

The lies we tell ourselves...

St. John UMC

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John 8:31-32 Then Jesus turned to the Jews who had claimed to believe in him. "If you stick with this, living out what I tell you, you are my disciples for sure.

Jesus is challenging a group of people with a deep identity in their religious culture. He's also saying once we start down this road towards connecting with God, we keep learning. We can't just say yes I'm in and think we're done!

Then you will experience for yourselves the truth, and the truth will free you."

How do we discern truth in ourselves and others? We KNOW the truth when it comes from God. We can also think of it this way. When we ignore the truth in our own lives, we are ignoring Christ. Discerning truth can take a long time. It grows in those that seek it, ask for it, wait for it and then put it to good use.

33 Surprised, they said, "But we're descendants of Abraham. We've never been slaves to anyone. How can you say, 'The truth will free you'?"

When Jesus said the truth will set you free, the people listening immediately thought of political freedom. There was an intense honor and shame system in ancient Israel. It was a core value in their society. They gained worth through their job, family and ties with other people. So a slave position was severely looked down upon.

The Pharisees were also thinking they only need to be descendants of Abraham to be right with God. Jesus was talking about a different kind of freedom.

34-38 Jesus said, "I tell you most solemnly that anyone who chooses a life of sin is trapped in a dead-end life and is, in fact, a slave. A slave is a transient, who can't come and go at will.

Sin is missing the mark. Failing to be the people God created us to be. Jesus is telling them they'll be a slave as long as they continue in their pattern of thinking. A slave doesn't get to make choices. They are at the control of their master. What kinds of things control us?

How often do we truly claim our brokenness? If we don't **know** we're broken, then we probably convince ourselves we don't really **need** a Savior.

The past six months have been a roller coaster in my spiritual life. I started asking questions. Am I doing what I want to do? Am I choosing activities that I want in my life? Or am I doing what a good Christian girl does? What if I wanted to be a different kind of pastor? What if they wouldn't let me express my new ideas for church?

The more I reflected it seemed I was living a life already scripted for me. I've grown up in the Methodist Church as a pastor's kid, moving around, eating the communion bread after church and waiting for hours for my parents to stop talking to people after church. I'm very comfortable in the

church. Its home. I was president of my youth group, went to a Methodist college and now attend a Methodist seminary. I've felt a strong call to be an ordained elder in the Methodist Church since I was 16.

Now here I am a couple months ago, wondering if this is what I was supposed to do. I talked with a couple people who had left the Methodist Church and started their own churches and loved it. It was tempting. But as wonderful as that sounded, I owed it to the church that raised me, paid for my college and seminary to ask the questions I had burning inside of me.

I spent the next month surfing the web and stumbled across several other young adults asking the same questions I was. So a couple months ago, I started wondering if a website and documentary on this issue would help pull together the conversation in the church among young people wanting to be clergy. I thought 20 people might sign up to be in this documentary project.

In seven days, over 170 young clergy and people interested in ministry have signed up to participate in this documentary! Bishops and pastors of some of the largest UM churches in the country want to lend their voice.

I'm overwhelmed! This all started because I decided to ask the question instead of jumping ship. **One, it shows me how faithful God is to our questions. And two, it illustrates we need courage to ask the difficult questions in our own lives.**

Many of us travel through a life that we didn't create. We make decisions according to what society thinks we should do. We choose careers our parents desired for us. We want to buy the things advertisers tell us we want. There are many lies we tell ourselves.

I'm not good enough. If only I made more money, I'd be happy. If I get healthy/lose weight/smile more/eat less/give more/travel less, I'll be happy.

Today I'm not talking about lying to other people. I'm talking about how often we lie to **ourselves**. Do you **know** yourself? The real you? Sometimes I stand in the mirror and question if the reflection is really me. It's kind of an out of body experience. We live with ourselves all day long but we often don't take the time to **know** the real us. Our culture impresses an image on us that we want to live up to. We tell ourselves the lies we need to hear in order to survive.

When one lie becomes two, becomes three and so on, we can lose the capacity for DISCERNING THE TRUTH. We may think several lies about ourselves here and there don't hurt. But as each one piles on, we start losing the ability to see what the real truth is.

I think many of us are suffocating under an avalanche of lies and we might not even know it. We've even lost the capacity to see the real truth in our lives.

It's quite insane to think that we lie to ourselves. How is it even possible to fool ourselves? How can we be both the deceiver and the deceived?

We may not initially recognize how much we do lie to ourselves. It is an easy thing to deny because there is no solid evidence that we do so. We don't utter the lie aloud, and no-one is there to hold us accountable. Therefore, it is easy to pretend that it never happened (thereby lying to ourselves yet again).

One reason that we lie is to **stop ourselves from being hurt**, usually to **protect our self-esteem**. There are thoughts that we find unacceptable, and thus we simply refuse to think them. We hope that **soon the reality will change** and that the lie will be inconsequential.

For example, we may deny that we are depressed, hoping that soon the depression will go away. Our reasoning is that if it does go away then our lie will no longer matter, and we will **have avoided dealing with a painful reality**. However, it is never a good idea to sacrifice our integrity, and it is never a good idea to lose touch with truth. Just as lying to others will lose their trust, **so does lying to ourselves compromise our own trust. We lose the ability to understand ourselves clearly and to be sure about what is true and what is not.** 1

Lying to ourselves is easier than lying to others. **We have a sympathetic audience.** We receive instant, positive reinforcement with the fantasy we have just accepted. It offers us escape from having to deal with realities that we would rather not accept. When we lie to ourselves, we don't tend to feel fear of being caught.

Ironically, deceiving ourselves requires more maintenance than most other lies.

We become a DISTORTION OF OURSELVES in this process and our integrity is compromised as we become mired in our own lies. We lose touch with the truth. Rather than being protected, we are at great risk. We are not capable of intimacy and we have lost our integrity. 2

With the lie, we can temporarily create a new world.

Tell me the truth -- but perhaps not every truth, all the time. We beg to be spared certain things. At the end of the day, most of us hope the world will lie to us with great skill -- decently, so we never have to wonder if what we're told is a lie. **All these lies, are the desire to become that which we pretend to be: the desire for OUR LIES TO COME TRUE.** 3

There is great power in naming our reality. Even if our reality stinks. God loves our truth. Now I don't believe God loves our sin and bad decisions. But God loves the truth that is at the core of us. God loves us in spite of our mess. Max Lucado always wrote, "Jesus loves you just as you are, but refuses to leave you that way."

God has a truth and reality for each of us that are so much bigger than we give God credit for. Because we're human and cannot even come close to grasping God's nature, our attempts to define God simply put God into a box. Life becomes mundane and monotonous when we think we've got God figured out. Where's the surprise? The risk?

How do we know our true self? **Know God.**

Remember John 8:32: If you continue drawing close to me, you'll know the truth and it will set you free.

Knowing Jesus sets us free. Having a relationship with the creator of the cosmos gives us a life we never dreamed of.

So when we lie, we are denying a central part of our own identity. I'll go a step further and say when we're disconnected from God; we cannot know **our full self**. So we lie. To ourselves. To others. My uncle asked me a pointed question a couple months ago: Do we lie because we're terrified others will figure out we don't know who we are?

These questions have required I take the next step in wondering if we're called to be honest with ourselves and with God, then shouldn't we be honest about the realities in our world?

Oh that requires some very tough and terrifying conversations.

I believe the church should be asking those questions before anyone else.

We look at our culture and world and there is such a big disconnect. We are disconnected from each other. And we pass by hundreds of people each day that are disconnected from the very God who created them.

And for those of you who know me well, you know how connected I am on the internet. But technology has certainly enabled us to live a disconnected life. We shop, talk, rent movies, bank and go to school online. The church **has** to be a place that steps up and helps people make connections.

I'm tired of lying. I'm tired of lying to myself. I'm tired of tip-toeing around the truth. We sometimes encourage people to name the "elephant" in the room. The awkward truth that no one wants to talk about. Nancy Ortberg said we need to let the elephant into the room. It's easier to clean up after the elephant when we know where it is.

There are many issues in our community and world that cannot start to be addressed until we have courage to take on difficult conversations. I'm tired of hearing myself complain about every issue you can think of, but not doing anything about it. I'm tired of the lack of truth-tellers in the world. This is the church's job! When we see an injustice, do something! Going to God in prayer and surrender is a start. How long will the church complain about crime in our communities before we do something?! How long will the church gripe about declining numbers before we get into the community and do something?!

The church must be counter-cultural.

Jesus was counter-cultural to his core. The first will be last. Love the least. Don't do something because everyone else is doing it. Love the people who **hate** you. Hang out with prostitutes. Be like children. Don't hold onto money. These are not fun, wonderful, joyful concepts. They're tough!

Life is messy. God's love for any and everyone can be confusing. Being a Christian means getting uncomfortable and awkward. God didn't say this life would be free of tension. Somewhere along the line, I believed the lie that life should always be pleasant.

Some of us excuse ourselves from tough situations by saying we're passive-aggressive. We tell ourselves it's too awkward and there's too much tension. Well that's true for almost everyone! No one wants to have these conversations. But it does not excuse us from naming the truth.

For some of you here today, this may mean there's a difficult conversation we need to have in our marriage. With our kids. With a friend. With a co-worker. With God.

So I stand here now with 230 young people ready and willing to ask tough questions about the future of the church. I'm terrified! But thrilled to my core. I would never have been ready for this a year ago. But God gave me permission to ask tough questions about what I was doing. I didn't want to **at all**. But I stepped out in faith to see what would happen.

My uncle told me a couple months ago, "**Learn to TRUST YOUR VOICE.**"

If you're worried you can't trust your voice right now, draw close to God. God will work on you, mold and form you into the person God is longing for you to be. It's tough work. But worth it. All it takes is having courage to ask difficult and creative questions and step out in faith.

I caught a couple minutes of Oprah a couple weeks ago. Maria Shriver was talking about how unhappy she's been with her life. Even in the midst of celebrity and fame, she was struggling. I appreciated these words she had to share. She made a pledge. "I pledge to show up in my life as myself, not as an imitation of someone else."

That's all God wants for us. To show up in the life God gave us, as our true selves. I give you permission. As a faith community, we give each other **permission** to examine our lives. Are we living the life God dreams for us? Do our activities reflect what we consider to be important? You have one life. That's all we get. Are you living a life that someone else created for you?

Get rid of the lies and let the truth of God **set you free.**