

Sermon Lent 5 2021

March 21, 2021

John 8:42-59

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. This morning we meditate on the Gospel lesson previously read.

One of the things I have found myself struggling with of late is lies. I don't mean that I've been lying, but I mean with seeing lies all around. With seeing how so many people get caught up in lies and don't realize it. With how much dishonesty is present all around us. For example, I don't know if you saw it but the Washington Post this week had to publish a significant retraction to a news story they had reported in January regarding Donald Trump and his concern for election fraud. The retraction noted that comments attributed to the then president were misquoted; the correct quotation bringing significantly different light to the story. And while a retraction appears honest, if the reporting had been honest in the first place and not so undercut by personal bias, this wouldn't have been an issue. And as I say that, lest you think I'm speaking in partisan politics here, the opposite bias is true of many other news sources, and the President himself was not immune to his own incorrect comments. No, I'm not speaking politically, here, I'm merely expressing the frustration at the challenge of knowing what the truth is in the midst of lies.

And of course, on the one hand, I know where this comes from. You probably get tired of me alluding to philosophical underpinnings of things—and don't get me wrong, I can appreciate why—but this is what has created the foundation for this. The death of God in philosophy created a moral vacuum that lost the capability for truth. And now what has trickled down to us plebs, us commoners, is a vast assumption that you can have a truth for you and that's OK, and I can have a truth for me and that's OK. "Lived experience" is the real truth, I have mine and you have yours. And that's OK until those "truths" are forced into combat, then what? Well, we, of course, know the outcome, and that's our comfort. We know that the truth of truths will win out, but what will be left in the wake of the destruction by lies? It's scary, isn't it?

And so as I said "on the one hand" before, the other hand is that this is nothing new. The devil has been spewing forth his venomous untruths since the garden. Yes, it was there that we heard the first lie. "You surely will not die, but you will become like God knowing good and evil." Of course, there are two things noteworthy about this. First is that the lie was set up by the perfect question to bring it about: "Did God really

say?” The second is that this lie, like every good heresy, had an element of truth to it. And as I say that, think about that. Every lie that people pick up, they do so because there is something they can identify as true in it. What was the truth in that one? They would become like God in that they would “know good and evil.” That became true, didn’t it? After all, what had they known before? They had known good. God had created the world and He had made it good. He looked at the whole of His creation and saw that, behold, it was “very good.” And as I often point out, this knowledge in Hebrew is an experiential knowledge. They knew good in the sense of experiencing it. But once they ate of that fruit, they would not just know the experience of good. No. Then they would know the experience of evil. And what evil would be the worst of all? The evil of death. You see we misunderstand death so often. Thankfully because of Christ death can be understood as what I would call a “useful tool.” It is the tool that carries us Christians into His loving bosom. But Paul doesn’t pull any punches. Death is our enemy. It is opposed to us. It is evil. And it was born of our sin which was brought forth by the lie—and all of this at the hands of the devil.

Look at how Jesus comments to this end in our lesson: **“He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies.”** You see, this is at the heart of the devil, these lies are from his “character” as it’s translated. They are of his own, literally. And in those lies he murdered. Because lies have consequences.

In fact, look at how Jesus describes that in the lesson: **“But because I tell the truth, you do not believe me. Which one of you convicts me of sin? If I tell the truth, why do you not believe me? Whoever is of God hears the words of God. The reason why you do not hear them is that you are not of God.”** Sadly, the consequence is that one is cut off by the lie. They are cut off from the truth and from God Himself. It’s that division that brings death. It’s that division that brings suffering. And it’s in that division that we see the perpetuation of lies around us. It’s also in that that we see that it’s a vicious cycle. The lie is perpetuated, the perpetuation draws more in and those drawn in exchange the truth of God for more lies, and so on and so on. And it can be so easy that we would be disheartened. In fact, this can even press us into assuming that the truth is inaccessible to us.

But look at what Jesus says twice there. **“I tell the truth.”** The truth is accessible to us in Jesus. Yes, there are lies all around, and those lies have consequences. But in

Christ is the truth. In Christ's word there is the truth. In fact, as I say that, look at how the devil has tried to take the Scriptures that have been handed down to us and make us think they're unreliable. That we don't really have access to what Jesus said, and that because of that, we don't really have access to the truth.

But you know what's interesting? You can do studies that verify that the New Testament is the most historically reliable ancient document we have. It's more certain that the New Testament contains what was originally written than that we have the writings of Plato, or even Homer's *Odyssey*. The point? Jesus speaks the truth. Jesus is the truth, and Jesus preserves that truth in guarding the handing down of the Bible from generation to generation.

And what is the truth we see? Well, as I spoke about a couple of weeks ago, we see that Jesus has won the victory over the devil on the cross. We see that the devil, the liar, the father of lies and a murderer from the beginning, we see that his own defeat and death is immanent by the work of the One who has crushed him underfoot. In fact, we see what is probably the most amazing part of this in this passage for today.

I always point this out when I preach on this passage, but it is one that is near and dear to my heart. It's the passage that convinced me about the divinity of Jesus. As I'm sure I've mentioned before, in college I got connected with some guys that didn't believe in God as triune. They said that if you look at the Bible you can't definitively say that Jesus is "of one substance" with the Father, as we say in the Creed. But this passage told me otherwise. How so? It's in that place where Jesus said, "Before Abraham was I AM." Of course, there would have been sufficient proof even if Jesus had said "Before was, I was." That still would have told us that Jesus existed before Abraham. But He chose the words carefully for a reason. I AM. The Name of God spoken to Moses in the burning bush. I AM who I AM, tell them I AM sent you. This makes you see why the Jews wanted to pick up stones to kill Him. They thought this was the worst of blasphemy: this MAN was calling Himself GOD!

But the mystery is the path that this God in the Flesh, this Truth incarnate would take to accomplish His victory over the liar. The great I AM came down into the body of the man Jesus, united with that man, and this God-man died on the cross. This God revealed the truth when He was hanging on the tree cursed for sin. Truth appearing to be overcome by a lie, but on Easter showing forth its victory.

And we see that the truth will win out over the lies in the end. And the truth will show itself, we will be vindicated as those redeemed, rescued from our sin by the great

I AM, just as He rescued the Israelites from the tyranny of Pharaoh. The truth will win out over the liar, and life over death will be given to those born of that mercy.

As Jesus says, **“Truly, truly, I say to you, if anyone keeps my word, he will never see death.”** Now as we hear that, we can have confusion that’s similar to what the Jews reflect. We can say, “but I see Christians dying all the time. How do they not taste death?” Literally what Jesus says here is “he will absolutely not see death unto the age.” I think that helps, because you see unto the age is how the Old Testament and Jesus often described eternity. They will not see eternal death. They will **absolutely not** see eternal death.

The murderer will not be able to cling to them, the Truth will crush the liar, and the liar’s death will have no more power. And the truth is that you are in that word. You are baptized in it, and you hear it, and it is fed to you in the supper.

In fact, as I was reading this week a great quote from the Large Catechism came up in my study. Luther in the section on the Lord’s Supper referenced this passage talking about the devil as a liar. He said that the devil is *“A liar who seduces the heart from God’s Word and blinds it, making you unable to feel your needs or come to Christ. A murderer who begrudges you every hour of your life. If you could see how many daggers, spears, and arrows are at every moment aimed at you, you would be glad to come to the sacrament as often as possible.”* Luther was saying that as we wrestle with the devil who is this liar, as we wrestle with the lies all around us, as we wrestle with the consequences of those lies, the death from this murderer, we have the Supper for our good. He was saying that because Christ has won the victory on the cross we should come to the sacrament as often as possible where that victory is fed to us. True victory placed on our tongues. True forgiveness for the sins we have exchanged for God in the lie. True life over death, true Truth over lies themselves. As Jesus even said, “Truly, truly, I say to you...” Amen Amen, yes, yes it shall be so. It shall be so because it is true. It is the truth of Christ, the I AM in the flesh who overcomes the liar and murderer, and who overcomes all lies with His goodness and with His truth for you and for the whole world. Amen.