

These are the first words of the first book of the Bible. Genesis 1:1-5 “In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. Then God said, “Let there be light”; and there was light. And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.”

Before there was life, there was darkness. There was chaos. There was an empty, formless void. Into that deep darkness, God spoke, commanding light into existence. It stood against the darkness. God saw that it was good and he used that light to separate the Night from the Day. These past few days we have been drawn into the chaos of darkness and we have wondered where all the light has gone.

It has been the darkness not of another nation or another people, but us. The world watched on Wednesday as our Capitol was breached by a violent mob and wondered what has happened to our shining light of democracy. Americans watched stunned that this could be our present circumstance, our national chaos.

Many of you may not know but I was a poll worker this year both at the courthouse for early voting and on election day here in our building. I had also worked all day in March during the primary. I have learned so much by being a

poll worker that I was not aware of before, all the checks and balances, all the safeguards, all the procedures and policies to guarantee a free and fair election. I worked with five different groups of poll workers in the presidential election and every one of them was staffed with committed persons, dedicated to following the same process for every voter. Can errors still occur? Yes, but the system has built-in procedures to address them when they do.

That is the truth. That is the truth I can offer you about the election process in our county, where we live. I don't know that because I read it in a news article but because I experienced our election system at work for myself. I learned the truth by participating and serving. When I looked at the crowd of thousands gathered on Wednesday convinced the election was rigged, I wondered how many had worked as a poll worker for those in their community. What did they really know about the election policies and procedures and safeguards in their county and state? Were they interested in learning the truth, the truth that can be proven and defended? Or were they willing to risk whatever it cost to rally behind the belief that their candidate's loss signaled it was definitely stolen by people who were not like them, a deliberate act against them?

Over five hundred years before Jesus was born, the Israelite people were returning home from exile in Babylon. King Cyrus of Persia was making all of this

happen. It felt like God's blessing was finally with the people again. To keep Israel on the right path, God sent prophets like Zechariah to remind them of how they were to live as God's faithful people.

In Zechariah 8, God speaks of returning their fortunes, their Temple, their homes, their traditions, all the good things they had been dreaming about for so many years. The exiles are finally returning to Jerusalem, to their shining city on a hill. Then in Zechariah 8:16, God says this, "These are the things that you shall do: Speak the truth to one another, render in your gates judgments that are true and make for peace, do not devise evil in your hearts against one another, and love no false oath; for all these are things that I hate, says the Lord."

Speak the truth to one another. Pass laws that are true and that make for peace. Do not let evil rule in your hearts against one another. Love no promise or oath that is false. God is saying to his people, If you want to live in my light, truth and peace and goodwill for each other is the only way. Lies and animosity and division and evil only invite the darkness.

On the Capitol steps, there were flags bearing our President's name, the symbol of the Confederacy as well as the name of Jesus and images of the Bible. An outside observer could make the assumption all those belong together and support the same cause. God's Son and God's word do not encourage violence or

division or falsehoods. They speak of peace and love and unity and truth. Jesus and the Bible lead us into the Light, not deeper into the chaos of darkness.

We are at a crossroads as a people, just like the exiles who were coming home from Babylon. We can follow God's path for our lives or we can follow our own. If we choose to follow God, we need to have a closer relationship with the truth and break up with any and all lies that have been keeping us in the darkness. There are no such things as alternative facts to God. God sees and knows the truth.

Here are the kind of alternative facts Israel told themselves before the Babylonians carried them off into exile. I know God said, "Don't make alliances with other nations" but God can surely see all the advantages we would gain in this partnership. Nope, God didn't see and God didn't agree. Or I know God said, "Don't worship any God but me." However our neighbors just had the best harvest in their life by offering sacrifices to Dagon. Surely God wouldn't mind if we set up a small altar to Dagon in the corner of the Temple and offer a few sacrifices. Maybe they have gone into partnership together so our God can focus on other things. Nope, God minded, he wasn't amused and he wasn't interested in sharing his people's loyalty. Israel told convenient lies to themselves, hoping to find a shortcut to better results. The lies only drove them deeper into darkness.

We cannot make lies, falsehoods, alternative facts – truths -- because they get us what we want when we want it. Every lie has its own dark consequence, the price we pay for furthering it. There is always a price, even if we don't see it at first. Don't let anyone convince you otherwise.

Here is Paul's advice to the Ephesians when they were caught between competing and contrary choices and beliefs. Paul says, "We must no longer be children, tossed to and fro and blown about by every wind of doctrine, by people's trickery, by their craftiness in deceitful scheming. But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love."

This is the only path for us as those who follow Christ. Speak the truth in Love, even when the Lie is more popular, even when the Truth takes courage to speak. There are so many truths about this pandemic we are fighting that are still not believed or ignored. We have reached a high of 4000 Americans lost in one day and in our state our deaths now exceeds 4000. Our hospitals are in crisis as the spread accelerates and yet so many are still do not believe in this virus' deadliness. There are so many truths about white privilege and our justice system that need to

be spoken and addressed, so that reform can happen. There are also so many lies that prop up conspiracy theories and white nationalism that need to be spoken in the light of God's justice, so they can be dismantled and torn down. It is up to each one of us to speak the truth we know in love.

We do this so we can grow into the image of Christ, even through every growing pain. We should expect to be changed, to grow in our understanding, in our confession, in our compassion, in our service. Christ is working within us and through us and among us, so that we can love and value every person as Christ does, seeing every person as the beloved child of God that they are. This life leads us to peace with one another, not to war. This life unites us, not divides us against each other.

As we gather at Christ's table today, may our hearts be at peace knowing that the One is the Light of the World is Lord of all creation. He calls us to gather at one table, wherever we are, to receive the words of grace and forgiveness and reconciliation that hold our lives. Christ calls us to remember that there is power in sacrifice and redemption in service. He calls us to life of peace, where the greatest of all is servant of all. When we are at peace with God and with one another, we are to free to live in the light of truth, leaving all the lies and violence and hate in the chaos of darkness.