

TRUTHFUL WORSHIP

“Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks.” *John 4:23 (NIV)*

I don't know about you, but I am a stickler for truth. I like to dig down to the heart of things and uncover the truth of what's going on. I love honest conversations where people are real with me about how they feel and allow me to do the same and if something is wrong in a relationship I want to discover what it is, confront it honestly and try to resolve it. This can make me a bit hard to live with, especially if you want a quiet life! It means confronting the truth of who I am too and that's often painful but I do it because I believe it leads to transformation and freedom. Our children know that it's always much better to come clean about things straight away rather than try to hide the truth, as the thing that makes me more furious than anything that they might have done is lying! We have a phrase in our house and its “own your stuff” – in other words when we mess up we try to own it rather than deny, explain it away or blame someone else for it. Not always very easy and we don't always get it right but I think it's worth doing because it deepens our relationships and builds a culture of trust and forgiveness within our family and within our friendships too.

The verses I have chosen to focus on today are part of the well known conversation that Jesus has with the woman at the well. And what I want to share with you is what I believe God has been saying to me through a powerful devotion by a writer and broadcaster called Carrie Lloyd entitled “For our own sake, we tell the truth”. Some of what I write are her words and so I want to attribute them to her as we start.

This is an amazing passage of Scripture – do read it all if you can. You see this Samaritan woman in John Chapter 4 was confronted with two kinds of truth; the truth about who Jesus is and the truth about herself. When I read the account, it reminds me, as Carrie points out, that Jesus is in fact the finest truth teller that ever lived. You see Jesus never avoided honest conversations. He revelled in them. Why else would He make space and wait upon the hottest hour of the day for a woman who was outcast by society? *He seeks the honest ones - ones who will worship Him in spirit and in truth.* The truth of who God is in all His infinite greatness and goodness most certainly, and I also believe, the truth of who we are too.

I wonder what truth about yourself has been surfacing within the chaos and uncertainty of the pandemic we are now in? I wonder am I alone in having been confronted with some uncomfortable truths about my character and my behaviour? It's been like holding a mirror up and in it at times I've seen resentment, self righteousness, emotional insecurity and control, mixed in with (thankfully!) some of the fruit God is growing in me of compassion, grace, kindness and self control. Some of what is coming to the surface in the chaos or in the silence (whichever one we find ourselves in) can feel uncomfortable can't it, and there aren't the distractions there anymore for us to be able to hide from the truth. As I've said before everything is heightened. *But I wonder, how helpful were these distractions in allowing us to come before God honestly and worship Him in spirit and in truth?* What if in every moment we hid, we missed an opportunity to experience the beauty of God working in our lives and transforming us into more of who we are truly meant to be?

Let's go back for a moment to the woman at the well. I wonder if like me you have puzzled over why Jesus asked her to fetch her husband? This can appear harsh, even cruel, especially when He already knew she'd had five husbands, and the one she lived with was not her husband. Was Jesus trying to shame her or put her in her place? No, Jesus is not falling foul here of His own teachings; He's a master of them! As Carrie writes, I think He wanted to see if she was prepared to own her truth, her own choices. *He wanted to see if she was the kind of soil He could sow into.* Wow!! She was hungry enough for wisdom and for truth to forgo protecting her own ego. She didn't tell Him what she thought He'd want to hear. She didn't defend her

behaviour. She “owned her stuff” and she simply replied, “*I have no husband*” (John 4:17). To which Jesus replies “What you have just said is quite true” (John 4:18). For true worship, according to Jesus, was coming: “*God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth*” (John 4:24).

Can we ever worship Him fully if we’re not walking in truth? You see I think that if we’re not honest before God about the aspects of ourselves we’d sooner avoid, we’re missing out on the opportunity to discover the wonder of His freedom and missing out on His design for us. *Denial puts distance between us and God, but honesty pulls us close!* And it does the same in our other relationships too. You see, in the great strength and certainty of His undying, never-going-to-abandon-us love, we have no excuse to run, but every reason and confidence to face the truth of who we are and to hold onto God’s hope and promise for who we can be. In this divine appointment between Jesus and the Samaritan woman we learn that truth isn’t repulsive its revelatory. It can be the same for us too. And it allows us to experience the most freeing worship we could ever know!

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