

First Sunday in Lent  
March 5/6, 2022 Sermon

The lie is accepted as the truth and the what is accepted as true is a lie. This sounds like a bold statement, but anything that is not one hundred percent true is a lie. The devil has been a liar since the beginning and he is a specialist in lying. This world is filled with things that are mostly true. That means that there is a little untruth all around.

When you begin to gasp the simplicity of what I am saying, you begin to understand how we all are tempted. The temptations are the lies that are placed before us to get us off track. We do need to see the pollution. When we see what does not belong there, the temptation loses its ability to draw us in. All temptations hold untruth. The lie, like leaven, once in, grows. No one starts out really bad, they must move to being really bad one step at a time.

The opposite is true. We all have good in us. In fact, I dare say, most of us are mostly good. Let us be careful here. I am neither trying to build you up, nor tear you down. I am seeking to understand the truth of our situation. Jesus told us that the truth will set us free. True liberty in this age is not going to come with the ability to do as we please, but with understanding things as they are. I have known people trapped in care homes who were free, while knowing others who did as they pleased and were in a prison of bondage.

Separation from God is death. We were born separated from God, therefore we are born dead. Dead in our trespasses. I know many think that to say that a beautiful infant cannot be a sinner. I do not know what they are thinking. But God's word has declared what we need to know. It is the state of being that is the situation. We are also born physical beings, but there is more and we often do not acknowledge the more that is there.

Have you noticed that as the culture has become more unfaithful and less willing to consider Christianity, it has become more fascinated with the macabre in literature and entertainment. Why the fascination with evil when there is denial of the good? We are spiritual people and the tug to explore who we are is there. If one will not turn to the Lord, the only other alternative is the father of lies who will pull any in any way he can. But let us not go to fear here. Greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world. Our battle is against forces of darkness, principalities and powers. Simply put, most of us face the battle of the lies that are all around us. Once again, Jesus has told us, "You shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free."

The point of willful privation, giving up things for a time, is not to show yourself or anyone else what a good person you are. Jesus reprimanded someone querying Him and said, "Why do you call me good? There is no One good but the Father." God is good all the time. The rest of us must learn to rest in His goodness. Remember, we were born separated and that is not good. Goodness is in Him alone.

Perhaps one of the greatest temptations for those who have proclaimed that Jesus is Lord is the thinking of all of the things we must do. If I work harder, strive more, pray more, work on my attitude, etc., I will be more acceptable to God. In and of themselves, there is nothing necessarily wrong with these things, but they can and often do become acts of the self. If our acts could be meritorious, we would have no need of a Savior. But, in fact, what we do is simply what we do. Jesus is the One who saves us.

Sometimes we believe the lie that salvation is some kind of jump through time and space from one position to another. In terms of being in a loving relationship with the Lord, a bit, and yet, look at Jesus and you will see that He lived a human life, one day at a time, walking everywhere.

We are in the wilderness of this world. This world is not our home. We make a home in it, but it is not our home. Quite literally, Jesus went into the wilderness to fast and pray. Why fast? A fast is often food, but not necessarily just food. These days I wonder if fasting from electronics could be a harder fast than food. Fasting often shows us just how dependent we are upon the simple things that we often do not give a second thought to. People who are starving often thinking mostly about food. Of course, so do gluttons. We were not made for the belly, but the belly serves us. Sometimes we need a reminder of the truth of every situation.

Yes, we all have fallen short of the glory of God. Every person has sinned. The wages of sin is death. All of these things are true. But also place this truth alongside what God has said, "In while yet you were a sinner, at just the right time, God sent us a Savior." Our Savior, Jesus, has come at just the right time. Not by our might or strength, but by His, we have been saved. It is He who saves us. As many as see the light, confess that Jesus is Lord, come into a living relationship with our Creator, we are walking in the salvation which He gives. He has given (past tense) us the ability to become children of God. Our salvation is assured based not upon what we do or will do, but upon who He is and what He has done. Jesus saves us. This is most certainly true.

The devil comes along and says, "If." If you are a Christian, if you are saved, being saved, hope in salvation, etc. IF!? There is no "if" about it. If the devil has an argument, it is not with me. I am the Lord's and that is all there is to it. It certainly is not my strength. I have and will fail. Our Savior delights in my feeble attempts, for through the continuous willingness to move into the light, I do learn and grow. But these things are not the basis for the position I hold in the church. No, it is by what Christ has done and is doing alone. Everything else is rubbish.

If God loves you and you are in a right relationship with the Lord, then why don't you do something miraculous? Come on, turn the water into wine. Change a rock into bread. You're hungry, stir up some food. If you have the power, do something. Ah, here is the lie. God is the Creator, I am not. I have never created anything every. Listen carefully, we may say that we create things, but the truth is that we simply take what God has already made and make of it something else. Ford does not make cars, it only rearranges God's creation to be useful in another way. We saw the raw materials. Fair enough. They all belong to God. He gives them for us to use, but always with His intent of good stewardship.

Jesus, knowing all of these things, did not engage in an argument with the devil. The devil has been around a long time and he knows how to twist things well. You and I experience this with people who are good at twisting every word we say. Hear the truth, "We do not live by bread alone." Let the lesson sink in. In one sense we are complex creatures and we do well to not let any one thing rule our lives. For everything under heaven there is a season. The second lie, the temptation is just another step in the wrong direction.

In our world we look to celebrities, famous people, people of power and seek to have position and status. I am just an ordinary person who, in many ways, is no different than any other person I meet. I have no power. All power and authority belong to Jesus. All! Do not worship the creature, but the Creator. God alone is worthy of all honor and praise. God will see you to the finish line. Jesus has come and reminds us not to test God, but to trust Him. He alone is worthy of all trust. Trust is the foundation of faith and your faith saves you. Our Savior shows that He has dealt with every issue and the last will be death itself. The world lies to us, but Jesus alone is telling us the truth. The truth will set you free. Amen.