

Among Us (John 1-18)
Sunday, September 14
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Today we begin a new sermon and study series: “Unlocking the Truth: the Gospel of John”. For the next few months we’ll be reading and learning from the Gospel of John in church, in the youth and children’s Sunday School classes, with opportunities to dive deeper at home.

Before we start, a few things about the **The Gospel of John**.

- **One of four accounts of Jesus.** Or, as they are commonly called, “Gospels”. These four books - Matthew, Mark, Luke and John – teach us the life and ministry of Jesus on earth, and focus significantly on his death, resurrection, and the meaning of his death and resurrection.
- **Unique!** Among the Gospels, the Gospel of John is unique! Matthew, Mark, and Luke carry similar themes and come from common source material, but John communicates information and teaching not shared in the other three books. There is certainly common things among the four Gospels, but there are things unique to John not found in Matthew, Mark and Luke.
- **Thick, dense teaching.** There’s lots of theology packed in this book. In the 18 verses we cover this morning, I will barely scratch the surface. There is so much here – you could spend months on these 18 verses alone! There are BIG major themes carried throughout the book.
- **Encounters with Jesus.** But this is not just a densely packed book of theology. In between the theology and teaching are stories of Jesus interacting with people. Many of his encounters with individuals highlight the teaching that surrounds the stories. The encounters with messy people are where the teaching is brought home, and their statements about Jesus reveal who he is.

As I said earlier, Our series for the next several months is The Gospel of John: Unlocking the Truth! That word “truth” I find increasingly problematic. I did not always find “truth” to be a problematic word, but I certainly do today.

The trouble with “truth” . . . isn’t that I don’t believe things can be true. I believe truth exists and is accessible, at least in part. I enjoy learning and embracing what is true. But as I hear people use the word “truth” with increasing frequency, I find it to be a weaponized and compromised word.

Everyone that I see making a big deal of “truth” carries this level intensity. When I hear people speak about “the truth” they carry this pictured level of anxiety. And when I read and hear what they have to say, the urgency and certainty in their tone is aggressive, it’s intense, it’s off-putting.

Whenever someone goes on and on about “the truth”, it is usually about a polarizing idea. It may not even be a well-supported idea, But the idea has been called “truth” and therefore the idea must be taken seriously, no matter how suspect it may seem.

Even if I agreed with this person’s point or “truth” that they are sharing, it doesn’t make me feel any better about the situation. That anxiety, intensity and aggressiveness are all there. When people use the

word truth, there are insisting that they know what is correct and right. And because what they are saying is “truth”, they have given themselves permission to say their truth as arrogantly as possible. After all, “I’m just speaking the truth.” Learning their “truth” is not inviting – it’s a demand for compliance.

I think I’m not alone in this room having a complicated relationship with the way people use the word “truth” in today’s world. So, if like me, you find yourself having an odd relationship with the word “truth”, buckle up and gird our loins for the next few months, because **the truth is a big theme in John!**

- **Darkness vs. Light** is a major theme in John, as is
- **Belief vs. unbelief.** All of these themes relating to truth as it is spoken about Jesus.

Jesus calls himself “the Truth” later in the book of John. And as the Truth, Jesus is very misunderstood. John 1:9-10 tell us, **The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him.** John tells us that Jesus was present with God at creation, and even though Jesus helped make this very world, the people of this very world did not recognize him when he arrived.

As truth arriving, Jesus wasn’t just misunderstood by the world – he was misunderstood by the very people he was born into, lived around, and shared a common faith with. **He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. John 1:11** Much of the rejection that Jesus experienced comes from the people of his Jewish culture and Jewish faith. Even as Jesus points to the Hebrew Bible and says, “This book is speaking about me,” people are blind to who he really is.

But in his coming to earth as a human, Jesus shows us that truth is different than what we have made truth out to be. The truth is not a list of ideas. It’s not a list of principles. The truth, most real, is embodied and expressed by Jesus. **The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. John 1:14**

God’s truth through Jesus does not come to us as more laws, more rules, clearer principles. The truth comes to us as Jesus, as Emmanuel, as God is with us.

When Jesus is spoken of as “making his dwelling among us” this is a reference to the Tabernacle of the Old Testament. The Tabernacle was the place where heaven and earth met. God was symbolically, and even physically, present among the people of God in the Tabernacle. People could see physical symbols of God’s presence among them within the tabernacle. In the same manner God dwelt among God’s people in the wilderness in the tabernacle, Jesus dwells among the people. As fully God and fully man, he is the person where heaven and earth make contact.

Jesus, in his interaction with the world is truth as PRESENCE. He is with the people, among the people. He’s not just cold hard facts about God and people and the interaction between the two. His presence in the world and among the people is truth.

God's presence among us as truth is a liberating and powerful thing. Consider this. In your experience,

What is "more" true?

Is it hearing Bible knowledge you can memorize and repeat from a sermon?

Or is it knowing that God is present and attentive to you no matter what?

What is more true?

When someone has said something correct to you?

Or when someone has been there with you in a difficult moment?

For those who have experienced the church in Cuba, what is "more true"?

Doing something for the people of the churches in Cuba?

Or being with people who love knowing that people outside of Cuba know and care about them?

What's more true in my own ministry?

In my own ministry, it's not been my best, most clear, most accurate sermon.

It's moments where I have been with people in significant situations, when I had nothing to offer but me.

The Gospel of John is thick with true things, true teaching, stuff that will stick with us and remind us of who Jesus is. But from the very start of the book of John, the truest of truthy truths is Jesus himself, fully with the people, engaging with them as heaven and earth perfectly meet within himself.

Truth as presence is **Good News!** This is GREAT news!

Truth is presence! I can do that! I can live that! I can pay attention to the places where God has placed me! I may not have my theology sorted out. I may be fuzzy on the right things to say and how to say them. But I can always listen for the people and places God brings to my attention, and I can be with those people and in those places.

Jesus is truth. I can know things about Jesus. And those things can be helpful. But more importantly I know that Jesus is with me. People who have absolutely nothing going for them have said to me, "I know Jesus is with me" with an experienced confidence that puts my own trust in Jesus to shame. They have found something sustaining and true that many will never find.

As we begin the Gospel of John together, as we are "Unlocking the Truth" together, know this: The starting point is Jesus is truth. Jesus is available to us. Jesus is present with us. Through the Holy Spirit Jesus is abiding in us.