

## Session Four, Exercise 1:

### “the knights of truth: child, fool and sufferer”

#### Background:

In our personal relationships, we experience very honest and truthful moments, and often are surprised at a new depth or dimension not previously seen before (hopefully an immediate benefit, but not always so). Truth or honesty is the ultimate penetrating force into our soul, it both wounds and heals, and when it is truth that wounds us ultimately it is for the good, for God is truth. The progression of graces, being studied in this class as the journey to holiness, is “established in truth” (2 Peter 1:12). Peter warns of false teachers (2 Peter 2:2) that blaspheme the “way of truth” (i.e. mind of the Spirit) as they promote the following of sensuality (i.e. mind of the flesh).

The Book of Hebrews has a lot to say about holiness as the author seeks to redirect or reinforce the young Christian faith of his Hebrew readers. His intention is to direct them to the person of Jesus Christ and to consider their former things of faith as shadows that pointed to the greater reality or the “real reality” (Schaeffer).

A perfect relationship may best be described as being in rest, within a harmonious peace and joy with each other even as they venture together. The Hebrew author calls his readers to enter the promised true Sabbath Rest of God, he reminds them that they must rest from their own work in order to rest in God’s finished work. For their own work has been shown incapable of providing that peace and joy, and is full of deception and lies. This place of peace and true rest can only happen in a state of complete honesty and truth, which is in the being of Jesus Christ. The Hebrews author describes this encounter with the Word of God:

*“For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edge sword, it penetrates even to dividing the soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. Nothing in all creation is hidden from God’s sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.” 4:12-13*

This exercise describes how we might live out the Truth in this world using a perspective described by Dietrich Bonhoeffer and elaborated on in an article remembering Bonhoeffer (<http://www.luther95.org/NELCA/internos/moeller.htm>).

#### Instruction:

Read the following excerpt from the article:

In an early sermon preached on July 24, 1932, Bonhoeffer took as his text John 8:32: “The truth will make you free.” In this address Bonhoeffer speaks of a strange collection of people that he calls “knights of truth.” Because truth is always something alien in human life, he says, it takes courage to speak the truth. Therefore not everybody is willing, not everyone is able to do so.

The three knights of truth that he describes in the sermon are the child, the fool, and the sufferer.

**The child.** The child is able to speak the truth because it is unaware or oblivious of what the truth does to people. The child speaks the truth, laughs, and is free.

**The fool.** At a medieval court only the fool was allowed to speak the whole truth and to confront everyone with it. The fool was not taken seriously, but one wouldn't do without him. Such is the case with the truth.

**The sufferer.** "I mean the man," Bonhoeffer says, "who was hit and tortured with a crown of thorns . . . who stands before Pilate and is asked the smart but hopelessly worldly question, What is truth? . . . Nothing else happens here as that truth-self is crucified, and it is Pilate who is judged by that crucified truth. It is not that you ask for the truth, but the truth asks for you."

"The truth asks for you." That puts a new perspective on our entire human struggle to come to terms with the truth, be it the quest for the meaning of life, be it the wrestling with God who often seems to be so absent in a world of suffering, be it in our own attempts to master life and its tasks. Our longing for answers is met with a question, Where are you before that Man who says, "I am the truth"?

We can see that before this ultimate question all other questions can be answered with greater clarity and ease. Bonhoeffer did not avoid the penultimate questions, but it was his understanding that the ultimate question is not one that we ask but is asked of us that helped him to approach the questions of his time with a distinctive clarity, simplicity, and strength.

And that is perhaps what makes Bonhoeffer so fascinating for us down to the present day. A man of great intellectual power, he was able to be simple, clear, and down to earth in his striving to find an answer to the questions that all of us are asked to answer in our lives: Where are you, who are you before the one who says, "I am the truth"?

### **Questions:**

How do these three knights show up in your life?

What have you realized from times that you been in one of these roles to bring truth to someone else?

What was your experience or reaction to times that others have played these roles to bring truth to you?

The ultimate question says Bonhoeffer is not that "you ask for the truth, but that the Truth asks for you". What does he mean by this?

With that ultimate question understood and if not answered, how could all other questions then be answered with greater clarity and ease?

Bonhoeffer is often recognized as one of the first to perceive Nazism as dangerously wrong and the need for the church to stand against it. The article says Bonhoeffer's understanding that the ultimate question was being asked of him by God, and not the other way around was what allowed him to answer the less ultimate "questions of his time with clarity, simplicity and strength".

Do you agree that this ultimate question is ultimate and all others are subordinate or aided by the answer to this ultimate question? If so, how might you be seeing more clear and simple answers to your subordinate questions to the ultimate question?