

Here are a few questions gleaned from the Internet that are supposed to be impossible to answer: When does it stop being partly cloudy and start being partly sunny? Which baby is the cutest ever? How can something be both "new" and "improved," 'cause if it's new, what was it improving on? What is another word for thesaurus? Would you rather be able only to whisper, or able only to shout? Can you cry underwater?

You can find these and many other so-called unanswerable questions if you simply Google "Questions impossible to answer." But really, many of these questions are, in fact, answerable. It's not rocket science. The question about babies, for example, is easy. The cutest baby is "my baby." The answer can only be subjective. Right?

Next! Can you cry underwater? Yes. Your tear ducts still function underwater, but you won't be able to feel the tears coursing down your cheeks because they'll mix with the water around you. And why would you be crying underwater, anyway?

This morning's Gospel story is full of questions. They are posed by Pilate, and Jesus responds to all of them. All of them that is -- *except one*. The last one. Pilate asks him: "What is truth?" And Jesus says nothing. Crickets. Complete and total silence. And even if he *did* respond to the question, we don't know what the answer was, because John doesn't tell us.

Perhaps Jesus simply said nothing because he sensed that it was a rhetorical question, i.e., a question of frustration coming from a guy under political pressure. "What is truth," is a question most politicians, it could be argued, have trouble with. It's more likely that Jesus didn't respond because he knew Pilate wasn't really looking for the truth. Pilate wasn't looking for what was true, but for what was expedient, i.e., what was least likely to cause a riot in the streets, and a phone call from the emperor.

Ok, so how did this little conversation between a Roman official and God's son get started anyway? It began with Pilate's question, "Are you the King of the Jews?" Jesus responded and the conversation continued. Pilate repeats his question, "So you are a king?" Jesus replies, "You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice!"

Whaaat? Let's try to not get all philosophical here. Jesus wasn't trying to get Pilate into a conversation about Greek philosophy. Jesus was not referring to the truth of philosophers, but the truth of, and about, God. He knew he could tell the Roman official anything, and what mattered the most is what the man believed. Jesus knew that Pilate wasn't ready to hear the truth about God. So, he didn't respond to Pilate's final question, "What is truth?" And yet, Jesus' reluctance to answer a question about truth has not stopped others from trying to answer a question he decided to leave unanswered!

And that's not necessarily a bad thing, nor is it particularly a hard thing to do. Elsewhere in the gospels, Jesus makes plenty of statements about God's truth, such as: - God loves us, God wants us to be reconciled to him,- that believing in Jesus is the way to salvation,- that God's kingdom is not like our earthly kingdoms,- that we should love God and our neighbors as we love ourselves,- God's word is truth, - and, of course, the big one, that Jesus himself is "the way, the truth and the life."

So the question, "What is truth?" is not one that's impossible to answer. What is difficult, but not impossible to deal with is Jesus' statement that "everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice." That Jesus chose the word "belongs" rather than "corners" is significant. He didn't say, "Everyone who *corners* the truth listens to my voice." This kind of a person -- the one who's convinced he's got a corner on the truth -- is not only a scary person, but a dangerous one. Proverbs 21:2

comes to mind: "A person may think their own ways are right, but the LORD weighs the heart."

Jesus says that everyone who belongs to him "listens to his voice." And that is not the first time Jesus has said this. Earlier in John 10 he talks about being the Good Shepherd. "The sheep hear his voice," Jesus declares in verse 3. "The sheep follow him because they know his voice." "I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice." Finally, "My sheep hear my voice. I know them and they follow me." Consequently, to "belong to the truth" and to "listen to Jesus' voice" is to be a member of the flock over which Jesus is the shepherd. (And back in those days the word, "shepherd" was a frequent metaphor for "king!")

Okay, then. Where in our culture these days do we see examples of belonging to the truth? Certainly, we can cite many instances of good deeds being done, of people caring for "the least of these." Those doing such acts are often motivated by listening to Jesus' voice. Such deeds are not only worth noting, but also worth emulating -- adjusted, of course, for the circumstances and people we encounter. But perhaps another way to learn about belonging to the truth is to consider when we **may not** be listening for Jesus' voice.

This is a relevant consideration. Why? Because if we're not listening, we are not "belonging to the truth." For example, we are not listening to the voice of Jesus: when we do not show love for one another, when we fail to repent of our sins, whenever we don't feel like "taking up our crosses," if we are not involved in making disciples, if we don't pray, if we do not forgive, if we are consumed with being materially and financially successful. We are not paying attention to our divine King when we express anger and verbal abuse, when we commit adultery or seek revenge on those who have wronged us. When we are consumed with worry and anxiety, or anytime we judge others.

Jesus' trial before Pilate is the centerpiece and dramatic climax of the story of Jesus' last hours on earth. It brings to conclusion many of the important Christological themes of the New Testament, especially the themes of judgment and kingship. Throughout the Gospels Jesus' presence in the world has been pointed to, as the moment of judgment upon the world, in which the people of this Earth must decide whether they recognize the revelation of God in Jesus. In fact, in our story for today it is as if the world tries to put Jesus on trial, but thankfully he is shown to be the true judge! Similarly, the trial will show that Jesus is not a king according to our earthly conventional expectations but is truly a king in the events that led to his crucifixion.

Notice that when Pilate is trying to understand the accusations that have been brought against the defendant he asks Jesus, "What have you done?" Jesus doesn't answer that question either. It's the wrong question. The Roman official should have been trying to figure out who the man before him actually was and where he was from. Pilate is then offered up a puzzling answer when Jesus informs him that his kingdom is not from this world. If it were, he would act like Pilate and other earthly rulers. He would have an army who would fight to preserve him. In other words, the issue is not about what Jesus has done, but who he is and where he has come from -- his origins.

Those of us who have read and studied John's Gospel know that from the very beginning of time Jesus, the Word, has come from God. If, however, we are to talk about what Jesus did during his time on earth throughout his ministry, his actions and teachings were nothing like any king we have ever heard of. What he actually did was: to be (unfairly) tried, convicted, and executed. He suffered, died, and was raised.

When we turn off Jesus, we turn off the truth. When we turn off the truth, we turn from a meaningful life to a meaningless life. Years ago, the Danish

philosopher and theologian Søren Kierkegaard commented on this "What is truth?" passage from John. In his comments, Kierkegaard reflects on the idea of listening for Christ by noting that the truth, that is Christ, is more important than what Christ taught. Kierkegaard warned that we can abolish truth *by* accepting Christ's teachings without accepting Christ. "We want truth the easy way," Kierkegaard wrote. "This is to abolish truth, for Christ the teacher is more important than the teaching."

"What is truth," it turns out, is not an unanswerable question. Christ is the truth! He didn't answer that question when Pilate asked it, because Pilate wasn't interested in the truth, he wasn't interested in who Jesus was.. "You can't handle the truth," Jack Nicholson's character booms in the movie *A Few Good Men*. Jesus might have said the same thing.

But he does answer it elsewhere in John's Gospel when he says, "I am the way, the truth and the life." And he answers it in what we experience within, when we receive him into our lives, into our hearts. Christ is the truth. And the lesser truths, of what should be done when we are faced with the complex situations of life, can best be found not just by consulting rules, precedents, and procedures, but also by listening for Jesus' voice.

On this Christ the King Sunday, it may be that the most important aspect of declaring Christ as King, is not our understanding of Jesus' lordship -- who he is and what he does; but our life with each other under that lordship. "I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." It is not enough to confess with words and life, "Jesus is **my** Lord and King." We also have to confess with words and life, "Jesus is **our** Lord and King." and that is a truth worth listening to, a question worth answering. **Amen.**