

What is truth? It's one of the oldest and most persistent questions that humans have asked. The ancient Greeks asked it as they were wrestling with the difference between appearance and reality. Philosophers across centuries have asked whether truth can really even be known. The follow-up question is: how would we even know we know truth when we know it? The question of what is truth is at least as old as Pontius Pilate, who will pose the question to Jesus face-to-face.

Is truth something subjective? Is it something we discover? Is it something we just construct? Is it simply your truth and my truth, and then some collection of our own making or choosing? Every generation must wrestle with it, from well before Pontius Pilate through to Michel Foucault, a 20th-century philosopher, to the modern post-modernists who just want to deconstruct the idea of truth itself. Every generation wrestles with this question of what truth is.

Ultimately, our text this morning is framed around that question. Jesus brings it up right from the very beginning: "If you hold to my teachings, you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." Jesus is making a truth claim, but this truth claim comes with a heated dialogue. This is a tense conversation in which the claims Jesus makes will provoke the crowds to what we see at the very last verse. If you look down at John 8:59, here's where the whole conversation is going. *"At this, they picked up stones to stone him, but Jesus hid himself, slipping away from the temple grounds."*

Now, I've preached many a sermon in my day. I've preached on sensitive topics and challenging issues. I've preached good sermons. I've preached plenty of bad sermons. I've preached at retreats with different crowds that knew me or not, and not a single time has anyone picked up a rock to stone me, for which I'm very grateful. It might be because I'm worse than Jesus, not better, for the record. But the reality is there's something in the claim that Jesus made that provoked the crowd in front of him to take up stones and attempt to murder him. I start there just because I want us to keep that in our mind as we go through this text: there is something quite explosive in what Jesus is saying.

To ask this question, what is truth, and to assert an answer like Jesus does, is to make claims that tend to stir people up. Jesus is going to make a claim just like that. This text that we're in is the end of a long scene in the Gospel of John that spanned chapters 7 and 8. It's so long and intense; we've taken about four to five weeks of sermons to work through this one scene where Jesus is at this festival, the Feast of Tabernacles.

So there is a large crowd with which he's interacting. He's taking over these big key festival moments and declaring who he is, and here it all coalesces around that question. So as we begin, my question is simply: what did Jesus say that would garner such a reaction?

One of the threads we have been weaving throughout these past four to five weeks is that you cannot apathetically respond to Jesus. The claims he makes simply do not afford that. It does not give you the opportunity. The claims he makes are so grand and explosive that they demand a response, and that's what you see in this text.

I want us to think about what Jesus said that would provoke such a response. *"To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, 'If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free'" (John 8:31-32).* So the framing of this whole thing is around truth. Jesus begins by saying, "You are a disciple, if you believe in me," that's the baseline status of a disciple. It is to put your belief, faith, allegiance, and commitment in following Jesus. That's what's happening in these early parts of the gospel. Jesus is walking around saying, "Come follow me. Put your faith in me and begin to follow me."

But notice what he immediately follows that up with. It says, "To the Jews who had believed..." There's the baseline of discipleship. He says, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples." Discipleship always progresses into holding to Jesus' teaching, which the word there we'll see later in John, is a very important word. It means to remain or abide. It's the word that Jesus would use in that famous parable about a vine abiding in the branch.

Meaning, if we want to experience the life of Jesus, our task is simple, we just remain in the person of Jesus. Hold to his teachings. That's what it means to be a disciple, to place our faith in him and then abide by his teachings. And ultimately, where that goes is what Jesus foresees. He says, "If you do that, then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." So Jesus is alluding to an idea of what the truth is.

But let's be honest, if I were to just say, "I'm here to set you free," your typical response would not be to pick up stones and murder me. That isn't quite what's going on here. He's alluding to it, but there's something more that Jesus will later claim that seems to be the thing that sparks it. Right now, everything's good, but those listening now take offense.

They answered him, "We are Abraham's descendants and have never been slaves of anyone. How

can you say that we shall be set free?" Jesus replied, "Very truly I tell you, everyone who sins is a slave to sin. Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever. So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed. John 8:33-36

Their first response is that they're picking up on the subtext that Jesus is laying down. They're saying, "Okay, if you're going to set us free, that implies that we've been enslaved." So they're like, "Listen, we're the descendants of Abraham. Have you heard of him? We've never been enslaved to anyone. Which begs the question: what? Remember the whole Exodus thing? Remember the Egyptians, Assyrians, Babylonians, and Rome, who they're currently under. You can make the case they were enslaved to the Romans. I mean, this is a people whose long lineage, their long history, has been enslaved by a people group, trying to maintain their distinction.

Now give them a little of the benefit of the doubt. They're smart, and so what they're getting at isn't so much that they haven't been enslaved in the literal sense, but rather they're making the claim that they would never give their allegiance to one of those other powers. They're alluding to some different thing, which is interesting because they miss exactly what Jesus is talking about.

Jesus pushes them a little bit further. He says, "Very truly I tell you, everyone who sins is a slave to sin." Jesus is speaking about a different slavery. He's speaking about something further down beneath the surface, in which once you begin to sin or commit things against the way of God, those things have a way of entrapping your very soul. There is a slavery that goes deeper than the surface level, and that's what they're missing. That's what they're not seeing.

So Jesus then goes on to this whole thing to start talking about families and sonship and fatherhood, and this becomes really important because this is the architecture of his argument against those present. He says that if they have sinned, they are a slave to sin. A slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever. So if the Son sets you free, you'll be free.

I know that you are Abraham's descendants. Yet you are looking for a way to kill me, because you have no room for my word. I am telling you what I have seen in the Father's presence, and you are doing what you have heard from your father." "Abraham is our father," they answered. "If you were Abraham's children," said Jesus, "then you would do what Abraham did. As it is, you are looking for a way to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God. Abraham did not do such things. You are doing the works of your own father." "We are not illegitimate children," they protested. "The only Father we have is God himself." vv. 37-41

Jesus is posing and structuring this argument around where they find their lineage. Are they in the Father's lineage, meaning God

the Father, or are they somewhere else outside of that? He tells them that he knows they are Abraham's descendants. But they are living counter to the way a son of Abraham lived. Abraham would not try to kill him. Jesus is saying, "I'm bringing truth to you that I heard directly from God the Father." Because the claims that Jesus continues to make are that he and the Father are one, unified together, he only does what he sees the Father doing. So if they reject Jesus, they're rejecting God because that is one and the same.

Jesus says, "You're doing the works of your own father." And they protest. They say, "We are not illegitimate children," they protested. "The only father we have is God himself." Now, the translators are softening the language a little bit. There's a play on the words here that is poking directly at the confusion around Jesus' birth as well. If you remember, Jesus was born out of wedlock. A more literal translation, if you'll excuse my language, is, "We are not bastard children like you." That's the claim they're making. "Jesus, you're illegitimate. You were born out of wedlock. Who are you to tell us that we are illegitimate children?" Yet somehow, Jesus is claiming they have some other lineage. Now, as you can imagine, this is where things might detonate.

Jesus said to them, "If God were your Father, you would love me, for I have come here from God. I have not come on my own; God sent me. Why is my language not clear to you? Because you are unable to hear what I say. You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies. Yet because I tell the truth, you do not believe me! Can any of you prove me guilty of sin? If I am telling the truth, why don't you believe me? Whoever belongs to God hears what God says. The reason you do not hear is that you do not belong to God." vv. 42-47

So the first response is like, "Dang, Jesus." He's not holding back any punches. This is not the Jesus we're typically familiar with. You belong to your father, the devil. That is strong language. But notice what Jesus is doing here. He is drawing a polemic between God, the God of truth, in which if you know the truth, the truth will set you free. So God is a God of truth that leads to freedom, and then he contrasts that with the devil, who is the father of lies, and the lies ultimately bring about death.

He's drawing these two conclusions because he's asking in which lineage do they find themselves? If their belief ultimately leads to something like murderous threats against the Son of God, that becomes problematic. It leads to death. They are opposed to the God of truth. He says, "Listen, if you loved God, if you were from God, in that lineage, you would love me, because that is who I am. I'm bringing about truth."

Now, let's talk about this idea of the devil a little bit, because that's something we're not too comfortable with in the modern world. Most of us are like, "Do you really believe in that pre-scientific myth or whatever?" Let's talk a little bit about it, because we tend to suffer from intellectual snobbery, thinking that because we're in the modern world, we're more intelligent than our forebears. But don't confuse information for intelligence. We have a lot more information than they did back then, but that doesn't equate to intelligence, which certainly also doesn't equate to wisdom.

Could we restrain our judgment for a moment and consider that Jesus might be brilliant? Maybe Jesus understands reality a little bit better than you and I. What if we just suspended that for a second? So what is the devil? Which is the proper way to say it. The word for devil is the word *diabolos*, which is where we get the word *diabolical*. *Diabolos* is the word that we get for devil, and it means the slander, the devil, or the accuser. You can see its connection now to the father of lies, the devil, or in other places called the Satan or the accuser, or the serpent of old.

There are all sorts of different titles in the New Testament for this figure, but they're all titles. That's important to remember because the devil isn't an embodied physical creature like we tend to think of it in pop culture. You think of the angel on one side and the devil on the other trying to provoke you with the red pitchfork. That isn't to take away his *diabolicalness* by any stretch, but we have some confusion here because we tend to think of it in that embodied form.

The best way I know to understand how the scriptures depict the devil comes from Tim Mackie, who wrote, "The devil is the evil intelligence behind the curtain of the universe." It isn't so much that it walks the streets, if you will, but rather it's something that can influence the world, which Jesus takes very seriously. For Jesus, the devil very much exists, and so it should for us as well.

The trajectory, or *telos*, of the devil, we find very clearly in John 10:10. "*The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.*" Over and over, we see this polemic drawn between God, who brings life, and the devil or the accuser who brings death.

One last caveat before we go further. Be very careful not to think that the devil is on the same playing field as God. It's two very different things. What we'll see in a moment is that in some ways, the devil is just unreality. That's what lies are—unrealities, deceptive things—don't ever fall into the trap of thinking that he is just as powerful as God, that they're in this struggle. That struggle's been beat.

What we're talking about is how it plays out within the in-between times, between when Jesus has come and restores all things. The devil is this accuser. So Jesus is saying to those present there, "Your actions, the way in which you are living,

are more rooted in the lineage of the *diabolos*, the Satan. That's what is bringing about the fruit in your life." But He says, "I come from the Father."

The Jews answered him, "Aren't we right in saying that you are a Samaritan and demon-possessed?" "I am not possessed by a demon," said Jesus, "but I honor my Father and you dishonor me. I am not seeking glory for myself; but there is one who seeks it, and he is the judge. Very truly I tell you, whoever obeys my word will never see death." At this they exclaimed, "Now we know that you are demon-possessed! Abraham died and so did the prophets, yet you say that whoever obeys your word will never taste death. Are you greater than our father Abraham? He died, and so did the prophets. Who do you think you are?" John 8:48-53

Those who are there are saying, "Listen, you must be demon-possessed." The accusation of him being a Samaritan is simply saying that he doesn't have the lineage of Abraham. He is on the outside. He is the enemy. That's what they're claiming against Jesus. And Jesus' response is that he is not crazy or possessed by a demon, but rather everything he does honors the Father, not for his own glory. How could he be about something else?

This is where they begin to lose it. They're like, "You said that if anyone obeys your word, they won't taste death. Are you saying Abraham, who died, and the prophets who died, that they didn't uphold your word?" They didn't understand what he was talking about. I love that it culminates with the question so many of us eventually have to wrestle with in light of the claims Jesus makes. "Who do you think you are, Jesus, to make these kinds of statements?"

Jesus replied, "If I glorify myself, my glory means nothing. My Father, whom you claim as your God, is the one who glorifies me. Though you do not know him, I know him. If I said I did not, I would be a liar like you, but I do know him and obey his word. Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad." "You are not yet fifty years old," they said to him, "and you have seen Abraham!" "Very truly I tell you," Jesus answered, "before Abraham was born, I am!" At this, they picked up stones to stone him, but Jesus hid himself, slipping away from the temple grounds. vv. 54-59

This whole debate continues, and Jesus doubles down. "Your father, Abraham, who you say you are from, rejoiced at the thought of the day that the Messiah would come." They move to the inconceivable and are like, "How could Abraham possibly know you?" Then we get to the climactic claim where Jesus says, "Before Abraham was born, I am." I am, in the Greek, is *ego eimi*, which is a direct quotation from the Old Testament story of the burning bush. God's voice spoke to him to go and free his people from Pharaoh. Moses asked what name to give them for who sent him, and God said, "Tell them, 'I Am' sent you."

When Jesus evokes this name, he is evoking the very name of God, and the very name of God is the infinitive verbal form of the verb “to be,” meaning existence. Notice that he doesn’t say, “Before Abraham was, I was.” That’s past tense. He’s not even claiming that he “pre-existed,” but rather he always is. Part of the explosiveness of this claim is that he’s claiming to be God. He’s taking that name most directly. In my opinion, this is the clearest example of Jesus claiming to be God.

What I want to dig further into is that there’s something even deeper with this claim in the very essence of God that helps us answer the question we started with: what is truth? Because the question that we’ve all been pushing for is: what do we base our reality on? What do we base our life on? When Jesus responds, “Before Abraham was, I Am,” He is taking on the name of God.

It is also paradoxical because he’s saying, “I am existence.” I say paradoxical very importantly because this is the part of the sermon in which none of us can fully understand, me included. Because the existence of God as I Am is, in fact, a paradox. To just be means that God is himself, and Jesus claiming to be God exists outside of time, outside of the time-bound existence that you and I have. It’s like trying to explain to a fish what it is to be wet. Let that sit for a second. You can’t quite do it because the fish just exists within water. How can it understand what wetness is?

One of the few examples that may help with this is the idea of light. We all exist within light. It just is. But you can’t actually see the light photons that do the thing they do. I’m well beyond my pay grade now, but you experience light because of the impact that it has in the world. It, in some ways, exists beyond the physical, yet it is present here. God was never created, never came into being, and will never disappear from existence, but rather lives beyond our understanding and beyond time itself. It’s paradoxical, but that is exactly the thing on which truth can be founded because it isn’t influenced by the demands of a time-bound existence.

Just think of all the examples throughout the scriptures in which God confronts the false gods of the day. Think of Baal. Remember when Elijah and the prophets of Baal had a little competition on whose god would show up? Elijah said, “You guys built that god. You created it. My God just exists.” So they covered both altars with water. All of a sudden, fire appears on the altar to God, proving the existence of God, while theirs has no fire.

When you create a god, it has to, in essence, be lesser than the creator by nature. So for God to exist beyond time means Jesus can appear on the scene and say, “I am God.” He preexisted Abraham; he preexisted time, yet he also is the physical representation, the exact and most perfect representation of what God is like. Paul says it this way in Colossians.

The Son is the image of the invisible God, the first-born over all creation. For in him all things were

created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. Colossians 1:15-17

It’s like water to a fish. It just is. Your existence is in the very being of God. It’s God who holds all of it together. God is the one pumping blood through your veins and air into your lungs. God just is existence, meaning if ever God wasn’t, we would cease to exist. Which is why when you read these texts from Paul, you’re caught up in the beauty and the poetry of them, but you’re still left with all sorts of questions, because it’s like trying to explain wetness to a fish. It’s beyond our understanding.

Think of Paul in Acts 17 when he’s walking around Athens and sees all the different idols that they created, and says, “Let me tell you about the unknown God that you’re speaking of.” And eventually he says, “For in him we live, and move, and have our being.” We live, and move, and exist within the very presence of God. It’s hard for us to understand, and so the question becomes, if Jesus is presenting himself as that God, the one in which we live, and move, and have our being, then let’s circle back to the question, what is truth?

Truth is a person. It’s Jesus. The foundation in which all of creation is being held together; that is, in fact, what truth is. Let’s go back to verse 37. It’s a simple line in which Jesus makes this accusation. He says, “Listen, you have no room for my word.” Now the word “word” in Greek is *logos*, which means word like words we’re speaking or writing, but it also has connotations of logic or understanding of why the world exists. It’s the understanding of Jesus. He says, “You have no room for me.”

The thing with truth is we all have to make some truth claim. You have to make sense of life, and you have to make sense of reality. So whether or not it’s explicit or implicit, every single person in here makes some claim about truth. Even the postmodernist who says that truth doesn’t exist is making a universal claim about truth. In their saying, no universal truth exists, they’re taking the posture of someone who can see all of the universe and make a claim that no universal truth exists. You have to make some sense of what truth is.

So when Jesus says, “You have no room for my word,” what he’s saying is that you have chased other things and put them in the place of truth. Now it makes sense to say your father is not God, the I Am, but is the father of lies. Because anything that isn’t in Christ is ultimately a lie; it’s outside of the very thing in which all of creation is held together. He says they can find themselves in the lineage of God, which is truth that will set you free and bring life, or your father is the father of lies, of deception. Look back at verse 44, and hopefully it makes a little more sense now.

You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father’s desires. He was a

murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies. Yet because I tell the truth, you do not believe me! John 8:44-45

Now the Greek word for lie is the word *pseudomai*, which is where we get pseudo, which is what you insert before a word to mean untruth, falsehood, or willful misrepresentation. Think way back in Genesis 3. Remember the serpent that was, at that moment, the figurehead of Satan or the devil comes along, and God had placed Adam and Eve in the garden and says, "You can eat from any tree you want, but don't eat from that one or else you will die." And Satan comes along and says, "Listen, did God really say that?"

What's he doing there? He's planting the seed of a small deceptive idea that begins to fracture Adam and Eve's relationship to truth. And when you launch that on a trajectory of a life, it ultimately ripples over and over and leads to death. Jesus said, "You are doing what your father does, the father of lies."

Notice that this is Jesus' longest teaching on the devil from what I can see, and the primary means in which he identifies the devil working is not through demons hiding behind bushes. It's not through some malevolent thing where we think like, "Oh, there's the demon in that." It's not like through the flat tire you may have gotten on the way here. It was probably just a nail in the road. It's through deception. I'm not saying that there isn't truth to some of those other things. It's more complicated than I'm making it right now. But the primary means by which Jesus identifies the devil's works is through deception. It's through lies. Which begs the question, what is truth?

The rest of my sermon is taken almost directly from a guy named Dallas Willard in two different books. One is called *Hearing God*; the other is two chapters in *Renovation of the Heart*. That way, if you hear it and it sounds familiar, that's why. But the best definition I know of truth comes from Willard: "Truth is that which corresponds with reality, and reality is what you run into when you are wrong." Let me illustrate it for you.

I can believe that I can run through walls; I can believe it with every fiber in my being. I can put my trust in it. We can gather Bible studies about how I can believe it; we can construct all of this thing, but what happens is the truth that I seem to be projecting does not match with reality. So when I bolt down this aisleway and run through that wall, what I'm going to be hit with is drywall. And then a heavy dose of reality. Because reality is what I experience when I'm wrong, and that has no bearing on how I feel about it. It has no bearing on what I want to be true. There is objective truth out there that is more complicated than most of us ever make it, but it is there.

What Jesus is claiming is that he is truth, and if you hold to his teachings, you will know the truth, and the truth will set you

free. Truth is that which corresponds with reality, which means the very essence of reality is Jesus. So as we disciple under him, what we are trying to do is understand who Jesus is, what he teaches, how he understands reality, and get that into our minds so that the way that our minds and ideas have been shaped by things other than Jesus get crowded out.

Jesus looked at the group and said, "You have not made room for my word. You're believing other things and claiming them as if they are true." But do you see what discipleship is? Discipleship is about understanding the inner disposition of who we are, the field of ideas that we navigate the world with, and saying, "Are those in alignment with what Jesus says about reality?" Because Jesus is truth.

This is another example I've given before that might be a more helpful. All of you have a mental map or an idea of how to get home from here. For me, I have a mental map, an idea that I put my trust in on how I get home. I'll pull out of here, go up on Shell Boulevard, take a left on Hillsdale, and then I'll go north on 101. That'll take me to Millbrae Ave. I'll go up that, and then I'm at home. That's my mental map. If that mental map aligns with reality, then when I get in the car, I will eventually end up at home.

If my mental map is wrong and I take 92 east, I'm not going to end up at home, but in Hayward, which may be lovely, but it's not my home. Do you see what I mean? The mental maps, if they are wrong, will lead you in the wrong direction. So the task of discipleship is learning to take on the mental maps of Jesus and how he understands and teaches reality, because he is reality. Even if I believe with every fiber of my being that going east on 92 will get me to Millbrae, it won't. It doesn't matter how much I believe it, because reality is what I find when I'm wrong.

Those are trite ideas, but every single one of us has ideas about how to navigate the world, things that are far closer to home. We have ideas of what it means to be human, of what it means to manage money, hold power, love, marriage, family, parenting, and the purpose of all of life. All of us have mental maps of how we understand these concepts. What happens when those don't align with reality? Well, it aligns with the father of lies, and it leads to death. The devil's primary means is to add just a little bit of deception, to take something, and maybe it's 98 percent true, but that 2 percent bends you in the wrong direction and ultimately gives way to death.

Every single day we navigate a world of ideas and live at the mercy of our ideas. We live at the mercy of what we think is true. We will begin to live in line with the ideas we hold as true. If they don't match with reality, that's going to taste a whole lot like drywall, as we try running through it. We live at the mercy of our ideas.

There's a beautiful thing in here, but it's also our double-edged sword. The ability for us as humans to hold both reality and

non-reality in the same mind is what sets us apart from any other thing in the created world. It gives us the ability to be creative. Earlier this week, my oldest daughter wanted to make cookies, and so she had a vision, an idea of something that didn't exist yet, and by the grace of God, they eventually existed. She made cookies. She took something that wasn't reality and brought it to bear and made it into reality.

But what happens on the other side of that? That's a beautiful example. But what happens if you begin to believe lies such as you think you're unlovable. You have the ability to hold that non-reality in your mind, and you bring that to bear, and all of a sudden, it train-wrecks your life because you're believing a lie that you aren't lovable. You may believe that you are only the total of your accomplishments. That's where your whole existence and being is found. That's a lie, and it gives shape to your life. It wreaks havoc and causes destruction because it doesn't match with reality.

Discipleship is about being set free. It's about learning what Jesus says you are. It's about learning what God says about himself, about sexuality, about humanity, about money and time and relationships, and what it means to be human. It's about coming to hold to his teachings so that you will know the truth and the truth will set you free. Jesus is the truest thing in all of the created universe, and when you find yourself rooted in him, you find life. Truth always leads to life. Lies always lead to death. So what do we do with this? Paul laid out a pretty good framework in Romans 12.

Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will. Romans 12:1-2

The way in which we go about taking on the very mind of Christ into our being and into our bones is by rejecting conformity, which comes from the word schematic, actually. It's like pressing it into a mold and a form to where you begin to believe that way. He says, "Do not conform to the patterns of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind." We live at the mercy of our ideas, and many of us have taken lies into our very being. We desperately need the work of Jesus to renew those, to teach us what is true versus what is a lie.

If we continue to hold to these lies, here's the insidious part of our ability to hold both reality and non-reality, we will come to

think they are true. When you come to think they are true, you will come to live as if they are true. Jesus says, "If you sin, you're enslaved to sin." It's less a moral claim. It's a claim about the war over your heart, in which, when you root your life in something that is untrue, it will eventually enslave you.

But the beautiful thing about God, and how he designed us, is that you have the utmost freedom in your mind. You don't totally control your thoughts. Sometimes those are imposed on us. But for the most part, you have ultimate freedom over what you allow your mind to dwell on. And when you allow your mind to dwell on things that are not true, that has a formative impact. But if you grow in attentiveness to God, beginning to meditate on the beauty of who God is, on his gentleness and humility towards you, of his love towards you, you become more and more like that because your mental maps are rerouting around that which is most true.

If Jesus is truth and reality, John, the very author of this gospel, would go on years later, as he's unpacking this understanding of Jesus, to say that "God is love." Which means that reality itself is founded on love, the love of God. That is fundamentally what all of creation has been constituted out of. It is a creative explosion from the very core of who God is, which is love.

Sin is that which is unloving. It's the opposite. It's the choosing to love self over others, choosing to love things over God, or whatever it may be that enslaves you. It's that which is unloving, and therefore it conflicts with the reality of the universe. But to renew your mind, you simply meditate on that reality as revealed through Scripture in the person of Jesus and through the help of the Holy Spirit, we come to believe that God actually is love.

The way to get rid of lies is not to try really hard to not believe them. You have to displace lies with truth. You have to replace those thoughts with something true, which comes back to understanding who it is that Jesus says you are. In another place, Jesus said, "My sheep know my voice." Have you given yourself to listening to the voice of Jesus over and over? Are you familiar with him? Would you recognize him when he says something true about you in the midst of lies?

I complicate discipleship so much, but often it is sitting in the presence of God, saturating my mind in the person of Jesus and the inner disposition of God the Father. When we do that, what we experience is love flowing back to us, the renewing of our minds. May it be so in each of us, because that is the truth, and the truth will set us free.

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

© 2026 Central Peninsula Church, Foster City, CA
Catalog No.1502-16FC