, 22 November 2020



It may be the most important question ever uttered in the history of humanity. Pilate's three-word question, asked of Jesus: "What is truth?" set the scene for the Christian era to follow.

In his dystopian novel 1984, George Orwell coined the term, “doublethink” to describe the phenomenon of rejecting things we know to be true, or, on the other hand, accepting things we know to be false in order to fit in with those around us. Although Orwell was writing fiction, he may in fact have been revealing a truth that hits close to home: all of us, from time to time, tell ourselves and each other things we know aren’t true.

Indeed it is a post-truth society in which we live. The postmodern age cannot tolerate facts, reason, evidence. It abhors claims of absolute truth. Knowledge must be fragmented down to the level of the individual experience. Reality itself is not real, argues the spirit of the age, and constitutes little more than a limiting social construct, which may at best be superfluous, likely tiresome and limiting, and at worst, damaging.

The post-truth age does not dissect the truth claims of the Christian worldview using facts and logic, science or reason. Instead, it simply disagrees, denying not that the Christian worldview is true, but stating that perhaps that it isn’t relevant, or interesting. It doesn’t deny that the life, death, resurrection, ascension and indeed return of Christ are real or true, but rather that this narrative simply isn’t true for everyone, or perhaps doesn’t fit everyone’s personal narrative, lifestyle or preferences. In this alternate universe to the Kingdom of God and the Church universal, relativism is a moral virtue, and the human search for meaning and truth is devoid of accountability and is untethered from anything material, existing entirely in the realm of the subjective.

These days, it isn’t because we believe the unlikely, the unprovable, the strange or the bizarre that sets believers in Christ apart from those around us. It is the fact that we believe in anything at all. Rather than floundering in the waters of uncertainty, and as opposed to deciding to be “spiritual but not religious” we have staked our lives, our hope, and our souls on the claim that Jesus Christ is Lord. This is a radical, bold, shameless and altogether uncommon act in the postmodern age. We hold to a creed upon which we are willing to build our lives. We have

decided all else to be less worthy than the value of Christ's sacrifice. We have made a decisive distinction, a differentiation, a judgement, which creates far-reaching consequences for the course our lives take. Unthinkable in the modern age, yet essential for relationship with God.

There is a false kind of peace and security in being asleep. It is not easy to wait for the day of the Lord. To be called to be ready is to wait upon the Lord in a world that does not know expectant waiting. It is to be awake and to watch for the Lord's coming and nearness in a world that often asleep to God's presence.

The story goes that once the great German reformer, Martin Luther was working and tending his garden when someone came up to him and asked what he would do if he knew Christ was coming. His legendary reply was "I'd keep tending my garden." Now does this mean that Luther was nonchalant about the day of the Lord's coming? Does it mean he was not serious about his faith? No, it is exactly the opposite. Luther knew better, and, knowing as he did that it is by the grace of God alone, through faith alone that he was justified, that he was a "child of the light and a child of the day", he was able to turn his eyes not to the sky, peering at the heavens, snooping for the imminent return of Christ, but instead could turn his gaze back to the garden he was tending, back to the work before him.

To be sober and awake in Christ, as the New Testament reading encourages, means that the believers, who are children of the light, are using the talents given by God to do God's work while it is still day, as the Gospel reading indicates. For those who are in Christ, the "day of the Lord," is not a future prediction to cause trepidation but an everyday reality and source of celebration. Each second, each minute, each hour, each day is "of the Lord," for he is Emmanuel "God with us." He came in the past, walks with us in the present and will come again, to be sure. We do not need to look into the sky to find him for he is continually coming to us, in the bread and in the wine, in the faces, the eyes and the outstretched hands of those in need.

God has destined us not for wrath but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. It is this spiritual truths and reality which does not confine nor restrict but frees us into joyful obedience. Belonging to the day will not win us any popularity contests, but allows us to rejoice both in the present and the future realities of the Kingdom of God.