

Truth in a Post Truth World

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Date: 14 August 2019

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[0 : 00] Nearly 2,000 years ago, Pontius Pilate, when Jesus was on trial, asked the question, what is truth? Within John's Gospel, as John recounts that situation, Pilate's question hangs there on a theological level, as the one who is the truth is on trial before Pilate.

Pontius Pilate's question also hangs there on a cultural level. Every culture we live in has its truth claims and has a truth culture.

And what I'd like to do to begin with is to see if we can move this along. I'll hand that to Steve and see if he can move that along one for me. Going to look at changes in an Australian truth culture since 1999.

Why pick 1999? It's the close of the old century. It gives us two decades to consider. And there are six areas that I think the truth culture of Australia has changed over those times.

I wonder if you can think what's changed in Australia over the last 20 years and see if I pick them up in my six here. First of all, do you remember the events of 9-11 and the subsequent terrorist threats that have poured cold water on what was the so-called end of history that was meant to have come with the end of the Cold War?

[1 : 25] Do you remember those Australian security announcements and adverts? We're alert but not alarmed. I can never quite say that without a faux Australian accent.

But I wonder, really, were you, are we, alert but not alarmed? Or is there a shadow edge of alarm that creeps in to our alertness?

Even yesterday's stabbing in Sydney, that immediate thought, is this a terror plot? Is this part of something bigger? We are actually a bit alarmed. And fear, fear harms truth.

Second of my events, the GFC, the global financial crisis of the years 2007 to 2008. Australia survived fairly well compared to other countries.

But a speed bump on the road for individual narratives and national narratives of growing prosperity generation after generation. Fears, anxieties, uncertain working lives and patterns as a result.

[2 : 32] A heightened concern for self at a national level, at an individual level. Again, that harms truth. Third, digital revolutions, in the plural, and their radical effects on everyday life.

Who's got a phone in their pocket here? Show of hands. Who's not got a phone in their pocket? Much fewer of us.

If we'd asked that 20 years ago, that would have been futuristic almost. Certainly 30 years ago. But now, the technologies are in our pockets and wrapped around our lives. And the sheer multiplicity of sources and amplifiers of news and counter news means that truth becomes harder to track.

Fourth, and related, a shift, a continuing shift from character to personality. To personality politics. To personal rights-based agendas for society.

We might think of particular instances like human sexuality. But they are just one marker of a wider turn. A turn in which personalized truth notions rise to the fore.

[3 : 49] That are harder to share. And which find it harder to coexist within a society. Fifth, a declining confidence in traditional institutions, trade unions, politicians, experts of all kinds, and churches included as well.

Distrust that corrodes collective truth. Sixth and finally, what we might call the Anthropocene. A new age dawning.

An age of human intervention on the planet that brings about weather extremities. Trigger thresholds crossed where climates change.

What will be the effects of this kind of era? The effects will be many. But one of them will be a decline of confidence in human ability to control our lives.

The decline of human measures of truth. Some good in that. But also some anti-biblical traits as well.

[5 : 00] If we were to summarize these, then there are four letters that could summarize them. The letters V-U-C-A. An old Cold War code.

VUCA. The V stands for volatility. Things change. Increasingly so, compared to 20 years ago. Life is not as stable as it once was.

The U stands for uncertainty. That change is unpredictable. Not easily predicted. The C. Life is complex. Multiple causes. Not easily unraveled. Certainly not easily controlled or manipulated by us. A complexity that eludes us in life.

And the A. Things are ambiguous. Life and its individual life moments are often hazy. With potential for misreading and misunderstanding.

[6 : 02] We live in a VUCA world. Even in the changes. Maybe particularly in the changes of the last 20 years. Where then can we go from this?

In a search for truth. Well, again, to track through four steps. And where this sits. And we come to Jesus himself.

First of all, I point towards a book written in 1984 by Walsh and Middleton. Two writers called The Transforming Vision. In that book, they set the Christian worldview very clearly against a non-Christian worldview.

A singular worldview of the wider world. A neat and confident transforming vision. Eleven years later, the two writers wrote a second book called Truth is Stranger Than It Used To Be.

Suddenly, back in those days of the 1990s, people were beginning to talk about post-modernity. Something changing. Something afoot.

[7 : 06] Even before our 20 years that we've just looked back on. A confusing choice. Truth as stranger than it used to be. But then we can jump forward to the year 2017.

When fake news was declared to be the word of the year. Of course, that could be fake news in and of itself. Who would tell? But at that point, and it's not the title of a book, but rather a title of a book, I think ought to be written.

Truth is a stranger who used to be. In a sudden overwhelming of choice, who do you trust? Who do you turn to?

Where is truth to be found? Well, truth is to be found where it always was to be found. Even to go back to Pontius Pilate 2,000 years ago.

Truth is found in the disorienting stranger who needs to be heard. As theologian Michael Horton has described Jesus himself.

[8 : 07] The disorienting stranger. The stranger whom the spirit, God's Holy Spirit, has enabled Christians to recognize as the advocate, the ruler, at the fathers, at God's right hand.

But we live in a culture, as Horton also says, where there is a fear of meeting the stranger, even if the stranger is God.

We might say indeed, particularly when the stranger is God. This post-truth world, with all its VUCA-like qualities, is a world of fear of the truth.

Fear of the truth as the other. In that sense, it is a world no different to that of John's gospel. When the light came into the world, in the word of Jesus Christ himself.

And the gospel, the good news of Jesus, points to him. A matter of relationship and not merely connection.

[9 : 21] In my next slide, I think we have, if we move on a few slides. Is the little pointer working? I'll take it back if it is, and see if I can run it from here.

Here we have a city, known and loved. A city that I've driven many miles around just over the last week. That you know, and in which you live.

I want to ask the question, in this post-truth world, what will make the good news about Jesus sticky? Sticky. Connecting in our culture.

In the twilight of our age, what lights are going on? And what lights are dimming? It can feel that the lights of Christianity are fading, aging, less numerous.

The lights of non-religion shine brightly, senses after senses after senses. What I want to suggest tonight is this.

[10 : 31] We are well-schooled at a simple gospel. The good news of Jesus told simply. The gospel is true, but it can be too isolated.

Too isolated from the world we live in. Too instant for those who need time to understand it. Too inflexible for a city, for a world where truth is feared and not immediately accepted.

What I want to propose here is a relational approach. An attendance to our relationships one with another that will grant or will increase the likelihood of granting this kind of increased stickiness. With that in mind, I want to turn to consider relationships. Relationships, we're used to them every day. But how can we get a handle on how we increase them?

How we nurture them? How we value them? And can grow in them? In this, I'm drawing on a book from 1993 written by Michael Schluter and David Lee called *The R Factor*.

[11 : 43] In this book, they wanted to say that relationships matter. They matter for the health of our society and for the life of our society. What they particularly pointed to was that proximity in relationship is a vital precursor if we are going to have a flourishing society.

In pointing to this, they isolated five aspects of relationship. To be nurtured and to be maximized. Let me briefly run through them for us.

First of all, they said that directness in relationships is really important. A relational proximity in contact. Ideally, eye to eye.

With a felt sense of responsibility for the relationship. We might think of the Good Samaritan as he encounters the wounded man on the road.

And sees there a fellow human being. There's a directness of relationship that causes him to act in a particular way. Truth then flourishes eye to eye.

[12 : 55] I want to suggest to those of us who might feel awash and a sea in a post-truth world. That our everyday relationships in their directness, in their contact, continue to matter.

And indeed hold the seeds of where we want to go. In probing. Not only post-truth culture. But also the growth of the gospel within it.

Second, I want to talk about continuity. That's the second of Schluter and Lee's five aspects of relationships.

Relational proximity through time. Allowing the sustained time for a relationship to grow. Again, this is something that we're used to. Relationships grow over time.

Some of you I've met for the first time tonight. Our relationship will be thin. Some of you I've known for decades. Our relationship will be deeper and richer. And that is where I want to point us.

[13 : 59] Truth flourishes where people slow down and spend time together. We might think of believers. How we use our gatherings, our services on Sundays.

And the time beyond it. The relational answer to busy lives where people rush past one another. And truth suffers.

Might be a contrarian one. At least at first hearing. To ask those who are busy. Working away. Raising children perhaps. Paying off a mortgage perhaps.

Asking those busy people to slow down and spend time together. I guess many in northern Sydney are time poor.

And some might also consider themselves to be church poor. Some others might be time poor and not consider themselves to be church poor.

[14 : 59] But relationships grow with directness and continuity. And thirdly with what Schluter and Lee call multiplexity. Not a visit to the cinema.

But rather to multiple life spheres. Getting to know someone. Perhaps not just at church. But also at home. Not just at work. But also after work.

To build trust in a person. And not just a contact. The truth flourishes. When our relationships flourish. When our relationships flourish. When we meet in different areas of life.

This has a bearing on how we move through places. How we live in our places. Not just our places at home. Where we sleep.

Also our places of work. And other places. Where we encounter those around us. I wonder if we think about the gospel of Jesus Christ.

[15 : 57] And evangelism happening in places. It always does so. And it happens ideally in relationships. Fourthly in these relational dimensions.

Parity. Relational proximity in levels of power. To enable easier self-disclosure. Showing of ourselves. And cultivating of common ground.

Truth flourishes. Human to human. On the level. Not necessarily in stark hierarchical terms. But as we open our lives.

One to another. Fifth and finally. A commonality. A relational proximity in purpose. Which binds people together.

As partners in a task. In a project. Truth flourishes. Where people are shoulder to shoulder. Our church times.

[16:55] On Sundays. Our gathering times. Our lingering times together. As times to feed lives. And equip lives.

Of gospel intentionality. That we would live our lives on purpose. For Jesus. Growing relationships for him.

It's not accidental in this. That I picked upon the good Samaritan. He engages in these kind of activities. In a parable way. If you remember that parable.

He even engages in commonality. With the innkeeper. A risky partnership. A new relationship. A new relationship with that man. Because of the need before him.

Following Jesus. Responding to his gospel. Invites us into relationships. What Schluter and Lee present here. I think is an analysis for our relationships.

[17:54] And an audit for them as church members. Do we know the lives of those around us? Perhaps not the whole church. If we're in a big church. But are we in a relational group.

A neighborhood. That's not geographically formed. But a small group. A small group that is outward looking. But also inward looking.

Where relationships can increase. And can flourish. As I say in a large church. This might be a question of smaller groups. In a smaller group.

In a small church. It might be the church itself. To entangle our lives. In this kind of way. What we need to consider next.

I think. Is a sixth secret source. To add to those five dimensions. Another R factor. The R factor of resurrection.

[18:51] Got here on the screen for us. A timeline. Resurrection established at the first Easter. As Jesus is raised from the dead. By God his father. On the third day after his death.

As the first born. From among the dead. The clue is in that first born. Not just for that first Easter. But Jesus is the second Adam. With others being raised to life.

In his slipstream. As they turn to him. In repentance and faith. Putting their trust in him. And aligning their lives with him.

Which is the gospel going out. Expended. Expanding grace of God. At work in lives. But also. The resurrection of all.

Of all the dead. Believer and unbeliever alike. In Acts chapter 10 verse 42. Talking to Cornelius. Peter describes. Peter describes.

[19:51] How Jesus has been established. As the judge of the living. And the dead. Whoever dies tonight in Sydney. Whether they be a believer.

Or an unbeliever. Is on a pathway. A trajectory. Towards resurrection. It's no. Underestimation. When in the latter chapters. Of the book of Acts. The hope of Israel. The hope of the Bible. The hope of the Old Testament. Is described. As the resurrection. Of the dead.

The dead. Plural. When Jesus returns. To raise the dead. To judgment. And believers. To restoration.

And eternal life. What does this sixth. Secret source. Give us. I think it gives us. An everyday. End times. Edge. To our living.

[20:46] Giving you some words. On the sheet. From C.S. Lewis. His observation. In the weight. Of glory. When he says this. We live in a society. Of possible gods.

And goddesses. Where there are. No ordinary people. You have never. Talked. To a mere. Mortal. Each person.

You have met today. Each person. With whom you relate. Is someone. Who is heading. Towards. Resurrection. Whether they be a believer.

Or not. This focus on the resurrection. Doesn't deny the cross of Jesus. No far from it. And it doesn't isolate. Jesus's saving work. But rather.

It crowns it. It crowns it. Jesus died. That he might rise. And be us. Be the one at God's right hand. The first.

[21:41] Born. Of the resurrection. This focus on resurrection. Also gives us. An everyday. Integrated edge. That actually. You and I.

Birthday. By birthday. Day. By day. Moment. By moment. Are moving. Towards. Our. Resurrection. Evangelism.

And discipleship. Become on one. Continuum. Evangelism. Isn't an optional. Extra. It's bound together. In this relational. Pursuit.

For truth. In our churches. And beyond. In our lives. In about 2007. Some sociologists.

Some Christian sociologists. Came up with the term. Midi narrative. Midi narrative. What they were trying to describe. Was what was developing. And I think is increasing.

[22 : 35] In our societies. That people around us. Have a small scale. Life project. Concerning themselves. Their friends. And their families.

It's their midi narrative. Their local story. Perhaps consisting of. Good housing. Good schooling. For the kids. A good health system. A good pension.

At the end of a good job. That's. A midi narrative. Well all midi narratives. All the millions of them. That move around.

Sydney. And interact with one another. All midi narratives. Meet. At. The resurrection. And with that in mind. I think we need. A sharper. Better sense.

Of gospel. Lifespan. Of what it means. To come. To Jesus. And. To move. From darkness. To light. That enormous.

[23 : 32] Step. Of new creation. And with that in mind. I want to move us. In the final section. To five thresholds. Based on a book.

You can see the reference there. By Don Everts. And Doug. Shaw. Five thresholds. Towards faith. If we think about the movement.

From darkness to light. Of becoming a Christian. It is an enormous. Step. If you have taken it. You know something. Of that enormity. If you have not.

Yet taken it. Perhaps you sense. Something. Of that enormity. What this helpfully does. Is break it down. For us. Into five. Thresholds.

Five. Steps. To pass through. And if we are thinking. About. How to tell. The gospel. Of Jesus. In the VUCA world. In which we live.

[24 : 26] Then I think. These five steps. Are helpful. For us. To understand. What has happened. To us. And us. In evangelism. As we reach out.

With the gospel. To others. The first of these thresholds. Is trusting. A Christian. One of the first things. I think we need to take.

Is a truth. Inventory. If you're a believer. In Jesus Christ. Then look. At your own life. Your own networks. Daily. Weekly.

Monthly. Occasional. To whom do I show. Face grace. By that I mean. Someone. At whom I will make eye contact. And smile. To whom perhaps.

Do we go a step further. And extend some sort of hospitality. Whether that be. Merely. During a work break. When we might fetch. Someone drink. Or something. Bigger than that.

[25 : 21] In our lives. Because that's where the seeds. The first of these thresholds occur. As people encounter us. With our faces. Turned towards them.

Even a world. Where there will be hostility. Towards Christians. It's surprising. How many non-Christians. Know a Christian. As we are scattered.

Into our wider world. Week by week. Where are we. Developing an openness of face. To the world around us. That people might make that first threshold step.

And trust me. Or you. A Christian. The second of these thresholds. Involves. Not just merely trusting. But becoming curious.

I wonder what kind of questions. You and I can ask. That will provoke curiosity. That opens doors. My best example of this. Is when I met my wife.

[26 : 20] She wasn't my wife at the time. Nor was she a Christian. At least I didn't think she was. And we went for lunch. The circumstances of how we got to go for lunch.

Are neither here nor there. But over lunch. I asked her what she studied. She was a university student. And she said. Biological anthropology. What do you say next for evangelism?

I'm so thankful that God gave me this next question. I said. What's your view of human nature? Are we apes with less body hair? Or one step away from God?

To which she replied. I'm not religious. And went on from there. And then. When she's finished. She asked me. What I thought. That is the power.

Of questions. When someone moves. From trusting a Christian. To actually becoming curious. And some of us are very schooled. In answers. In answers.

[27 : 18] To questions. But what. These five threshold steps. Invite us to do. In a post-truth world. Is to increase. Our ability. To ask questions. I've given you a couple of.

References there. To books. Which I think. That are helpful. In this regard. Kukul's book. Tactics. Is directly addressing. The question of questions.

Daniel Strange's books. Plugged in. Addresses what he calls. Subversive fulfillment. How the gospel. Will subvert. The hopes. Of those around us.

And say. You cannot find. Your hopes. And your desires. In anything else. Other than Jesus. And at that point. As well as subversive. Destruction.

If you like. There's also subversive. Construction. Fulfillment. That is the gospel. Of Jesus. That will bring. Answers. But that's to jump.

[28 : 13] Ahead of ourselves. We're simply becoming. Curious at this point. The third of these. Thresholds. Is opening. To change. Beyond curiosity.

Now I'm thinking. Is there something. Here. That I might need. To think about. Something that might. Have a claim. On myself. Perhaps we need.

To ask ourselves. Who is it in our lives. Who is quietly. Becoming curious. Perhaps asking us. More questions. About ourselves. As a Christian. The questions.

Are beginning. To come to us. Where can we. Begin to share. Rumors. Of providence. Of God's. Good. Acts. In this world. Now let's understand.

Change. When it comes to God. Is a beautiful thing. But also a scary thing. Selling. Everything. And giving up everything. To follow Christ. Is a big step.

[29 : 10] This relational. Program. This relational. Audit. This relational. Self-reflection. That I'm trying to put before us. Invites us.

To travel. With people. With godly patience. But also. Within those relationships. Gently challenging. In a Jesus kind of way. Just as Jesus told parables.

So too. We. Perhaps. Will tell. Open-ended. Stories. Known as parables. That will point. Towards Jesus. And his kingdom.

The fourth step. Someone who's open to change. Isn't perhaps yet. Seeking. After. God. The fourth step. Is when. They.

Become. A genuine. Seeker. Someone who is more. Than. Curious. Someone who is more. Than. Open to change. Someone who says. Here.

[30 : 06] I'm beginning. To sniff. Something. Out. That I need. To explore. And find. Out about. This. I think. Is where. Our relational. Balance.

Becomes. Important. The importance. Of us. Living. Out. The kingdom. Of God. Before them. Do you remember. That small. Relational group. Where we're living. In good relationship. Perhaps. A small church.

Or within. A larger church. A fellowship. Group. Of some kind. We talked about. That being. Outward facing. The importance. Of us. Living. Out. The kingdom.

Of God. Of showing. As well. As telling. The good news. The power. Of bringing. People. Into our friendship. Groups. Into our lives.

The power. Of lives. Accompanying. Words. Telling. The good news. And inviting. A seeker. To commit.

[30 : 59] To a quest. Not an endless. Provarication. A shrug at the shoulders. But a quest. To see where this leads.

And the fifth. Of these steps. Entering. The kingdom. Actually. Selling. All. Moving. In. And then. Looking. Out. At our existing.

Relational networks. In a new way. As a new creation. This will involve. Being relationally. Urgent. But at this point. If we have been.

Travelling. Alongside. Someone. Through those. Previous. Four thresholds. Then here is evangelism. That doesn't just. Need to be. About events. At our church. And someone else.

Bringing someone. To Christ. But also. A relational basis. Under which you. And I. Can be evangelists. We. Can bring.

[31 : 54] People. To Christ. Where. Does this. Lead us. And leave us. I want to suggest. That in this. Post. Truth.

World. We have. In a relational. Approach. That is. Centred around. The resurrection. Of Jesus.
And where we are. All heading. Something that is.

Urgent. And lifeful. That can be. A seed. Bed. For growth. That our churches. Can if you like. Be
truth. Spots.

Bit like. Hot spots. You know. When you log on. To someone's hot spot. That people can come. And
find truth spots. Where they can begin. To relate.

And indeed. You and I. As individual. Believers. Living relational. Lives. Can be mobile. Truth spots.
Moving.

[32 : 49] Through. This city. This city. Of post truth. This city. Of so many. Noises. With the living.
Word. Of God. That grows.

What do we have here? I think we have. Realism. About change. That evangelism. Sometimes
involves. People traveling. With us.

Relationally. And we have. In these five. Thresholds. Smaller. Steps. To change. As we walk.
Alongside people. As we talk.

Into their. Midi. Narratives. As the gospel. Becomes. More. Personal. More. Manageable. Even.
Perhaps.

More attractive. In closing. We have. A framework. To help us. See people. As. Whole. People.
Both. Ourselves. And others.

[33 : 45] If you're. A Christian. You are. A sinner. Who has. Become. A saint. But we are. All. Also.
Sufferers. And the gospel.

Speaks. Into our lives. As a whole. Truth. Is not. Over. The gospel. Will outlive. This secular world.
Which is. Haunted. By. Jesus. At God's right hand. That is hunted. By Jesus. Who will judge. The
world.

That is limited. By Jesus. Who will return. To judge. The world. And to raise. The dead. The gospel.
Will outlive. The secular. Meantime. Let's live. Word fed. Spirit. Empowered. Lives. And let's throw
this open. For questions.

[34 : 41] Thank you. We are going to do that.

We are going to throw it open. Questions. What you might want to do. Is just turn to someone.
Beside you right now. And. Just quickly. Engage them. About sort of. Something that impacted you.
Something that landed.

For you right now. There is also a number. You might want to write it down. I am not sure if it is on
the screen yet. But it is 0480123976.

If you want to text. A question in. 0480123976. So quickly. Engage with. Someone around you.
Someone you came with. About something that impacted you. Something that stood out. And then.
We will launch into some questions. And you can text the. Person's question next to you. Can't
you? You can. You can text someone else's question.

[35 : 39] I have a friend. Yeah. I have a friend. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you.