

**PENTECOST:
A TIME TO EXPERIENCE GOD’S HOLY SPIRIT ALIVE AND ACTIVE**

**Last Sunday after Pentecost
Christ the King
Proper 29
November 22, 2009**

**Daniel 7:9-10, 13-14
Psalm 93
Revelation 1:4b-8
John 18:33-37**

A Big Question: What is Truth?

One really tough question

A few weeks ago, our son, Robert, took his nephew, our 3-year-old grandson Jonny, fishing in a local farm pond where Jonny caught his first fish. Each time I asked Jonny about the size of the fish, he stretched out his arms wider and wider. “That big, Grandpa Bob.” I asked Robert, “What’s the truth?” Robert responded, “Dad, there are no little fish in that pond.”

“What is truth?”—that’s also the question Pilate famously asks Jesus at the end of our Gospel passage (John 18:37), one of four passages for this Sunday that sheds light on this big question. Each passage deepens our celebration of a Sunday dedicated to the truth of the Bible and the reign of Christ as King.

Epistemologists (experts in the science of knowledge) distinguish several ways we know things to be true. For example, it is historically true that Caesar crossed the Rubicon; it is poetically true that love is like a red rose; it is ethically true that two wrongs don’t make a right; it is theologically true that Christ is Lord and savior; and it is scientifically true that matter is composed of subatomic particles.

These ways of knowing truth do not exclude one another. Rather they present knowledge under different conditions, sometimes, as in our passages, under two or more aspects and conditions at the same time.

Psalm 93: truth in theology and science

This psalm reveals truth as it is presented under the conditions of a royal theology and cosmological science typical of the ancient Near East. In this psalm, God is a majestic potentate, ruling over the cosmos from a throne and dictating laws that last for ever. The cosmos over which God rules, depicted in terms of ancient cosmology, consists of an

earth that does not move, heavens that fill part of the void around earth, and waters that fill the remaining void.

Daniel 7:9-14: truth in history, apocalyptic, and poetry

Daniel also stamps his message with the seal of royal theology, but gives it historical, apocalyptic, and even poetic twists. He lifts the curtain on a heavenly stage set for mortal combat. Four grim beasts marshal forces on the side of evil. Opposed to the beasts are the armies of the faithful led by the enthroned God of Psalm 93 and a supernatural figure called the Son of Man. In this passage, some scholars see historically accurate, but poetically depicted, memories of a second-century BC revolt of the Jews against their Syrian rulers (chronicled in the books of the Maccabees).

John 18:33-37: truth in history and theology

This account of Pilate's meeting with Jesus is one of four similar passages in the Gospels (Matthew 27:1-26; Mark 15:1-15; Luke 23:1-25). The meeting is confirmed historically not only by biblical sources but by non-biblical writers as well (the Jewish historian Josephus and the Roman historian Tacitus). But John, like the other Gospel writers, deepens the historical sense of the passage, in this case with an editorial aside and theological reflection about Jesus' prophetic powers: "This happened in order to make come true what Jesus had said when he indicated the kind of death he would die." (verse 32, *GNT*)

Revelation 1:4-8: truth in science and apocalyptic

Revelation plants its treatment of the big question firmly in time and space. Taking a cue from the ancient science of political geography, Revelation tells us where its audience is located: "From John to the seven churches in the province of Asia" (verse 4, *GNT*). The message sent to these churches is apocalyptic and poetic and invites us into the heavenly throne room of Psalm 93 and Daniel 7. From there, we see a figure drawing near, riding on the clouds and reminding us of Daniel's Son of Man. "Everyone will see him, including those who pierced him" (verse 7a, *GNT*).

Was Jonny Telling the Truth?

So, did Jonny tell the truth about the size of the fish he caught? Yes, he did, but it was a truth conditioned by the vantage point of a three-year-old and by the encouragement and assurance of his uncle, Robert, who knew that the pond did not hold little fish. Likewise, as we study the Bible, we can be assured that it is true, not just in one way, but in many ways.

This week's Reflection was prepared by Robert Hodgson, Jr., Ph.D., Dean Emeritus of the Nida Institute for Biblical Scholarship at the American Bible Society.

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This week we remember to pray for the work of the Bible Societies in: Armenia – With thanks to God for helping prisoners to experience God's presence and for gifting blind children through the Children's Bible, and with prayers for the successful completion of the revisions of the Scriptures and for the continued enthusiasm of staff

engaged in preaching the *Gospel on Wheels* and for teachers involved in “fishing” more souls for the Lord; **Georgia** – With thanks to God that every year Bible work is becoming more widely known and accepted, and with prayers for increased interest in the Bible, for translation work, for the preparation of study materials and Scriptures for children, and for opportunities to bring the Bible to new groups of people; **Azerbaijan** – With thanks to God that 2008 was a very fruitful year and that many Scriptures were distributed and that the translation of the Bible into Azeri is almost complete and being readied for publication, and with prayers for Bible translation work into the Udi and Talish languages, and for the safety of the Bible Society staff.

Activity Corner: “The LORD Is King” Montage

Supplies needed: Bible; poster board; old magazines; scissors; glue or paste; marker; construction paper (assorted colors); “crown” pattern (approximately 3” x 5”); pens or pencils.

Read Psalm 93. This psalm is an “enthronement” hymn that celebrates God’s universal rule. How is God’s universal rule described? Find an image of a throne and affix it to the top of the poster. Underneath the image, copy verse 2. Then look for pictures that depict the earth as described in the psalm (i.e., oceans, sky, etc.) and create a montage. Trace and cut out crowns and affix them around the poster board as a border. On each crown, invite everyone to write “Jesus is my king” and sign their names. Conclude by singing “Praise, My Soul, the King of Heaven” or “All Hail the Power of Jesus’ Name” or one of your favorite hymns.