

BROKEN TRUTH



1 Corinthians 8:1 "Now concerning food sacrificed to idols: we know that "all of us possess knowledge.'"

All of us possess knowledge, writes St. Paul's to the Corinthian Christians in the midst of an early church dispute about the efficacy of eating meat that was sacrificed in pagan temples. But do we? Is there an agreed set of facts that we all possess here? Or elsewhere. David Brooks wrote an editorial at the end of last year for the New York Times that boldly declared: "This is the year that broke the truth. This is the year when millions of Americans – and not just your political opponents – seemed impervious to evidence, willing to believe the most outlandish things if it suited their biases."

Many in this country now believe fervently that our recent presidential election was stolen from the people by massive election fraud. While others just as fervently believe that this

was the most fair and free election in recent decades. How do we resolve such disputes? How do we talk to one another when we realize that our opponents don't believe the same facts as we do? If the mission of the Church as stated in the Catechism of the Prayerbook is indeed the reconciliation of all people to each other and to God through Christ Jesus our Lord, then we cannot avoid this discussion. We can't simply say that there's no use talking to them, they won't listen to reason! We cannot turn our back and walk away from each other, we cannot dismiss or discount one another. We have to learn how to talk and to listen to each other, to understand and to respect each other, if we are to fulfill our mission as the Church.

Many of our hopes for reconciliation are based on the idea that the key is education. We just need to explain things to each other how to be better informed and thus make better judgments as to what is true, and what is not. But it turns out that if you tell someone their facts are just wrong, they get defensive and you don't usually win them over; you can even entrench false belief this way, and get yourself labeled forever by your opponents as a lunatic or worse, a heretic.

I remember endless religious debates in college with my conservative Southern Baptist friends. Our folly of simply educating our opponents was based on the illusion that you can change people's minds and behaviors by simply presenting them with new information and new thoughts. If this were generally

so, moral philosophers would behave better than the rest of us. They don't. I am not sure many minds were changed back at college. People don't like to be told what to think, and may rebel if they feel that they're being pressured to think in a certain way. They will instead side with those on their team or tribe, or political party, or religious denomination. They will instead stand with those they trust and with whom they identify, and thus cement the very divisions between us that we are called upon to reconcile. So what can we do? Well, you might try those Guidelines to Dialogue that we have stressed at our Vestry and Parochial meetings. Maybe we could just practice listening to each other for a while, asking questions about each other's beliefs and reasoning, without judgment or debate, so as to better understand each other.

Studies have shown that people only really change when they are put in new social environments, when they are put into permanent relationship with diverse groups of peoples and thoughts. It is more about relationship, than being right or wrong. I know this myself as a child of school desegregation. The constant shuffling of the boundaries of Houston's public schools to achieve racial desegregation forced me into a different High School for each of my four years, into different schools with different social make-ups. There were rich kids and poor kids, black kids and white kids, and rednecks, there were conservative Christians and orthodox Jews.

Thus I will acknowledge that immersion into different environments forces us to adapt in a million different ways that we will never understand or be able to plan for. Studies show that living together with people of other groups can and does reduce prejudice and even change minds. Such immersion is how new emotional bonds are formed, how new conceptions of who is "us" and who is "them" come into being. Thus reconciliation is more about staying in relationship with one another, than in being on the right or wrong side.

And thus the real danger here in our society is our self-segregation. The real danger here is surrounding ourselves only with people who look like us, who believe what we believe, who speak the same language as we do, belong to the same social class. We ought not to be separating and dividing ourselves up into these different like-minded groups, if we **really** want to participate in the Mission of God.

For the Mission of the Church calls us out of our complacency, call us out from our protected environments, calls us out from our self-segregation, and call us out into a strange, new world, into foreign and unfamiliar places and people, where the 'other' lives, whose ideas and values may be very different from our own! Our Christian calling then can sometimes be very uncomfortable, even frightening at times; as it demands discipline and courage on our part to overcome our natural reticence to engage with the stranger in our midst, with

'those people,' you know who I mean. And so this work of reconciliation often takes courage and faith on our part to engage in, because sometimes it is a scary venture. In the end we have to trust in God, if we **really** want to participate in the Mission of the Church.

And at a time when our nation is so dangerously divided, in a time when our politics are so bitterly partisan, where **is** the voice calling for reconciliation in this country, where is the voice to bring us back together as fellow human beings, the voice that is more concerned for us as the children of God than for any particular political party or tribe or religion? Isn't that what the Christian Church is called to do here? Are we not called upon to speak up at the very times like these? To stand up for the acceptance of one another, for understanding, for love of neighbors, for the love even of our enemies, for hospitality to the stranger and foreigner in our land? Did we not take vows at our Baptism to respect the dignity of every human being? Did we not take vows to seek and serve Christ in *all* persons? To strive for justice and peace among *all* people? To proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ? Why aren't we doing more of that? Where is our voice?

And though the Christian Church ought to be part of the solution to this national crisis, we are instead, I fear, part of the problem. For Martin Luther King, Jr.'s words are still true today fifty years later, 11:00 o'clock on Sunday mornings

is still the most segregated hour of the week. President Truman may have integrated the army in 1948. Brown versus the Board of Education began the integration of our schools in 1954.

Redlining neighborhoods was outlawed by Fair Housing Act in 1964. So how is it that our churches are still so segregated in 2021, especially if we are to be a voice of reconciliation in this land, if we are to really engage in the Mission of God? For our inactions speak louder than our words, and how can we as Christians help bridge the divide in our nation, if we ourselves as Christians are so divided, so segregated, gathering as we do so often on Sunday mornings only with those who are members of our particular denomination, race, and social class!

This Mission of God is indeed an audacious goal, because we frail human beings by nature tend to retreat into our own corners, we tend to hang out with those who are most like us. We usually seek haven with members of our own tribe, with our own kind, with people who look like us, who *share* our values, who represent the same culture and education as we do. We do not easily mix well with others. It's uncomfortable. I understand that. We feel safer and more secure with 'our' people. I know that. We like our little silos and we feel protected there, safe.

But our mission, our ministry as the Church is supposed to be breaking down those walls that divide us, removing the borders that separate us one from another, and building the

bridges that unite us to God and to each other. It is what we are supposed to be doing every day of our lives as Christians, really engaged in the Mission of God! We are NOT supposed to be retreating back into our convenient self-righteous circles of friends and safe communities! We are supposed to be engaged in the ministry of reconciliation of all people to each other, and to God our Father, and not just to those who look like us, or think as we do, or who share our values and speak the same language as we do. So let's get at it! Let's really be the Church, and not a country club. Let's do the mission of God, in a world that now so desperately needs us to do so, in a nation that so desperately craves such an example of diverse people working together, and healing our wounds. I tell you, that if we the Church focused more of our time and our energy on confronting these kinds of questions, and less on questions of human sexuality or theological orthodoxy, then I believe the Christian Church would be thriving, that the Church would be relevant in our society, and that we as Christians would be truly engaged in the God's Mission, and serve as an example of unity and reconciliation to a sadly divided world. **Amen.**