

I don't usually watch television, but every morning I check the headlines on the BBC News app. This morning the first one is "Row over Trump team email trove." If I were the BBC I might have led with the deadly attack on a Methodist church in Pakistan or the mudslide that has buried a remote village in Chile. Life is hard, and now we have learned our connectedness with others across the planet, we know more than ever about just how hard it is. People are being hurt and killed by one another and by our changing climate. Yet the contention and disorder at the highest level of our countries leadership are what draws the top headline.

A 2016 the research organization, RAND, published a study of Kremlin propaganda. It described the technique as a "firehose of falsehood" which sprayed deceptive messages across many channels, in rapid succession, with little to no grounding in reality or even internal consistency, propaganda that "entertains, confuses and overwhelms people."<sup>1</sup> I am not necessarily suggesting that that kind of propaganda is happening in this country, but nonetheless many of us find ourselves entertained, confused and overwhelmed by the daily news cycle.

The RAND report also offered advice for fighting propaganda; in addition to challenging the lies in each individual claim, it said, get the bigger truthful narrative out there.

I think that's what we are called to do as people of hope: to get the bigger truth out there. And that means the bigger truth that God loved the cosmos so much that he sent his only begotten son to become part of it, to share in the pain, the deceit, the confusion and the death.

The bigger picture, or as the RAND report called it, the bigger truthful narrative, is the light of Christ that John the Baptizer is pointing to in this morning's gospel reading. We have a masterful statement of the light in the first reading from Isaiah.

The spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me,  
because the LORD has anointed me;  
he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed,  
to bind up the brokenhearted,  
to proclaim liberty to the captives,  
and release to the prisoners;  
to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor.

This is the passage that Jesus the Christ claimed as his own when he started his ministry. It is a succinct statement of the change that God is bringing into the world. At times it doesn't seem like it's true, in fact it may seem as though the opposite is happening. But as hopesters, we hold on to and proclaim, with John, the bigger truthful narrative that the light has entered the world, that the time is drawing near when God's purposes will be fully revealed.

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<sup>1</sup> M. Bauerlein and C. Jeffery, Do You Struggle with Trump Fatigue? Mother Jones, Jan/Feb 2018, p.4

And so we work for justice and peace. We roll up our sleeves and proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. Our God is not an angry vengeful God. Our God is the Abba that Jesus knew, the one who is right here *and* at the very farthest reaches of the cosmos. The very nature of our God is love. And God's love is most fully expressed wherever peace and justice-making happen.

The evil in the world is time limited. And we get to shorten its days by our own cooperation in active peacemaking. In actively proclaiming the day of the Lord's favor, in actively contributing to the well-being of the planet and in refusing to get caught up in the "firehose of falsehood" which would suck away our hope and our faith, leaving us only with the empty husk of despair.

As people of hope we have double vision. We see the pain and the injustice, and we know that it is only part of the truth. We also know that God's plan is to bring all things into reconciliation, at which point everything will be in its proper place and there will be no more pain and suffering, and we know that that is already happening, that God's spirit is working in and through us to bring about the day of peace and the day when God's glory will cover the earth and fill the whole universe.

It is because we have the inner knowledge and faith that the light has entered the world and that all things are being brought into harmony, that we can live as Paul instructed us. And conversely, as we choose to live that way so we develop greater trust in God's plan of redemption. In the reading from 1 Thessalonians, Paul says

Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise the words of prophets, but test everything; hold fast to what is good; abstain from every form of evil.

This is one way we proclaim the truthful narrative, by boldly giving thanks and praising God on all circumstances. This may feel like "fake it till you make it" but experiments have shown that when we smile we feel more cheerful. How much more will our sense of hope increase if we are praying without ceasing and giving thanks in all circumstances. Rather than simply accept the difficulties in our lives we embrace them, knowing that within our conflicts is the nugget of our salvation.

We can support one another in this. Often when someone asks how you're doing, and they really mean it, rather than think of the good things, we think of the things that are not so good. We can help to increase our hope quotient by practicing giving thanks, and by choosing to frame things in positive ways. I know it's counter-cultural, and I certainly don't often manage to practice what

I'm preaching this morning. But we can be hopeful and thankful even as we acknowledge and share the difficult and dark places of our lives.

Because the bold, truthful, bigger picture is one of hope. God is creating the universe and is working to bring it all to perfection – to harmony in Christ. And we get to cooperate with the Spirit of God in bringing this about. Every prayer, every step that *we* take adds energy to the mission of God. Every move we make in peace-building and justice-making adds to the forward momentum.

The bigger narrative is that of God's love and God's purpose. The astonishing thing is that we are an important part of God's purpose. Each one of us is integral to working out God's plan for the redemption of the cosmos. God depends upon our cooperation to bring about the change we long to see. What are we waiting for?

I'm going to end with a poem by the Indian poet and Nobel prize winner Rabindranath Tagore. Where he says joy, we could say hope.

I slept and dreamt that life was joy  
I awoke and saw that life was service  
I acted and behold – service was joy.