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Jesus Appears as the Prophet with Authority

Truth is hard to come by these days. Whether we get our information from newspapers, television, or social media, it's difficult to decide what is real and what is fake. For some, truth is nothing more than "my truth"—what truth is in my opinion. Jesus came to our world to speak the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. He speaks to us with the kind of authority no one else can claim. We listen to him and believe what he says and we find the truth about life with God.

Sermon Hebrews 3:1-6

Therefore, holy brothers and sisters, who share in the heavenly calling, fix your thoughts on Jesus, whom we acknowledge as our apostle and high priest. He was faithful to the one who appointed him, just as Moses was faithful in all God's house. Jesus has been found worthy of greater honor than Moses, just as the builder of a house has greater honor than the house itself. For every house is built by someone, but God is the builder of everything. "Moses was faithful as a servant in all God's house," bearing witness to what would be spoken by God in the future. But Christ is faithful as the Son over God's house. And we are his house, if indeed we hold firmly to our confidence and the hope in which we glory.

Introduction: Jesus wasn't saying too much that Good Friday morning in Pilate's palace. He had been awake all night and beat up pretty badly. The governor wanted to get rid of the mob and needed some evidence that Jesus was innocent. Jesus wasn't talking. Pilate prodded Jesus to talk but nothing. Finally, Jesus said, **The reason I was born and came into the world is to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me.** Pilate's response was scornful cynicism. He almost spit the words out: **What is truth?** He had been around long enough to know that truth is like beauty—it's in the eye of the beholder.

It's hard to get a handle on truth these days. Once upon a time, people considered the Bible to be truth. But then the Enlightenment came along and replaced divine truth with philosophical truth and scientific truth. Man replaced God as the source of truth. Nowadays people don't even accept that truth. The only thing that's true is my truth; I define truth. If I say it's not raining then it's not raining, even though it's raining. And so we live with fake news and disinformation and propaganda. We get to the point of joining Pilate in his scornful cynicism: What is truth?

Jesus began his ministry by teaching. He walked on dusty roads and sat on rocky hillsides and worshiped in local synagogues. He talked and he taught. The people who heard him were stunned. He taught them as one who had authority which was not what they were used to. What he was teaching was new, but he backed it up with power, with authority. **The people were amazed. News about him spread everywhere.** Jesus was the real deal because he taught the truth. No scornful cynicism at all.

We don't consider Jesus' truth to be fake news. We don't doubt what he says; we aren't cynical. But it's good for us to step back sometimes and analyze why we feel the way we do about Jesus' truth. Do we trust Jesus' good news because this is the way we were brought up, this is what our parents taught us? Do we trust his truth because we're conservatives and not liberals? Do we listen to what Jesus says about eternal life but are not so concerned about what he says about life with others on earth?

The Second Reading for today, from Hebrews chapter 3, gives us an opportunity to examine and assess the reasons we take Jesus words seriously, why we consider what he says to be truth. We live in a society of cynics when it comes to truth. Like most of our friends, we absorb fake news and deal with deception. But when Jesus speaks, he speaks

The Truth, the Whole Truth, and Nothing but the Truth

We're not sure about the author of the Letter to the Hebrews although it's obvious he was a Jewish Christian. We're more sure that the people he was writing to were Jewish Christians who lived in Rome. We're absolutely sure that these Jewish Christians were reverting back to Jewish customs and traditions to avoid some of the persecutions the Romans reserved for Christians. The author began his letter with this: **In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son.** So right from the start he put God's truth into the mouth of Jesus. Then he wrote: **We must pay the most careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away.** He was imploring these people to stay with Jesus and not replace him or reject him.

At a certain point he took them back to their history and reminded them how their ancestors had done exactly that: they rebelled against God and against Moses on the trek from Egypt to Israel. He quoted Psalm 95 where the Lord said: **Do not harden your hearts as you did in the wilderness, where your ancestors tested me.** He reminded them of the divine verdict: **So I declared an oath in my anger, 'They shall never enter my rest.'** And they never did. They all died in the desert.

These Roman Jews were certainly Christians. The author calls them **holy brothers and sisters who share in the heavenly calling.** He knew what they believed: **We acknowledge that Jesus is our apostle and high priest.** They believed that God sent his Son to the world to proclaim the truth and they confessed that Jesus gave his life as a sacrifice to God to make up for their sins. **We believe that Jesus was faithful to the one who appointed him.** And then he introduced Moses: **Just as Moses was faithful in all God's house.** There is a picture here that we need to understand. This house is the Church, the body of believers, the family of God. Moses was the faithful leader of God's family in the Old Testament, but he was also part of the family. He was a child of God like all the other believers were children of God; he was also a sinner like all the other believers. On the other hand, God was the one who built the house. God was the one who created the Church, he worked faith in the believers. And Jesus was God's Son. So he wrote: **Moses was faithful as a servant in all God's house, bearing witness to what would be spoken by God in the future. But Christ is faithful as the Son over God's house.** Moses wasn't the final authority who spoke for God. Moses didn't offer a sacrifice to God for the sins of the world. Moses hadn't built the house. Only Jesus did that. Moses even told God's people that Jesus was coming. We heard him in the First Reading: **The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you. You must listen to him.** This was the point the author wanted to drive home to these Jewish believers: The rebels in Israel lost their fortunes and their future when they rebelled against Moses. We will lose even more—we will lose life with God—if we reject Jesus. And here's why: **Jesus has been found worthy of greater honor than Moses. Jesus is greater than Moses.** On the other side there is this: But we will be his people forever **if indeed we hold firmly to our confidence and the hope in which we glory.**

This New Testament letter was addressed to a group of Jewish Christians who were struggling with their allegiance to Jesus. We are not Jewish Christians and we aren't really struggling to stay with Jesus. That Jesus is greater than Moses is not so interesting to us—of course he is. But there are words here that enable us to step

back and analyze why we feel the way we do about the truth Jesus tells us. Why do we believe, like the people in today's Gospel, that Jesus speaks with authority?

We believe that Jesus is the **apostle** God sent to speak God's truth. We may trust our husband or wife to tell us the truth, we may believe what a politician promises or what a judge decrees, we may have confidence in our doctor or lawyer to be truthful with us, but none of us believes that God sent any of these people to speak the truth about the most important things in life. We believe that Jesus is the **high priest** God sent to carry out his truth. There are all kinds of people who can do us all kinds of good. Our family can love us, the police can protect us, hospitals can heal us but none of these can save us from sin. Jesus was the great high priest who entered the sanctuary of God. He placed himself on the altar of the cross and he became the atoning sacrifice for our sins. He ended the divide that sin had created between us and God and made us one with God. We believe that Jesus is the **faithful Son over God's house**. We love being citizens of our country, we enjoy having friends at Trinity (St. John's), we're loyal fans of the Packers or Brewers or Bucks, but none of these associations can bring us the security and the serenity we have as members of the family of God and people who dwell in God's household.

Why do we believe that Jesus speaks with authority? Why do we trust Jesus' words more than any other words? Why are we so sure that Jesus speaks the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth? Is it only our history or our custom or our obligation? Do we listen to Jesus only because that's what our parents taught or what our church friends believe? We believe what Jesus tells because we have become convinced by faith that he is **the way, the truth, and the life and that no one comes to the Father except through him**. We accept what Jesus says about sin and hell, we trust him when he speaks about grace and forgiveness, we listen to him when he teaches us about our Christian living and lifestyle because we believe that **salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven by which we must be saved**.

Everything we are and everything we hope to be lives and breathes on the words and works of Jesus. **They are written that we might believe that he is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing we may have life in his name**. Amen.

The sermon was preached by Pastor James Tiefel.