

Contending for Truth

Proper 19, Year B, Track 2, RCL. Isaiah 50:4-9a. September 16, 2019. The Episcopal Shared Ministry of Our Saviour, Salem and Trinity, Alliance in the Diocese of Ohio. The Rev'd Jerome H. (Kip) Colegrove.

I love the vigor of the imagery in today's reading from Isaiah. In particular I love the picture of the prophet fiercely confronting his opponents, as if he were challenging them to a fistfight:

Who will contend with me?

Let us stand up together. (Isaiah 50:8)

In this passage the Bible doesn't simply *tell* us not to be bashful about defending God's truth; it *shows* us an image of the kind of scrappiness typical of the more physically belligerent among us and says, standing up for God can be like this. Risk getting your nose bloodied for God! And that, or its equivalent, did happen to the prophets from time to time. It depended on how unpopular the truth was, and with whom.

I'm pretty sure the Prince of Peace would rather our disputes over the truth were settled by nonviolent means, whether those disputes occur within the Christian community or between that community and the world at large. But standing up for the truth, in matters large and small, is a requirement...even if we get smacked down for it (or crucified—but we hold the assurance of resurrection).

The philosophical climax, so to speak, of the Gospel according to

John occurs when Pontius Pilate offers Jesus the famous retort, “What is truth?” (John 18:38) The whole story has been about the person in whom truth resides and through whom it is manifest: Jesus of Nazareth. The message is that some people can have the truth standing right in front of them and for personal, political, philosophical, economic—all kinds of reasons—they won’t see it, won’t acknowledge it, won’t let it change their course.

Prophets have a special call from God to tell the truth, and especially, in the phrase bandied about nowadays, to tell the truth to power. But the powers of this world—the various agencies of evil—stand in confrontation with each and every one of us, not just with prophets. Will we stand up to them? Will we tell the truth?

Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth and the life.” (John 14:6) Truth is life and it is the way of life. When truth is mocked and beleaguered, in public life or in private life, we need to remember that God stands for truth and be ready to stand up for truth ourselves.

And...when we stand up for the truth, God is standing with us. No one contending for the truth contends alone.