In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

My sermon this morning is my second sermon in a row on the Holy Spirit. I bet I could preach lots of sermons on the Holy Spirit. Last Sunday we considered the Holy Spirit in his work as our Counselor – the one who can help us with our prayers and the one who can heal our cheatin’ hearts if we be willing. This time I want to speak of the Holy Spirit as “the Spirit of truth.” My sermon text then is from our Gospel Lesson, John 16. Jesus says this:

13When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth... (John 16:13, RSV)

My topic, then, is truth. I hope to speak well of the truth and its relationship to Jesus Christ and to the Holy Spirit.

Pontius Pilate once asked the question “What is truth?” In the Judgment Hall, Pilate wondered about the truth. But Truth stood right there before him. Why, Jesus is “the way, the truth, and the life” (John 14:6). Pilate would have done well to give himself over to Jesus rather than to give Jesus over to the soldiers to be crucified.

The longer I sit at the Pastor’s Booth out there on our sidewalk, the more I find my answers to be scaling themselves down so that I only want to talk of Jesus. “Jesus is everything,” I say to people. “Fill your heart with Jesus,” I urge people. “Fill your heart with Jesus and then calmly face the events of the day.” I simply believe that you and I will be better people to the degree that Jesus becomes more and more everything for us.

In recent weeks, Pastor Caleb has been leading our Monday Evening Bible Class in a study of Colossians. St. Paul did not establish that congregation in Colos’sae, in modern-day Turkey, nor did he visit that congregation, as far as we know. But he has heard reports of troubles in that congregation. The troubles do not seem to be conflict among the people, as there were conflicts in Corinth. Rather, the trouble with the Colossians is that they do not seem to have a strong feel for the truth of things. They are confused both about the truth of the universe and about the truth of human conduct. About the universe, they still believe in what St. Paul calls the “elemental spirits of the universe” (Colossians 2:20). They seem to believe that the universe is ruled by powers and principalities. About these things, Paul says that it is time for the Colossians to reconceive the universe in terms of Jesus as Lord of all. The apostle puts it this way:
He disarmed the principalities and powers and made a public example of them, triumphing over them in him. (Colossians 2:15, RSV)

Jesus did this on his cross and in resurrection. He disarmed the great forces of nature that seem to rule things. Force, mass, acceleration, storms on the sea, even death itself must all be understood now to be subject to the rule of Jesus.

So, that is about the nature of the universe. The truth of things is centered in Jesus Christ.

And about the truth of human conduct, the apostle again points to Jesus. He argues that when we come to Jesus, we take upon ourselves the daily task of dying to our old ways in order to rise up as new people. St. Paul says that we should put on the characteristics of Jesus, like putting on beautiful clothes. Let me read for you a great paragraph about this from this past Monday evening’s Bible class:

Put on then, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassion, kindness, lowliness, meekness, and patience, forbearing one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful.

Let our every thought and deed be captive to Christ (2 Corinthians 10:5). Let Jesus be everything to us. Let Jesus fill our hearts and then let us calmly face the day before us.

So, let us turn now to some practicalities. Last week I heard a lecture by Dr. Donna Freitas. The title of her lecture was Practicing Christianity in the Age of Facebook & Smartphones. My! I did not realize how much social media and smart phones are dominating the lives of people, and discouraging them too. Dr. Freitas has especially studied college students and their use of social media, but in the course of her research she has learned some things about older people too. She has learned, for example, that when college students are home visiting with Mom and Dad, the students want their parents to put away
their smart phones! Shame on us older folks if we cannot even focus on our own children because we are too much addicted to our phones!

So, Dr. Freitas has learned some things about the parents of college students, but her special study has been of the students themselves. She says that many college students live in terror of a misstep on social media. They feel continual pressure to present a beautiful, flawless picture of themselves on Facebook or other social media. They get worn out by it. They fear to be silly on Facebook or to express a politically incorrect opinion. They worry that they are going to say something on social media that is going to ruin their career before they even get started. They hear that employers are studying the social media pages of job applicants. They fear that they will offend a potential employer.

And besides that — besides the wearying pressure to appear perfect on Facebook — the students worry about their own addiction to their smart phones and social media. If they are mugged, they will give up just about anything but their smart phones. They name their smart phones. They become real uneasy if they mislay their phone. They have trouble concentrating in their reading and in their studies because they are stuck in what seems to me to be a voluntary epilepsy. They can hardly think two thoughts in a row because they are regularly turning aside from things to check their phone.

Dr. Freitas says that the students know this about themselves and they worry about it. She says that college students know every wi-fi dead zone on campus, and they flock there as final exams approach. They huddle in obscure rooms in the basement of the library because they know that there they can have some peace as they try to prepare for their exams. If they request wi-fi at home or in the vacation cabin, they hope that their parents will say no. Some of them go to church, not so much because they are believers, but because it is one hour in the week in which they feel that in good conscience they do not have to deal with their smart phone. So I figure that if someone recommends that we get wi-fi in our church nave here, we should say no!

Now, if St. Paul were to give his opinion about smart phones and Facebook, I bet he would say, “hold every thought captive to Christ — not to your smart phone, but to Christ.” And in saying this, the apostle would be drawing us on closer to the Truth. To the degree that Jesus becomes everything to us, we will draw closer to a true and human way of life. We will display more of those good things of which Paul writes:

12Put on then, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassion, kindness, lowliness, meekness, and patience...
On Trinity Sunday, we try to reckon with the great idea that we have three divine persons on our side: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. They constitute one God, and what a good God we have! God the Father gives us existence, every instant of our lives. God the Son - our Saviour Jesus - died for us, that we might live. And God the Holy Spirit makes us better by bringing to our minds and to our hearts Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit bears witness to Jesus to us. As Jesus puts it in this Sunday’s reading:

13When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. 14He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. (John 16:13-14, RSV)

So, one of the persons of the Holy Trinity - the Holy Spirit - is trying to lead us into truth by making us mindful of Jesus. The Holy Spirit works at this for us all the time, using the Bible, the liturgy, the hymns, the encouragement of one another, and the image we carry within us of Jesus Christ. Let us not grieve the Holy Spirit by too often forgetting about Jesus. Let us back off a good deal from our smart phones and social media in order to give more of our thoughts and our lives to Jesus. Indeed, let us fill our hearts with Jesus and calmly live the days before us in his name, to whom belongs the glory with the Father and the Holy Spirit now and forever. Amen.