

Prayers for Peace, Hope and Justice

In Isaiah 61 the prophet describes the sins of Israel. In vs 9 we read:

“We look for light, but all is darkness, for brightness but we walk in the shadows.”

In vs 14, the prophet continues: “Truth has stumbled in the streets, honesty cannot enter.

Truth is nowhere to be found and whoever shuns evil becomes a prey.”

As we light our candle for peace hope and justice today, we reflect on the way in which truth is compromised at every turn. Aeschylus, (eeskillles) the father of Greek tragedy wrote, that in war, truth is the first casualty. We see this daily in the Middle East conflict and the lies know no bounds as false narratives and blatant lies are churned out by the minute to explain away war crimes and crimes against humanity.

This past week, in South Africa, we saw the once great Independent Media group who once boasted some of the most courageous truth tellers in South Africa, sink to a new low as they not only withdrew from the Press council of South Africa following an adverse finding against them, but also chose to vilify this body in numerous articles. The Press council is one of the few ways in which we the public can be protected from misinformation and untruths in the public media.

Those of you who have watched the documentary “The Social Dilemma” will know that social media is the source of most of the misinformation, disinformation and blatant untruths in our world. More dangerously, it has algorithms that identify our own preferences and perceptions and then feed us more of what we like. We end up in an echo chamber where ideas, stories and theories are peddled as truth and the more we click, the more stories and “facts” are fed to us to support the views we already hold.

So, what can we do?

- Avoid getting your news from social media. Use it to connect socially with people
- Avoid publications that don't submit themselves to the discipline and ethics of an external ombudsman or the Press Council
- Have a variety of news sources and be aware of your own preferences and biases as you listen and read.

Today as we light the candle, we are reminded of the courage of Jesus – the light of the world – who shone the light of truth into the darkness and who ended up paying the ultimate price. But not all the darkness of the world could extinguish that one candle and today the light of Jesus and the followers of Jesus continues to speak truth in a world of distortion and untruths.

Let us pray

Gracious Lord, you said that our yes should be yes, and our no should be no. You spoke truth to the rich and the powerful and you spoke truth to your own disciples when they developed perceptions informed by their own prejudice or lust for power.

Give us the patience to listen to different points of view. Give us the discernment to know when we are ignoring facts and views because of our own fears, aspirations and prejudices. Give us the courage to speak the truth even when it is uncomfortable for us to do so.

We pray this in the name of Jesus who spoke the truth, lived the truth and was willing to die for the truth.

Amen.