

Last Tuesday marked the beginning of our Confirmation Group, the beginning of a journey for them as we encourage them to explore the faith into which they were baptised..

What is so important about this faith that we are attempting to pass on. Because if we cannot answer this question for ourselves and for our lives – then why are we asking them to take this seriously?

As I thought on this through the week, as I reflected on our lessons set for today, I found myself turning to these portions of our Psalm and Old Testament Lesson.

Psalm 15

1 Lord, who may | dwell in your | tabernacle? ♦
Who may rest up|on your | holy | hill?

.....
3 Who speaks the | truth ~ from the | heart ♦
and | bears no de|ceit ~ on the | tongue;

Micah 6:8

⁸He has told you, O mortal, what is good;
and what does the LORD require of you
but to do justice, and to love kindness,
and to walk humbly with your God?

What does God require of us, we who seek to follow him in our daily life; we who look to him for strength, for forgiveness, for hope? One word that came to my mind was that simple word truth

3 Who speaks the | truth ~ from the | heart ♦
and | bears no de|ceit ~ on the | tongue;

What is truth? As I asked myself that question I thought of Jesus standing

before Pilate:

For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice." ³⁸ Pilate asked him, "What is truth?" *John 18:37-38*

What is truth? That is a very relevant question in contemporary society at home and abroad. We are told that we are living in a post truth society. In fact the Oxford Dictionary declared ‘post truth’ to be its word for 2016, offering the following definition

post-truth – an adjective defined as ‘relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief’.

So in our public discourse we have moved into the era of fact and alternative fact. In a sense this is not a new phenomenon. A former Secretary to the British cabinet, in the context of a trial in Australia, was forced to concede under cross examination that he had been ‘economical with the truth’ and it has often been said that ‘truth is the first casualty of war’ as news begins to veer towards propaganda.

But there is something different about this new phenomenon of ‘post truth’ In this opinion is put on the same level as fact. Politicians on both sides of the Atlantic, in appealing to their supporters, have decried experts as suspect, particularly when the experts have come up with statements at variance with the line they are taking. So a statement such as, ‘I think climate change is a myth’ is proclaimed to have equal validity to the accumulated evidence of the world wide scientific community.

With the decline in print media and even radio and TV stations as the source by

which more and more people access the news, turning instead to news feeds circulated through social media such as Facebook we have seen a very unwelcome development. The algorithms that these sites use will high light news stories most in line with what you have previously accessed; stories that will reinforce what you already think. Whereas the print media and radio and TV stations can face censure from regulatory bodies and the TV and radio are obliged to provide balanced coverage on issues of national importance, there are no corresponding structures in place for moderating the truth or otherwise of what appears on these sites.

The consequences of this can be troubling. Late last year, a young man entered a pizza restaurant in Washington armed with an assault rifle. He had watched a news feed on social media to the effect that Hilary Clinton and others were running a child pornography ring based on these premises. It shows how easily impressionable people can be manipulated by those with a particular agenda. The consequences could have been disastrous. Fortunately the police managed to bring the situation under control without loss of life.

As a former US Senator, Daniel Moynihan said, in the context of those who would deny the reality of the Holocaust, "Everyone is entitled to his own opinion but not to his own facts."

We come back to the question ‘What is truth?’ Is there no place for objective truth in our ‘post truth’ society? Truth about ourselves, truth about our society can be uncomfortable, can be challenging – but just because I do not like it, just because it is challenging, this does not diminish its authority, does not mean we do not need to hear it.

We read this morning from the Book of the Prophet Micah. While the whole of the book may not have been written by Micah himself, it is representative of a group of prophets who operated in the 8th century in both the Northern Kingdom of Israel and Judah, who condemned societies that while outwardly religious, took advantage of the poor, tolerated injustices and corruption among civil and religious leaders. In very public pronouncements in the public square and in the royal court they spoke truth to power.

Society in every age needs its prophets, those who will stand in the public square and speak truth to power. Every generation needs to hear the voice of one

Who speaks the | truth ~ from the | heart ♦

who asks

and what does the LORD require of you
but to do justice, and to love kindness,
and to walk humbly with your God?

so that in the face of those who would seek to pervert the values of our society, who would seek to offer opinion and prejudice in place of fact and principle, these values of righteousness and justice may be upheld.