

“Telling The Truth”

- I. Introduction: This morning my sermon is entitled “Telling the Truth.” With our Lord’ help I am relying on the love and affection between us so, that together we can look openly at what is true: What is true about what our church needs, what is true about where we have come from together, and where we are going. Centrally important this morning is that our Gospel from Luke presents us a picture of Jesus early in his ministry. He had gone home to the town where he grew up where he had an opportunity for a warm and fuzzy encounter and opted instead for a deeply honest exchange with his former neighbors and friends. Jesus told them the truth. Truth-telling was one of the core qualities of our Lord, even when that truth fell on hard ground. In fact, Luke tells us that the people of Nazareth not only rejected Jesus’ message, but also became so rageful with him that they drove him out of town and tried to throw him off the side of a cliff. But it was not his time. Scripture tells us that instead he passed through the midst of them and went on his way.
- II. There are several parts of this morning’s sermon about truth. For the first part, I now invite Leo and Leslie Beale to join me. They have led an extraordinarily successful Stewardship Campaign this year, and today is the final day of this campaign. Leo and Leslie, please share whatever comments with our Christian brothers and sisters that our Lord leads you to share. As you come up, I want you to know how grateful to God I am for both of you. I can remember our time together in confirmation class. Leo, it took several weeks to “clinch the deal” with you, but I have no question that God sent you two to us.
- III. And now, there is another set of truths that I must share with you. By way of introduction I would like to share a personal story about telling the truth with you. It has been my family’s custom to have an open casket viewing the night before a family member’s funeral. At my mother’s viewing, two elderly women stood next to her coffin, and not recognizing who I was, one of them said, “You know she had one son. He was a very bad little boy. She had a lot of trouble with him. But I’ve heard he’s turned out pretty well.” I smiled. They were right at least about the first part. And sometimes when I misbehaved it was hard to tell the truth because I was afraid of the consequences. Like the time when I was age 5 or 6 and there was the bicycle incident. One

of our neighbors, a young girl about my age, was given a beautiful new bicycle by her parents, red it was, with beautiful shiny chrome handle bars and even long streamers on the hand guards. Oh, did I want that bike. So I took it when she left it outside her house one day and I hid it in an obscure place behind some trees and bushes. The whole neighborhood began to search for this bicycle. My father came to me and asked if I knew anything about the missing bicycle; someone had seen me with it. Oh no, I said, I have no idea where it is. I didn't tell the truth. Several months later the bike was found. By that time the rain and salty ocean air had ruined the chrome. I was proven to be the guilty one. Let it only be said that things did not go well for me that day. I never again lied about stealing someone else's bicycle. In fact, I never again even stole anyone's bicycle.

In this case, here this morning, I have opted to be honest, hoping that no one decides to try to push me off a cliff. The long and short of it is this. Ascension needs \$120,000 in additional funds from us this year. This only became clear to us during our Vestry Retreat Saturday two weeks ago. You could say that we should have known this prior to beginning our Stewardship Campaign, but we didn't. For the retreat, Rick Turner had compiled a thorough report on what we need to do address pressing building repairs. His recommendations were backed up by engineers' reports. Many of you took his tour last week to see with your own eyes what we are talking about. The minimum amount we need to spend this year to deal immediately with leaks in this roof and in the flat roof of the adjoining building, plus several other small repairs amounts to \$75, 000. I have witnessed large leaks in the ceiling outside the door to the columbarium and in the hallway outside our nursery. This flat roof has long outlasted its projected lifetime, and when we go up on it to repair it, it creates more holes. There are other essential repairs in the next four years but there is no money in the budget to cover these expenses unless we lay off staff or make other painful cuts.

Parenthetically, because there are so often a bunch of us up here, I'd like to clarify that we are less expensive than we look. Our two deacons receive no remuneration. This reflects the nature of their calls and the diocesan policy, not our lack of gratitude to them. Our Priest Associate receives a small honorarium each month that in no way reflects the significance of her ministry with us here. In essence because Ascension is servicing a heavy debt load from our original building project, our budget includes 81% fixed costs. Our Building Fund has been partially spent down and a significant portion of what remains is needed each year to help finance operating costs until December gifts begin to flow. The amount borrowed is then replaced.

Ascension has for some time had another need that we must not postpone responding to. We desperately need to hire a lay youth minister. That person's salary for six months for 2010 would be \$25,000 and there will be other expenses related to rebuilding our youth program. Our youth deserve more than they have received from Ascension in recent years. This may not be obvious, but that's because they are flying under the radar. Some of youth are going to programs in other churches, some with their families have left Ascension, and others are waiting to see what we will do. Fr. Brett has made an excellent start and will supervise this program area, but we need a youth minister in order to move forward.

- IV. Where we come in. The fact that you're still sitting here with me is a good sign. Thank you. The Vestry has approved addressing these issues in 2010 if \$120,000 can be raised in additional pledge commitments and gifts by March 1st. I know that some of us are maxed out in what we can give. If this is your situation, we deeply thank you for you are doing. Pray for us. Others of us are not sure about this whole giving thing; you and Jesus haven't really worked it out yet. We are grateful that you're here and we will pray with you for greater clarity. But I believe that there are many of us who can truly increase our pledges. We are asking people to consider a 15% increase, but will be deeply grateful for whatever increase you might be able to make. Peg and I are among these families – it's possible for us to increase our pledge with fewer nights out and by deferring a second car purchase. I ask you to join us in stepping forward this morning and increasing your pledge by 15%. If you are ready to do so, there are pledge cards in the pew racks in front of you. Please indicate your increase and put the card in the plate or mail it to us. Others of you may want to talk about it with your family and pray about it. We pray that God will guide you in your discernment.
- V. Before we get too close to the cliff, let me add one other thing. Shortly after I came, we did a series of home communions. Over and over again, you shared with me that what you wanted the most was to be told the accurate, up-date, full truth about Ascension. This is what I have tried to do since I have been with you and what I am trying to do this morning. Let me share something else. The amount of our giving is always between each of us and Jesus Christ. I choose not to know what anyone gives here. I will not know what you individually decide to do. And I want to say one more thing – this is very important, so please hear me. Your importance to Ascension is not a function of your income or your pledge. God loves each of us with a passion that is greater than we can know or imagine. Always we must remember that it is God's love that it at the heart of our community. So I conclude this morning by saying: May God Bless you, May God make His face to shine upon you, and May God always give you His peace. *Amen.*