



# CHRIST CHURCH CRANBROOK

**Truth The Seventh Sunday After Pentecost 7112021**

I feel like we all need a cleansing after that gospel.

Grace to you and peace from God, our father, and the Lord, our Savior, Jesus Christ.  
Amen.

Two questions for us. I want to talk this morning about truth. So two questions. How do you tell the truth and how do you receive the truth? When I was newly married, I had a friend who had also been newly married. And so we were these two newlywed girls. We had spouses and we would gather for coffee and sort of compare notes and share stories and figure out like, what are we supposed to do with these spouses of ours?

Our spouses were very different. They weren't very similar at all. And I was trying to learn how to be a good wife to a graduate student. But my friend, Sarah, she was working on some of the more normal things that you have to figure out when you get married. So she and her husband Joey were trying to figure out the household chores. Who's going to do the laundry. Who's going to pick up after one another. Who's doing the dishes in the sink and so on.

What drove Sarah bonkers was that she would come home after a really long day of work and Joey would be at home and there would be dishes in the sink and there would be laundry unfolded. And where would Joey be? Playing video games on the couch or outdoors hanging out and nothing would get done. Sarah would naturally then make some sort of snide remark and off they went, they had this pattern and they just kind of escalated and they got angry with each other. We would try to figure it out the next day. Like what should she have done differently? What can she do? And we tried to just come up with ideas to fix this perennial problem.

So one day we had coffee in the morning and she said to me, "We had a breakthrough last night." I was like, "Oh my gosh, what happened?" She said, "Well, Joey finally admitted I was right." And I was like, "Wow, that is a huge breakthrough." She goes, "No, no, that wasn't the breakthrough. The breakthrough was what he said after he said I was right. He said two things to me. First, he said, 'Sarah. It's not what you say. It's how you say it.'" "What's the second thing?" I asked. She said, "A spoonful of sugar helps the medicine go down." It's what she needed to hear. She needed to hear that her way of delivering the truth mattered to him.

A spoonful sugar. Do you recognize that idiom? Do y'all know where it comes from? Mary Poppins. It actually was first shown and said in the Mary Poppins film in 1964. And of course Mary Poppins, who was the nanny to these two children who never did anything. She told them, a spoonful of sugar will help the medicine go down. It'll make the work go

easier. And so they all learned how to tolerate doing things that they did not like by sweetening it with something that they do.

The song was written by two brothers, Richard and Robert Sherman. It's a great story of how it was created by them. And it actually has a really interesting, weird tie-in to our current. In 1964, the Sherman brothers were racking their brains on what could be a good song for Julie Andrews to sing that was kind of upbeat that did the work that it needed to do. And they were struggling. And at one point Robert Sherman's son came home from school. And so he said, "Well, how was school today?" And the boy said, "Well, we got our polio vaccine." And of course back then, they were dealing with an epidemic of polio that was affecting children. And so children were getting vaccinated in large quantities in public schools. And so the dad asks, "Well, did it hurt?" And the boy responded, no, because they gave it to us on a cube of sugar." The vaccine was able to be ingested.

So there's the song. Mary Poppins' wards, little Michael and Jane do their chores with ease because a spoonful of sugar helps the medicine go down. But for my friends, Sarah and Joey, it had such huge ramifications. It means that to tell the truth, which is so hard to hear sometimes, you make it bearable with a little bit of sweetness.

How do you tell the truth? I want to offer up today two examples that come from our scriptures. We have John the Baptist and we have Amos. And what I love about these men is that they actually tell the truth plainly so that you can understand it. But each of them has a slight interesting, different way of doing so.

So Amos, he goes and tells the truth to the people of Israel, to the king of Israel, to the priest, high priest of Israel. The way that Israel is conducting their affairs is really unrighteous. They're exploiting those who are not doing well. They're not taking care of the poor or the widow and God sees it and God is not pleased. And he tells the people who are in power. And Amos shows a plumb line that he says God shows to him just to show how crooked Israel has become, they're not straight anymore, or lined up with the righteousness that they're supposed to have.

And so naturally these words cause a stir. I mean, nobody wants to hear they're not doing things righteous and holy. And so the priest of the temple kind of gets irritated with Amos and says, you need to go away. You need to leave this place and go do your professional work of prophesying somewhere else, but don't do it here. But here's how Amos can tell the truth. He's not a professional like that priest was, or the king was, he was just a farmer and a landscaper. And so he's able to tell the truth with great vulnerability and humility. He says, yeah, I really have no business in being here, speaking to you all, except the Lord has told me to do this.

Maybe that's how you tell the truth, by being humble and vulnerable, or are you more like John the Baptist? John is a character. He is not afraid to say it like it is. And of course he tells the leader that they're morally corrupt and off to jail he goes. What's interesting about John the Baptist is even though King Herod throws him into jail because he's afraid of him, King Herod is drawn to him. King Herod wants to hear what he has to say, even though he's perplexed. And those are the truth tellers who tell the truth with power and charisma, you cannot help but hear what they have to say. You're so overwhelmed with how they

have such an understanding of the truth, but that truth has power and it usually gets you into trouble, sometimes even killed. John the Baptist tells the truth. He says to Herod, you can't sleep with your brother's wife and Herod doesn't know what to do.

I want to offer one more example of telling the truth and that's me. Once I was pretty upset with my teenage son and forcefully let him know how wrong he was. And we had one of those epic arguments. And there were lots of tears and lots of yelling and lots of screaming. And finally Miles said something similar to what Joey said to my friend. Miles said to me, "Mom, I know you're right, but can you share it with me in a way that builds me up and gives me confidence rather than tears me down and makes me feel small?" He wanted me to tell the truth with kindness.

Whether you tell the truth with humility or charisma or kindness, what I love about this is it actually forces us in realizing that when we're truth tellers, it's not just simply enough to speak the truth. In fact, I believe that if you tell the truth without compassion, it's cruel, you always need to serve the truth on a little sugar cube. Truth with a side of grace, if you will. Truth that comes wrapped in a sugarcoating means to me that the holy spirit is there to help the medicine go down.

Okay. Here's the second question. How do you receive the truth? I think telling the truth to others is a little bit easier than receiving the truth yourself, because it's always hard to hear the truth that's aimed at you because it means something needs to be fixed. Now here's a way I suggest not to receive the truth – like Herodias did. She was married to the king's brother and at first I always thought that King Herod compelled her to be married to him, but it doesn't look like that. I think that she was working her way up the ladder. So she ditches the brother and marries the king, and John the Baptist is like, no, you can't do that. And what's her response? She despises him. She hates him, hates him so much, hates receiving that truth that she actually turns her and her poor daughter into accomplices for murder.

Why are prophets so annoying to us? It's because they tell us things we don't want to hear. But here's what I've learned, being a Christian. The things that I don't want to hear are usually the things that God wants me to hear for my own good. I am learning that when I hear the correcting, liberating, painful truth that God is actually offering to me the gift of truth that I need to lay aside my wounded pride in doing what is wrong and just admit that I need God to change me. I'm learning that the corrective truth I receive always comes with a dose of God's love to help me accept it. I am learning that God's love for me is the spoonful of sugar I need to help the medicine go down.

I mean, can you imagine if Herodias did that? If she took and received the truth that John the Baptist gave her, what you're doing is wrong, and sort of said, yeah, you know what? It is kind of, sort of wrong. And instead of demanding the head of John, the Baptist, she demanded the freedom of John? How you and I receive the truth speaks to whether we believe God's working in our lives to free us from sin. Or are we too ashamed to admit that we're human and that we need correction and we need guidance every now and then?

I recently had to go through this myself. Someone told me a really hard truth and it was really painful for me to hear. And it kind of knocked me off my feet. After I took some

time, licking my wounds, I began to sense that even though this was really hard to learn about myself, there was a loving God who wanted me to know so I could change my ways and no longer, not only be harmful to others, be harmful to myself, but you know what? I needed that sweetness. I needed to know that this was surrounded by God's love for me.

The truth is really hard to hear, but it does set us free. May you always tell the truth with a large helping of grace. May you receive the truth knowing you're surrounded by God's love and may you always carry a spoonful of sugar to help that medicine go down.

Amen.