

Truthfulness

From "Last Thing At Night" by Hugh Lavery

If I hear a person described as 'utterly Truthful' I am always deeply impressed. Truthfulness, don't you think, is a rare virtue. I wonder why. Possibly because it presupposes so many other qualities; tact, for instance, courage, and maturity, grown-upness.

Children tell lies. Often because they are afraid or because they are unsure of themselves and want to show off. Truthfulness is something that belongs to the adult. A grown-up who habitually tells lies doesn't seem fully grown-up. He seems to lack stature. His character hasn't that firmness, that surefootedness we associate with mature people, true adults, with the people we depend upon.

Telling the truth isn't easy. By no means. We all talk a lot, and speech is a noble instrument. Conversation can be a wonderful power for good, and simple speech can transform unhappy people into happy people. It can bring consolation to people who are sad, uplift to the depressed, new life to the nervous and faint-hearted. All sorts of people with problems hung on Christ's words and found new life in them. They still do.

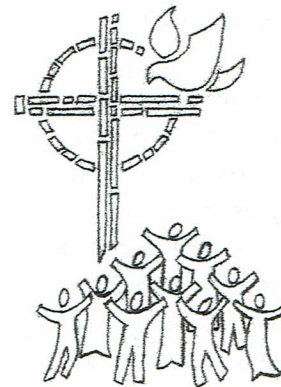
But Christ told the truth. His words were surprising, hard sometimes, moving, but always true. Sometimes his words caused heckling, protest, violence even and opposition from the highest quarters. But he spoke on. He spoke the Truth. And the opposition grew. It began a conspiracy. Still he spoke and his speaking cost him followers, then friends, then one of his chosen apostles, finally his life. Quite simply he died for the Truth. And the truth prevailed.

Telling the truth doesn't mean being blunt, being offensive. It isn't an endorsement for the 'I say what I mean' type of person who takes delight in hurting people. To keep silence is often a great kindness and often a great sacrifice especially when people we don't like are being discussed.

Silence, then, is indeed golden, priceless.

But perhaps the biggest thing of all is telling the truth to ourselves. I think you know what I mean. You must have noticed how easily we can defend our meanest actions not to others but to ourselves. We can excuse our bad temper - 'after all he deserved it'; our dishonesty - 'after all they won't miss the money'; our spite, our slander. That is the most dangerous form of untruth, building a dream-picture of ourselves completely remote from the facts, a false picture, shatteringly untrue.

The remedy is to turn to Christ's words. He doesn't wound, and he doesn't flatter. He just tells the truth. And his strongest words are for the hypocrites, the dream-picture people, people who have a sham facade, chromium on the outside, squalid within. Such people can't improve. That is the curse of untruthfulness. It's a sort of blindness, and the only cure is to turn to Christ whose whole life was truth and whose truth was life.



A blessing from the Swiss poet and philosopher Henri-Frederic Amiel (1821-1881)

'Life is short, and we do not have too much time to gladden the hearts of those who travel with us, so be quick to love and make haste to be kind. And may the blessing of the One who made us, the One who loves us, and the One who travels with us, be with you and those you love this day and always. Amen.'