

Truth meets mercy (Psalm 85)

These days it is hard to discern what is true and what is false.

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After seminary I worked as a prison chaplain. The seeds of my interest had been sewn on a field trip to the women's prison, where I met the chaplain, Sister Jeannette. She knew each incarcerated woman and every correctional officer by name. Standing next to her when someone stopped to talk with her, I listened as she focused intently on their story. She never interrupted, and she never allowed someone else to interrupt (she'd put a calm hand up if they tried).

Then, without a hint of judgment, looking into their eyes, kindness spread across her face, she would say, "The truth will set you free."

In Psalm 85 the psalmist proclaims that "mercy and truth have met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other." If we are going to be brave enough to tell the truth—to hear the truth, live the truth, speak the truth—we need the assurance of mercy.

These days it is hard to discern what is true and what is false. Perhaps it has always been this way, but today we are aware of living in a world of not only dramatically different worldviews but also false and misleading information. It is easy to feel lost. What is true? What is false? In public as well as personal arenas, we ask ourselves and each other: What is your truth? What is my truth? Are we living in it, are we living from it, are we seeking it, are we turning our backs on it? Where do you find

yourself with the truth?

The psalmist locates truth as something that “springs up from the earth.” It’s an image of ultimate truth as fresh and undefiled: it springs from the natural world. It’s a place you and I might retreat to when seeking the truth, when discerning the truth, when wanting to rest in the refuge of truth evident in nature.

Long before we were born, our faithful ancestors in faith struggled with the truth just as we do today. Through this psalm we learn that they determined that truth has met with mercy, that righteousness has kissed peace. Their words are a balm as we explore the truth around us and within us.

Barbara Kingsolver writes that “truth is like gravity, and carbon, and the sun behind an eclipse: it’s still there. And it stays alive if you tend it like a flame.”