**Text**: **John 6: 24-35**

**The Bethel Pulpit**

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August 5, 2018 – 11th Sunday of Pentecost On the web at [www.bethel-madison.org](http://www.bethel-madison.org/)  
 312 Wisconsin Ave, Madison WI 53703

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

This greeting from Ephesians continues to shape our worship conversation. Two weeks ago I asked you two questions: what do you know for sure about God…and…how does your life-behavior reflect that belief? I encouraged you to think about the important connection between those two questions.

So let’s keep trying to live out the connection between these two fundamental questions.

So what DO we know about God?

We might all agree that ONE THING we KNOW about God is that God is a God of truth…God’s Word is true…God cares that you and I value truth and honesty. So, if we believe that God cares about truth, we get to that 2nd question: how do we live each day, reflecting what we know.

Today I’m wondering about YOUR experience with truth…what do YOU know about being a truth-teller? Get ready! You have another chance to talk to your pew-neighbor. And so I have more questions:

Is it easier to speak TRUTHFULLY to a stranger or to someone you know really well?

Jesus said: You will know the truth and the truth will make you free.

Has that ever happened for you, that telling the truth was an experience in freedom?

Has telling the truth to someone ever been painful…even a disaster…for you?

Your turn to talk with your neighbor…ready, set, GO !

“Speaking the truth, in love…” those are the words from Ephesians that have been living in my heart and mind all week. WHY does it matter that we speak truthfully, to one another?

When we pick and choose a particular phrase out of the Bible, we do not dare to ignore the words/ideas surrounding that phrase. ‘Speaking the truth in love’, in this setting, has the significant purpose of building up the body of Christ. You and I, as disciples of Jesus, are always called to help our communities offer a stronger support system for all people. Especially to empower our community of faith…our congregation…to be a stronger witness to the love and forgiveness that you and I know from Jesus.

Truth is a foundational bedrock for a well-functioning community. Even truth, however, must be clothed in love and kindness and gentleness. Truth that is brittle and cold…truth that is spoken only for the sake of ‘telling it like it is’ does NOTHING to build up Christ’s body…and you and I will be wise and careful about the love-aspect of truth-telling.

So…how do we, as a congregation, pledge ourselves to truth-telling, so that

Christ’s body…the church…will be made stronger and truer?

Think about all the congregational-input-forums that we have been invited to this past year.

Come and tell us:

* What matters most to YOU about being a down-town city church
* What makes worship most meaningful to YOU
* What kinds of education forums should be offered here
* How best to manage our congregational finances

This summer you have been asked to ‘tell us the truth’ about our Sunday morning worship and education offerings, in order to help us schedule our time together in the best possible ways. First of all: thanks for thinking with us about this important matter, thanks for talking with us, and thanks for filling out the surveys. Our conversations together have brought new ideas and we, your staff, are listening very, very carefully and making some changes. These changes are in response to your ‘truth-telling’.

One new idea would be to have a prayer-partner-person available to you each Sunday. Sometimes, each of us might need a more private time for truth-telling. Sometimes, when we come to worship, we wish for a one-on-one prayer-time with a person who will pray with us. Such truth-telling is as essential to building up the body of Christ as our large-group opportunities.

If you…today…are looking for such a one-on-one prayer opportunity, please know that Joanne Ellingson is available to you, following worship, for such a listening and/or prayer time.

As we sing our hymn together, I ask you to pay attention to the words in the 2nd stanza that we sing:

“Keep me from saying words that later need recalling; guard me, lest idle speech may from my

lips be falling. But when, within my place, I must and ought to speak, then to my words give

grace, lest I offend the weak.”

May God guard the door of our lips, and may God also give us the graceful courage to speak honestly, with love, to all whom we meet.