

I recently sat at a table in a local restaurant, facing a window coated with a film of dirt and summer grime. A window washer appeared outside with a bucket of water and window wand to wipe the grime away. It was like the raising of a curtain on a stage. Now I could see clearly the scene outside. In the immediate foreground was an asphalt parking lot; beyond that a stretch of 4 lane highway with old un-used buildings on the other side. An ambulance sped on by as traffic quickly stopped to let it get by quickly. A large bulletin board that had a smudge picture of Jesus face that made no sense. Distant signs that tell people which way to go when it comes to I-127. A large jet coming in to land at the Lansing airport. *What had been concealed was now revealed: the appealing and the unappealing; the inspiring and the uninspiring; the depressing and the uplifting.* **Everything stood out in sunny outline, bold and clear.**

Truth does that for us. It removes from our eyes the film that coats and distorts reality, and enables us to see, with clarity, the totality of life.

Most of us long to attain the truth, a most elusive prize. We refuse to be satisfied with partial truth. Our curious and questing minds demand *"the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth."* Jesus offers some words of assurance to truth-seekers: *"You will know the truth."* But he qualifies his promise with the biggest little word in the English language. **That word, as everyone knows, is "if."**

You will "know the truth" if you do not drop out or turn back in your pursuit of the prize.

When I was a freshman in high school, I succeeded in making the track team. For some crazy reason, I chose to specialize in the re-lay run and, get this, high huddles. My first chance to compete came when my school engaged in a track meet with three other schools. I ran a very commendable race. For three laps I was in the lead, but when it came time to passing the baton, I dropped it—BAD!! The final runner picked it up quickly, and we came in 3rd. Even so, I was proud of my time and enjoyed hearing the compliments of my teammates and seeing my name in the sports section of the local newspaper.

In my run in the High Huddles, I came in 4th in 100 yards for the huddles. In those days I lacked the competitive spirit and was satisfied with my performance. However, I was disappointed when my name was not listed in the newspaper, and irritated when a spectator sneered at the winning time, saying, *"Huh! I could have walked around the track and won that race."*

I made my last start in competition against the best milers in the state. It was a miserable start. The other runners were rounding the first turn almost before the crack of the starter's pistol registered on my consciousness. Instead of trying stubbornly to catch up with the rest of the pack, I drifted shamefacedly to the sidelines, feeling humiliated in front of the large crowd of spectators. **"What happened?" someone asked. I could not find even a lame excuse to offer.**

At the end of the track season, letters were awarded to deserving members of the team during a school assembly period. The athletes went forward one by one, amid enthusiastic applause, as the coach called out their names. With pounding heart, I waited to hear my name. My face reddened. I perspired freely. I fidgeted nervously. I felt like crawling under my seat when my name was not called. I did not deserve my varsity letter my first year. It was denied me because I failed to give my best on the track, and worse, dropped out of the race in the season's most important meet. **But as time went on I matured, and as I ran in college, the mistakes I made when I was young were worth it—because they helped me mature as a runner and they taught me to pay attention to those around me.**

Many years later, I watched a lad go to bat in a Little League game. It was a close contest. Joe had struck out and grounded out in two previous turns at the plate. "Let me have your bat," I heard him say to the team's star slugger, who also had failed to connect.

Joe swung on the first pitch. Ping! The ball flew to far centerfield. Joe dug in, his legs churning as he circled the bases. It was a sure, inside-the-park home run. As he headed for third, the little guy's cap left his head. Joe stopped in his tracks, spun on his heels, and turned back to scoop up his errant cap. Then, cap in hand, he streaked for home plate, only to be thrown out by three steps. **Joe failed to score because he turned back on the base-path.**

The Jews to whom Jesus spoke failed to **GRASP THE TRUTH** - life's most precious prize - *because they dropped out or turned back on the course of discipleship*. We read that they "**HAD BELIEVED IN HIM.**" Past tense. Period.

But if you seek the truth as a close and constant companion of Christ, continuing in his Word, you will find it and you will know it.

The Jews "failed to 'continue in (his) word.' Their simple understanding in his teaching was not deeply rooted IN FAITH, and therefore their belief in him quickly withered. *Discipleship involves constancy as learners, and that gains the promise of the knowledge of the truth and freedom."*

Albert Schweitzer's familiar and oft-quoted words about knowing Christ can be applied to finding and knowing truth.

He comes to us as One unknown, without a name, as of old, by the lake-side. He came to those who knew Him not. He speaks to us the same word: "Follow thou me!" and sets us to the tasks which He has to fulfill for our time. He commands. And to those who obey Him, whether they be wise or simple, He will reveal Himself in the toils, the conflicts, the sufferings which they shall pass through in His fellowship, and, as an ineffable mystery, they shall learn in their own experience Who He is.

They shall learn, as did Peter, that he is the Christ of God. They shall learn, in their own experience with the Christ of God, what truth is, because he himself is the truth. "If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth ..."

"You will know the truth, and the truth will make you free."

*Martin Luther was a hard-working seeker after the TRUTH. Unfortunately, truth and the freedom it brings NEVER HAPPENED FOR HIM. WHY? Because, his search took him down the wrong path. He thought the only way to find TRUTH was through the practice of good works, like other devout Christians of his day. When a bolt of lightning felled him, he called on Saint Anne, patron saint of miners, for help and made a vow to become a monk. He selected a monastic order that demanded much in the way of discipline. Here, he reasoned, was the best setting in which to concentrate on good works, the true way to please God and save his soul. He subjected his body to great discomfort. He fasted for days on end, prayed for hours at a time, and went often to confession. **But all his good works failed to give him the assurance of his soul's salvation.***

What a great day it was for Luther - and for the Christian church - when a phrase he must have read a hundred times before leaped up at him from Saint Paul's Letter to the Romans. When he read it this time, the eyes of his understanding were opened and a burden was lifted from his heart. He saw that GOOD WORKS MEANT NOTHING. **That life with Jesus was won by "just by faith"** (Romans 1:17). **To that, Luther added one significant word: "alone." YES, LIVE BY FAITH ALONE!!!**

That was a liberating insight for Luther. "A Christian man is the freest lord of all," he wrote in a tract addressed to the Pope. He meant that *"since justification is by faith alone and cannot be earned by good works, he who has this faith is freed from the bondage to the law and from seeking to earn his salvation by works."*

Luther's discovery of that truth about God has freed millions since from that bondage and burden. John Wesley is among them. Like Martin Luther, he sought in vain, and with many a sigh, to earn his salvation through adherence to law and the performance of good works. But a reading from Luther's preface to the Commentary on Romans brought release to his tortured soul. He recorded his experience in his journal: *"About a quarter before nine, while he (Luther) was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone, for salvation; and an assurance was given me that he had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death."*

History attests to the powerful and positive impact of this high Anglican's "evangelical conversion" upon Britain's people and their institutions.

A man who had been saved from "*the law of sin and death*," by the Gospel truth that justification is by faith, was interviewed on television recently. He wore a floppy cap over his long hair, which framed a craggy profile. Now nearly forty, he had been the lead singer with a well-known pop-rock group. At the present he was singing religious soft-rock music.

The singer told the interviewer about his childhood and youth. He had been raised on the streets of New York City, where he was for a while the leader of a gang that fought other gangs over "turf" or territorial rights. Then he got into music. He and his band became famous. They cut a million records, or more. They made a million dollars, or more. What so often happens on the road of success happened to him. He warded off the pressures of show business by turning to drugs and alcohol. He became their slave. "Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin."

But the man on television was no longer a slave. Not to drugs. Not to alcohol. The Christian-rock song that he sang, and his face as he sang, showed that something had happened to change and mellow him. What had made the difference? The answer is implied in his response to the interviewer's question,

"How would you classify your music?" *He hesitated thoughtfully for a moment before replying, "I call it 'truth music,' "* he said. *"I sing the truth."*

Then he told about meeting Christ. Now no one meets Christ without an introduction of some kind. **And introductions to Christ are made - almost without exception - by believers.** When he was introduced, he responded with faith and trust to the love of God that he saw in Christ. He found Christ to be a Liberator who could free him from the shackles of sin. He became a follower of Christ, and in following Christ he had gone on from truth to truth, **because he had found Christ himself to be the truth.** *The truth about God.*

The truth that God "lives and loves, that he reaches down to help us with our lives and strengthen us when we are weak."

The truth about life, its meaning, its purpose, its destination. That is what he sang about. ***He sang the truth. For the truth had made him free.***

An old Christian was spending his last days on earth in a hospital bed. His frame was frail and his face pale, but his smile was as radiant as ever. He had responded years before to the divine command, "Follow thou me." He had learned in his own experience who it was who had called him, ***and he had found the truth in his long and faithful walk with Christ.***

He was reading his New Testament when the pastor walked into his room. ***"Isn't this wonderful!"*** he exclaimed, pointing to a favorite passage. "I never understood it quite this way." ***In the fellowship of Christ, he was making fresh discoveries of truth, even as his days dwindled down to a precious few.***

The beautiful thing about it all is that God's truth is an inexhaustible treasury of fresh discoveries.

THE "TRUTH" NEVER CEASES TO BE EXCITING!!

Every new discovery whets our appetite for more.

And it makes us FREE INDEED!

Amen!!