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### **The Best Answer to Fake News: The Truth Will Make You Free**

With all the talk these days about what is true or false (i.e. claims and counter claims of so-called “fake news” – consider the readings we often hear during Holy Week and Good Friday.

During the trial in Jerusalem, before the final sentence of crucifixion, Pontius Pilate asked Jesus, “So you are a king?” Jesus answered, “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.” Pilate asked him, “What is truth?” John 18:37-38

Earlier in the same gospel, Jesus told those who believed in him. “If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.” John 8:32

If we find and know truth we will find freedom.

A central question of faith is coming to know what it is that makes us free. Free from being defined by a past we would like to move beyond. Free from second guessing. Free from fear, concern, anxiety, guilt, doubt, being weighed down by shame, regret, judging, being judged.

In this light: here my question for us over this July 4<sup>th</sup> holiday: what does the freedom and truth that Jesus is pointing to have to do with the kind of freedom that we in this country have come to celebrate and claim?

I like to point out from time to time that our Book of Common Prayer is the source of doctrine and practice for our church, Independence Day is counted as a major feast – with its own collect: Lord God Almighty, in whose Names the founders of this country won liberty for themselves and for us, and lit the torch of freedom for nations then unborn: Grant that we and all the people of this land may have grace to maintain our liberties in righteousness and peace. ...

I was born in a year when I got to enjoy the Bicentennial – the 200<sup>th</sup> year anniversary of the 1<sup>st</sup> July 4<sup>th</sup> -- at the height of my childhood. It was a nation-wide celebration that went on all year it seemed. And the actual day, we were at a family lake house in Ohio, there was a parade of boats. Sparkers at night. We watched massive fireworks displays on TV that must have been seen by outer space. Wonderful memories.

In that Declaration of Independence that we all had to study in school, these are the words that many remember: “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are

created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.”

The signers appealed “to the Supreme Judge of the world for the rectitude of our intentions -- with a firm reliance on the protection of divine Providence.” A creator, supreme Judge God, found his way into that famous document. At the very least, these insertions allows us to sing national hymns during church services so many years later.

We turn to Abraham. Let’s just admit that to our ears the binding and near sacrifice of Isaac is a disturbing story. People have been disturbed and moved by it since it was first told.

What kind of God would make such a request? “Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains that I shall show you.”

What kind of father would even think of carrying it out? Or would not crumble at the innocence of the child: “Father, the fire and the wood are here, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?”

The human sacrifice was of course averted. God saw Abraham’s faith. Christians have long traced the offering of Christ on the cross to these words: “for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me.” It is a connecting, if not disturbing, story.

And back to our question: what is it that makes us free?

Of the many words that I can associate with the spiritual journey, the one word for me that does not fit is ‘independence.’ I certainly know the pull of wanting to be personally independent. Isn’t that what the prodigal son declared in the famous parable? Give me inheritance now, Father, and let me go. Let me to be free from you and the duties of working the land. Let me find my way and do what I want, even if it brings me to ruin.

You and I will spend good parts of our lives searching for salvation, redemption, meaning, purpose, love.

The actor Martin Sheen, who famously played the president in the TV series *West Wing*, is a known activist. He’s speaks with pride of being arrested 60 times for marching and attending vigils and speaking out. Sheen is also a well known seeker and believer.

In a recent interview with Krista Tippett on the radio program “On Being,” Sheen spoke about freedom.

Tippett asked him this: You said somewhere, or wrote, “I don’t know what salvation means in a personal sense. For me, a better word is freedom,” I mean, you’re not talking about freedom as autonomy or isolation or mere independence — I mean, it might have a

quality of independence. You're talking about freedom as connected to community in some way, I think.

Sheen responded: Yes, exactly. So often people get stuck — and I did, myself — on the spiritual journey, if you will, with piety. And that is a terrible stumbling block. I have nothing against piety, but I think that piety is the road. It is not the destination. If being pious leads you to a form of personal reflection and acceptance of a higher power, then it has its purpose. But it has to be discarded, in the larger picture, in favor of the community. Because piety is something that you do, or you tend to do, alone. And true freedom, spirituality, can only be achieved in community.”

I think we need to pay attention to this.

As our nation celebrates independence from that King of Great Britain 241 later, it may be a good reminder as we face so many challenges of living in the world today, that we still need one another and care for another. We cannot solve the many problems of the world unilaterally and we cannot ignore the voices of those without power or influence.

True freedom, spirituality, can only be achieved in community.

I believe that one person's claim to freedom should not impinge on another's pursuit of happiness. Yet it often does. We are called to a different way of living.

In our gospel today, Jesus says: “Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me... and whoever gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones in the name of a disciple-- truly I tell you, none of these will lose their reward.” Matthew 10:40-42 It is an invitation to interconnectedness.

Community today is family, church, village, nation – it is global.

This parish is one form of community for you and me – even in the quiet days of the summer. A place and a space to gather to break bread, worship, remember, pray and learn. We are not a perfect community. We do not reflect fully the breadth of the world's diversity.

We try on our best days I hope to be open and welcoming -- and I know we fall short of people's expectation of what that may mean from time to time. And we continue to try to figure this all out together.

What is true freedom? To stand before the God who made us and say, like Abraham: Here I am: warts, scars, insecurities, vanities and all. Here I am.