

*A good person out of the store of goodness in his heart produces good.*

My guess is that today's first and Gospel reading promote the moral virtue called prudence, which in today's constantly contested atmosphere has fallen off the charts. In the simplest terms prudence means "handle with care", which could pass as an aspect of love. But we live in a media age of extremely "careless" talk as if one side or the other might claim its exclusive grasp of what's true.

Of course "true" popularly means correct, factual, verifiable in some experimental way – in the manner of Thomas Gradgrind in the novel *Hard Times* by Charles Dickens. Gradgrind ran a school in the industrial (and smoky) town of Coketown in the mid 1800's. His aim was to *Teach these boys and girls nothing but Facts. Facts alone are wanted in life. Plant nothing else, and root out everything else. You can only form the minds of reasoning animals upon Facts; nothing else will ever be of any service to them.*

Thereupon he asks a student named Bitzer to define a horse. Bitzer's correct answer is: *Quadruped. Graminivorous. Forty teeth, namely twenty four grinders . . . its anatomy reduced to numbers – which can't lie!* Seems like that's what prevails as true nowadays. I used to see my doctor and talk about my health; now I'm shown a screen with 2.4, 2.6. . . . 3.1. No signal at all about my growing anxiety as I see the statistic rise!

So also with Bitzer's horse. His "useful" description bears no likeness to that of God's description of a horse in the Book of Job: *Do you give the horse his strength, / and clothe his neck with a mane? / Do you make him quiver like a locust, / while his thunderous snorting spreads terror? / He paws the valley, he rejoices in his strength . . .* Those are "facts" only poetry can reveal. Something Gradgrind's daughter reveals when later in life she says: *Father, you trained me from my cradle. How could you give me life and take from me all those precious things that make life worth living. Where are the graces of my soul? Where are the sentiments of my heart? What have you done, oh Father, with the garden that should have bloomed in this great wilderness here? And she struck her breast.*

We normally take truth to mean correct – case closed. After the evidence is weighed in a courtroom we declare a verdict based as the clerk said on "the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth". However, the New Testament word for truth is the Greek *aletheia* which prudently means the unconcealed or revealed (as if to say that everything we see is but the outcome of a veil drawn back). In other words there is an abyss of still concealed reality, hidden, yet to emerge that is inexhaustible.

Doesn't this require then a less brash, a "learn but wait and see" attitude – together? *When a sieve is shaken, the husks appear.* Moments occur when we find out we were wrong. *The fruit of a tree shows the care it has had.* If it was cultivated by Gradgrind, expect it to be bland if not sour. Could it be that we are living in a world in which the blind teach the blind? And especially: what a wonderful revelation it is when it is no longer concealed that I who saw all the faults of my neighbor so clearly awoke to my own embarrassing mistakes – but in my case I was merciful.

**Geoff Wood**