



## “Nothing Rhymes with Orange”

*John 8:31-41*

### “If you hold to My teaching...” (John 8:31)

Recently on Sunday mornings at First Presbyterian we have been steadily working our way through the gospel of John. As you come to John 8:31-41, a moment of real significance takes place as Jesus is teaching the disciples the reality of genuine faith.

When Jesus challenges his disciples to think deeply, He does so with these well-known words: *“You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free”* (John 8:32).

In 2016, *Time Magazine* reported that Oxford Dictionaries had selected the word “post-truth” as the word of the year, saying, “In a year dominated by highly-charged political and social discourse which is fueled by the rise of social media as a news source and a growing distrust of facts offered up by the establishment, ‘post-truth’ as a concept has been finding its linguistic footing for some time.” The article went on to report that “post-truth” may become the defining word of our time.

For many, our society is dominated by the popular belief that every person should be able to determine truth for themselves. Culture at times seeks to teach us that morality has very little real meaning left, absolutes mean nothing, and we should be committed to the popular mantra, “It may be true for you, but it is not true for me.”

Yet a problem arises when society consistently reinforces the belief that there are no absolutes and all morality is relative. When our college graduates and postgraduates go to work for large financial institutes on Wall Street guided by their own moral relativism, they may find themselves in prison for living out the relativism they have been taught.

When Jesus says, *“If you hold to my teaching, you really are My disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free”* (John 8:32),

He is reminding these disciples that following His teaching is the mark of an individual who is eager to show that with Christian belief comes Christian behavior. Our walk must equal our talk. Genuine, credible faith is not for the casual religious tourist seeking a new spiritual experience. Rather it is for the disciple who longs for a rich, rewarding, deep, intimate relationship with Christ.

### “How can you say...” (8:33)

Several years ago I came across the following: “Nothing rhymes with orange. False. Nothing and orange do not rhyme.” It is only when you read it carefully that you understand it. Likewise with the verse, “I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin” (John 8:34). Jesus is teaching His disciples about the significance, power, and gravitas of their own sin. He is not speaking about sin in some abstract, disconnected sense. He is talking about personal sin and its power to enslave.

The Bible teaches from Genesis to Revelation that sin is dark, deceitful, distasteful, enslaving and utterly addictive. When it first approaches us it may seem appealing, attractive, and enticing. It is, however, utterly deceptive and toxic, damaging everything and everyone it touches. We see it in domestic violence, human trafficking, alcohol and drug addiction, child abuse, and fractured, damaged lives. When Jesus talks about becoming a slave to sin, He is highlighting the raw unbridled power and destructive pathology of sin.

A complicating factor is our tendency to think of sin as something we do, forgetting the ways sin influences us. It hardens the heart; it numbs the soul; it desensitizes our thinking and infects our conscience, debilitating our power to resist. It then seeks to move us toward addiction and enslavement. That is why it is crucial for us to never underestimate the significance, power, and gravitas of sin’s toxic impact on the soul.

### “If the Son sets you free...” (8:36)

With all of that in mind, here is Jesus explaining that when we submit and surrender our lives to Him, He frees us from the toxic, enslaving power of sin. He explains that His love and grace bring freedom from the power

of sin; it no longer controls us by its addictive enslavement: *“So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed”* (John 8:36).

Having been freed from the power of our sin by the indwelling power of the Spirit, we are called to live out our faith each day. We live in a culture and society that believes autonomy and novelty in moral and spiritual standards will bring freedom and satisfaction. Yet that brings a shallow, empty disappointment, devoid of a love filled with genuine commitment and faithfulness for the long haul.

When society seeks to dismiss our Christian values under the guise of “it may be true for you but it is not true for me” just because those values are unfashionable, our response is to not allow our society and culture to determine our moral and spiritual values. It is time to say, “Morals matter! Standards are important!” Resist the temptation to let a culture that has clearly lost its moral moorings tell you what to think and how to behave. It is time to firmly, yet graciously, hold fast to Christian values when it comes to the sanctity of human life, human sexuality, character, integrity, honesty, and transparency.

It is time to move forward, emancipated from the tranquilizing addiction of situational ethics and the moribund impotence of cultural appeasement.

Jesus calls us to actively live out our faith each day. He never calls us to sit down and be quiet, or be intimidated into surrender, or get over it and move on. We must take a firm stand, doing so with respect and courtesy, knowing that the future matters. He calls us to be a people committed to working out our faith in the messiness and distraction of everyday life. He calls us to be a people who faithfully and sacrificially serve on the PTA, get involved in the political process, and live out our Christian values in law or medicine, education or finance, retail or manufacturing, literature or the theater.

And the amazing thing about following His call is that He will equip and empower you, because when you “know the truth, the truth will set you free!”