

St. David's Presbyterian Church  
St. John's, NL  
"Honesty"  
Dr. J. Dent

April 20, 2008  
(Fifth Sunday after Easter)

Honesty is such a lonely word  
Everyone is so untrue  
Honesty is hardly ever heard  
And mostly what I need from you  
-Billy Joel

There's been a lot lately in the media on the topic of honesty and ethical issues. Have you noticed that? Most of us consider ourselves fairly honest people, but then the details come to the fore.

Take Chris Avenir, aged 18, a first year student at Ryerson University who developed a Facebook club which invited other students to input answers to homework Chemistry questions. The professor discovered this was happening, and Mr. Avenir was charged and convicted of an academic misconduct, although he did not receive the greater judgment of expulsion. (source: *Globe and Mail, March 19, 2008*)

And lest you think only one person was creatively looking for homework answers, a survey was done in 2006 in the *Journal of Accounting* which found in a sample of 569 undergraduate business students, that 52% of business students admitted to cheating during their university, and 54% of accounting majors admitted to cheating, 82% of these acknowledged that they had also cheated in high school. In an earlier study, 75% of undergraduate students admitted to cheating in their university courses. Cheating here is defined as "illegal, unethical, immoral or against the regulations of the course or institution." And these were just the ones that admitted to doing so. (source: *Journal of Accounting, Ethics and Public Policy, Volume 5, No. 3, page 375ff. (2006)*)

Recently on a CBC radio interview, it was noted that people regularly take office supplies home. These would say that it was okay to take a pen or two, but taking a box of pens home was stealing. Others, in regards to communication, admitted to having told their spouse or friend or co-worker they exaggerated or massaged the truth in speaking about where they were, in terms of coming home, or changing the amount of time needed to get

home, or somewhere else. In other words, people admitted to “little white lies” occurring fairly often in their lives.

On the extreme opposite end of the scale, there are those such as Brad Blanton, a psychologist, who has started a movement called “Radical Honesty.” It encourages us to speak the truth, no matter how brutal or socially inappropriate. For example, the first thing you might say to a person when you meet them for the first time is how fat they look.

All of these media attention grabbers cause us to take a hard look at what it means to be honest. Christians are followers of the Way, the Truth and the Life. We are to be honest, there's no question about that. But we are to speak the truth in love, as Paul puts it. So how can we do that?

First of all, we need to commit ourselves to honesty. When we don't know something, we need the humility to admit what we don't know. We also need to admit our need. That's the first step in the Gospel and it's the first step in the 12 Step Groups such as Alcoholics Anonymous. When we have a gambling problem, or a drinking problem or an illicit drug problem, or a financial mismanagement, a sexual sin, a broken fiduciary commitment, or even dishonesty on your taxes, we need to first of all admit our sin.

Sometimes we sin in our ignorance. Sometimes we know what we are doing it, when we are doing it. The sin is there in both cases.

Thomas in John 14 listened intently to Jesus. Thomas sometimes gets a bad reputation due to the fact that he didn't immediately believe, and stated that he wouldn't believe unless he saw and touched the wounded hands of Jesus and the wounded side of Jesus. So many of us grew up hearing him called “doubting Thomas.” “Don't be a doubting Thomas.” But Thomas listened to the Lord, and he had a character trait that caused him to speak his mind, and to speak it honestly. This is good.

So when Thomas heard that Jesus was going away, and that God was preparing a house with many rooms, with lots of space for everyone coming to a great reunion, and that Jesus would come back again and make sure everyone who is supposed to be there will be there, he said he didn't understand. Thomas said that he didn't know where Jesus was going, so obviously he also didn't know what the way was so they could follow.

Now that's a practical question. So often we need simply to be like Thomas and refer our questions to Jesus, for things as small as taking stamps or pens from work to larger questions of submitting work that is not our own as if it were, or submitting expenses that are not a true reflection of what we have paid or done. Ethics is simply trying to be honest and accountable for accurately reflecting the truth and reality.

And so we hear Thomas admit his ignorance. And because Thomas was willing to say that he didn't know the way, we get the benefit of Jesus telling everyone who will listen, that Jesus is the Way, and the Truth and the Life. This upper room teaching that Jesus gives is essential for all of us who face loss, everyone of us, who faces the reality of our own mortality.

Death is scary. Jesus has conquered death. He will allow all who trust Him a great reunion and a whole different kind of wonderful life which does not end. He teaches those who want to follow Him that He is the God of the universe, and that when you have seen Him, you have seen the expression of the Three in One. Jesus is God. He has authority even over death. He Himself went through death and conquered it.

Of course you have a choice. You can choose Jesus. Or you can choose any other way. But John, the writer of the Gospel, urges you to trust this Jesus when you want to go another way.

This fellow Brad Blanton apparently has also offered a life position called "futilitarianism," whose only belief is that "it is futile to have any belief whatsoever," which of course, is self-contradictory. Each of us chooses every day who we will trust and not trust. Each of us chooses every day those to whom we will speak honestly, regardless of the consequences to our reputations, to our careers, to our lives.

Jesus makes a wild promise that some of us either don't hear or don't believe. He says in v. 14, "You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it." This is a comment about prayer. It is a comment following the promise that Jesus' followers who trust Him will do even greater things than Jesus himself has done. (v. 12) But what does this promise of 'asking for anything in my name' mean?

It means that we need to ask for the desire of our hearts to be fulfilled. Will God grant us the lottery, or a perfect mate, or a painless existence, or every

material thing we want? These were explored in that movie *Bruce Almighty*, where an unemployed TV newscaster was given God's powers over a part of Buffalo, NY for a few days. God will not grant us those things which will mitigate against His Will. For a time, He will allow us to go our own way, but that little phrase "in my name" is the key. Ask for anything 'in my name.' When we ask for the will of God to be done through our lives, He will answer us positively. When we look for Jesus' best for any situation, He will answer us. We may not get the answer we expect, but we need to ask and we need to record the answers, so that we can praise God better and more specifically.

I often use John 14 as the passage for funerals. In fact, it is only a rare funeral where John 14 is not read. People need to know that their spiritual journey in the midst of the loss of a loved one, begins with honesty. Because as we are honest with God, then we begin to have greater intimacy with God, which in turn leads to eternity in our relationship, something God alone can endow.

We don't often reflect on the longer term consequences of our choices, and so we don't consciously live in the context of eternity. But eternity is a reality, and as always, I encourage you to face it with God through Jesus Christ, rather than some other way.

I encourage you to speak the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15), which is all about our spiritually maturing, and becoming more like Christ. Speak it while you can. Our friends often can't stick around like we might hope.

It is good to appreciate what we have and who we have as we have them. Thanksgiving is always in season.

What areas of your life is God putting his finger on this morning? Is there any place of deception or lies that He might wish to address in you? Is there some outstanding business that you have with God that you need to address today? Is there someone you need to approach or forgive or tell the truth to?

Please take seriously what God is saying to you. And remember to keep asking questions as Thomas did, realizing that it was the way to a deeper trust in Jesus Christ, the ultimate way to be honest.

Let us pray.