

There are several web and media outlets that have been examining recent political ads to determine if their content is truthful or not. They ask if the ads speak correctly about a candidate or party. For the most part, most of the ads I have seen rated have been rated as half-truths. They contain some truth but it has been distorted or taken out of context from its original use. We struggle to know the truth; we want to know what is right.

Acts is the history of the beginning of the Church. It is, in some ways, the Mission Statement of the early church. It seeks to give us a glimpse of how the mission of the church began and to demonstrate to us how it carried out the mandate of Christ. The Isaiah passage we used this morning are the verses that Jesus quoted in his Mission Statement in Luke 4:18-19. They help us define what Jesus saw as his mission and Acts helps us to see how this was translated and carried out by the early church.

A brief look at the Isaiah passage reminds us that the main emphasis of Christ's mission was to bring Good News in a variety of ways. He defines for us what God is like and how we are to see God. He also sets for us the type of ministry(ies) the church should encompass: Feeding the hungry, clothing the naked—we are all brothers and sisters in a global community. Our task is also to heal the broken hearted – to be the giver of hope to a broken world. Our task is to free captives of the world ideologies. We are to care for those who mourn, there is a better day coming. We are the bringers of the WORD of hope, forgiveness, healing and restoration through both words and actions. These are words for discipleship training in the early church and for the church today. This is where the church must be expending its energies; this IS the mission of God's people in Christ.

In our Acts reading Peter and John are caught between the traditions of the past and the new mission, the new wineskins of Christ. They are now before the second highest power in the land (Rome first, Jewish Council second). They have boldly preached in the name of Jesus and have healed a crippled man. They have given Christ the credit for this healing for this is the mission to which they have been called. Their words are words of liberation. They are setting people free from the bondage of the Law, from the Temple rules. They have with them the man healed, the message cannot be denied—Good News is being preached.

I love cartoons as many of you know. I have one that shows a preacher in the pulpit. In the window behind him is a moving van and the caption reads: "Today I am preaching the sermon I have always wanted to preach!" The good news, the words of Peter and John are not the words the leaders of the Temple want to hear. Preaching like this will only get you in trouble. The moving van should be nearby.

The Council has a "situation": they cannot deny the healing; the man is standing there with Peter and John. They do the next best thing: they go into Executive Session. They privately discuss what their options are. Their only conclusion is to forbid Peter and John to speak any more about Jesus. If we don't hear about it any more, if the words are no longer spoken, then we have controlled the situation and things can get back to normal.

Is that not the way much of life is handled? If we don't talk about it perhaps it will go away. If we forbid people talking, sharing about Jesus this whole situation will dry up and go away. But, Peter and John cannot do that. They have a mandate from one greater than the Temple or the Council: "*Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God's sight*

to obey you rather than God. For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard” (4:19-20).

Silence is dangerous at best. I was shocked by the surveillance video from this past week showing the beating of man on a Philadelphia subway train. The man was on his way home from work and another man, completely unprovoked, started beating on him with a hammer. The man who was doing the beating had his six-year old son with him. No one on the subway tried to stop or intervene. They did not want to get involved. They remained silent, looked the other way. Now before we get too “high-minded” remember this is very close to a situation in Seattle a few months ago when a young woman was being beaten in the street and no one called the police or tried to intervene. The mantra of today is to not get involved, keep silent in hopes it will go away.

We try hard to avoid controversy. We remain silent. Silence is golden, remember. I mean how many times do we get in trouble by being silent? How many times do we get in trouble by opening our mouths? The former rector of All Saints Episcopal Church in Pasadena, California, preached a sermon before the last presidential election. In his sermon he asked which of the candidates best demonstrated a like-Jesus quality. He did not endorse one candidate or party over the other. In fact, he took all the major candidates to task for not being more like Jesus. However, some saw this as an affront to the party then in power. Shortly after his sermon the congregation was notified they were under IRS investigation for being “politically involved.” As the LA Times followed this story they noted hundreds of other congregations and sermons that were supportive of the administration at that time and how none of these warranted any investigation. If the rector had remained silent...

It seems as if even raising questions can be dangerous. So we often just keep silent. We assume silence has no sides but know the tragedy of being silent. “When they came for the _____ I was silent. When they came for the _____ I was silent. When they came for me there was no one left to speak.”

I realize that there are good people on both sides of most issues. What I hope we are seeking is open, frank and honest discussion about the issues that are confronting us as a people of faith, the people of God. However, for some reason we cannot seem to accomplish this. Sides must be taken. Polarization has become the theme of the day. But polarization is not the way of the people of God. The way of the people of God is forgiveness, reconciliation, feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, etc.

We need to decide what is right for us before our God. These are tough days in which we live and tough decisions need to be made. We are caught, and for some, it seems that silence is the best way out. Especially in a world where there are no easy answers. And yet, it is at this crucial time that we need to hear and discern the Word of the Lord. We need to know what is right. We need to hear again, to listen again to the Scriptures and what they say about the life of a disciple of Jesus Christ. Is the Spirit of the Lord upon us? “*We cannot help but speak about what we have seen and heard.*” We have been listening, waiting, sharing and the Spirit of the Lord is upon us.

Heard the story of a young boy who wondered what the preacher did the rest of the week. His father tried to explain, the best he could, how the hours of the preacher were filled with studying, listening, etc. After the sermon that morning the little boy looked up at his father and said, “You know, listening isn’t easy either!”

In order for us to know what is right we, too, must learn how to listen: to one another and to the very voice of God: Is the Spirit of the Lord upon us....