

John 3:1-3
All Saints Day
November 5, 2017

Grace and peace to you from God our loving parent, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!
Amen.

Matt (my son) and I recently watched the movie *Concussion* (2015, Columbia Pictures) starring Will Smith. For those of you who don't know the movie, it tells the story of how Dr. Bennett Omalu (Smith's character), a forensic pathologist, delves into the deaths of several former National Football League (NFL) players who were not all that far removed from their playing days being in their late 40's and early 50's. In each case they showed symptoms such as depression, rage, loss of memory, and as some put it simply losing their mind and not even knowing who they were anymore. Doctors could identify a cause and were unable to treat it. In each case, those afflicted took their own life.

The vast majority of the medical field choose to simply dismiss the deaths and do no further research as it will cost too much or not prove anything more. Yet, Dr. Omalu doesn't do that. These men were too young. They were all professional football players. After exhausting research he concludes what each man experienced and led to his death is what we now know as Chronic Traumatic Encephalopathy (CTE), the result of repeated blows to the skull. In more violent hits the velocity exerted on the skull causes the brain, which basically floats in the skull with a protective fluid surrounding it, to propel through this fluid and make contact with the skull resulting in a concussion. CTE is the medical condition resulting from numerous concussions which have left so many NFL players dealing with debilitating mental and physical ailments and ultimately death.

Upon discovering this Dr. Omalu, along with others, seek to confront the NFL and alert the general public to why these sudden and shocking deaths have resulted to so many of their beloved players. Yet, many don't want to hear it or believe it. Many believe Dr. Omalu's research will bring down the NFL, which as we know is multi-billion dollar business. To admit there is truth to Omalu's research will have devastating consequences and cost the NFL millions. Yet, Dr. Omalu is persistent in his efforts even in the face of death threats. .

Two scenes in particular stand out to me. One is where Dr. Omalu and a colleague finally get a meeting with the NFL's lead physician who denies Omalu's research and threatens that if Omalu continues he will do irreparable harm to a game idolized by many that employs thousands and does remarkable charitable efforts. Is Dr. Omalu really certain he wants to continue onward? Resilient and speaking out for the dead whose voices have been silenced by this illness Dr. Omalu tells this doctor to "Tell the truth." Stop pretending it doesn't exist. "Tell the truth."

Secondly, there is a scene in which it appears the threats, the obstacles that have been placed in his way, the challenges, frustrations, and fears have finely taken their toll on Dr. Omalu and he states to his wife, "I was the wrong man to discover this." His wife responds to the contrary stating he is exactly the right man. Both Dr. Omalu and his wife grew up in Nigeria. They met at church shortly after his wife migrated to America and her faith tells her God has been instrumental in calling Dr. Omalu, leading him all the way from Nigeria, and utilizing his gifts to uncover and shed light on this illness and give voice to those without voice.

Tell the truth. You are the right man to discover this. In essence, I believe this is what the author of 1st John was preaching to the church in his context around the turn of the first

century. In the second chapter we learn of some division in the church, which is somewhat ambiguous, but may well have resulted over the belief by some that Jesus was not fully the Son of God. He was merely a human being who the Holy Spirit came to dwell in and thus revealed God's power through Jesus' acts of healings and other miracles but then prior to his death departed him; thus, in essence leaving the death and resurrection of Jesus merely an afterthought. Perhaps, some were being led astray by this teaching. Perhaps, some were doubting their existence and identity as Christ's followers. Perhaps, there was even dissention among those who still held true to the belief Jesus was the Son of God in flesh and blood and was the very real presence of God, which died on the cross and rose from the grave. Whatever it may be the author comes on the scene and tells them the truth they need to hear. He reassures them in their doubts, struggles, and fears they are set apart by their incorporation into the church of Christ. They are children of God. This is who you are. This is what you are the author proclaims. Believe it and live it! Stop listening to the lies of others that state otherwise. Stop being led astray by voices and vices of the world that lay claim to giving life, providing safety and security, and draw you from God. Stop the nonsense of believing you can do this on your own. You can't appease God through the fruits of your labor as some still claimed made one righteous. Stop all of this. This is what the author states in Chapter 2:

¹⁵ Do not love the world or the things in the world. The love of the Father is not in those who love the world; ¹⁶ for all that is in the world—the desire of the flesh, the desire of the eyes, the pride in riches—comes not from the Father but from the world. ¹⁷ And the world and its desire are passing away, but those who do the will of God live forever.

These are the desires and work of the anti-Christ. These are not truths.

The truth, as we heard last week in John's gospel, is found in Jesus Christ, God's Son. The truth will set you free. The truth will turn you from disbelief and doubt and grant you the faith to trust in the promise that Christ came to save you from sin. To offer forgiveness. To return you into the loving arms of God. The truth will transform you into what you are – children of God – and the truth will then transform you to live out that reality. For the author of 1st John it's not enough to simply claim the reality we are children of God. It's not enough to believe we are forgiven by God's grace. It's not enough to say we are followers of Christ. To be children of God entails living in response to that grace. Grace that is the words he opens with saying, "See what love the Father has given us." Being children of God incorporated into the body of Christ, the community of saints, the priesthood of all believers, the church is solely due to the love of the Father. It is a gift received through faith instilled in us by the Holy Spirit. This entry into the body comes through the glorious waters of baptism, which Everett was just bathed in. The author of 1st John urges them to trust in this promise. They are already there. They are children set aside, made holy, and connected to Jesus Christ and given a purpose. Tell the truth. Claim the truth. Live the truth. You are children of God.

Yet, there are aspects of exactly what this means that are still hidden and will not be fully revealed until Christ returns. But, in the meantime, living into and claiming ownership of the fact they (we) are children of God united with Christ comes with a calling. It comes with a response to the glorious gift of God's extravagant love. To know the truth is to live by the truth and that truth is seeing our neighbor also as a child of God – created in the image of God. Yes, by nature of our baptism we have become children of God in a new sense. We have been adopted into the body of Christ. The author of 1 John proclaims we will grow into the likeness

of Christ. While that appears to fully manifest itself in the end time, that likeness also lives now as we respond to His self-giving love in loving one another. In loving our neighbor. In being vessels of peace, instruments of grace, hands of forgiveness, and voices of justice. Perhaps, like Dr. Omalu we trust the gifts God has entrusted us with and in the face of adversity, fear, and struggle find the strength, courage, and voice to speak out and give voice to those whose voices have been silenced. We stand with the poor in spirit, those who mourn, the meek, those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemakers, and the persecuted. When we do this there is no doubt, like Dr. Omalu, we will be reviled and might have all kinds of evil uttered upon us; however, we recall that Jesus also says we, too, will be blessed. Rejoice and be glad. Rejoice and be glad children of God. Rejoice and be glad saints of God. Rejoice and be glad in the truth that has set us free to live fully as children of God!