

John 8.46-59
Judica (Lent 5)
2 April 2017
St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church, Topeka, Kansas

+ Iesu Iuva +

Beloved in the Lord: Grace be unto you and peace from God the Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

A college roommate creeps into the shared room late one night. His roommate is asleep. But his geography essay is lying on the desk. He takes it. Quickly copies it. And hands it in to the professor the next day. The professor reads both papers. Recognizes the copied work. Calls the two roommates to account. Certainly someone has been cheating, maybe both. But the copy-cat roommate denies his cheating.

A wife returns home late one night. She smells of cologne. Her husband asks her where she's been. She says, "Girls' night out."

An acquaintance takes a handful of disparate facts surrounding you. Connects them in a plausible but untrue way. And destroys your reputation.

Lies hurt. Some simply cloak the truth in falsehood no matter how helpful or hard the truth may be. Others destroy the reputation of the neighbor. Harm what is good. Extoll what is wicked.

But all of them, all of them, damage the integrity of the person telling them and of the person listening to them, and they tear apart the fabric of human life.

That's what happens on the social level. Tell a lie, and you impugn your own integrity. Tell a falsehood, and soil whoever hears you with your lies. Deceive another, and create a crisis of human community.

No wonder God commands us, "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor." No wonder, for the sake of His beloved creation, He tells us to fear and love Him. And not tell lies about our neighbor. And not slander him. And not betray him. And not hurt his reputation. But defend him. And speak well of him. And explain everything—everything—in the kindest way.

No wonder! Because the cost to His beloved creation of doing otherwise is too great. It's the dissolution of all that is true and honorable and just and pure and lovely and commendable. As we amply see every day. Just turn on the news.

But if that's the way it goes in human things, how about in divine things?

The Lord has given us a prayer against lies in divine things. "Hallowed be Thy name," we pray. We ask in this petition that God's Word be taught in its truth and purity; that we, as His children, lead holy lives according to it. And we pray against all falsehood in divine things. For whoever teaches and lives contrary to God's Word profanes the name of God among us. Protect us from this, heavenly Father!

If lies are destructive in the human community, how much more in the community of God and men?

That's exactly what we see in the Gospel for today. Lies in divine things. Jesus is a sinner. Jesus is a Samaritan, the lowest of sinners. Jesus has a demon. Jesus is not greater than Abraham. Jesus' Word does not bring life.

But the biggest lie, the one that underlies every one of these, is this one: Jesus is not the Son of God.

Because that's a truth that's too great to bear. It's a truth that has too many implications for the Jews that they don't want to hear. It's a truth that has too many implications about God and His nature that they don't want to hear. That they are lost and helpless on their own. And that God is such a God that He is merciful—so merciful that He sends His only-begotten Son into the flesh. Himself to become helpless. And to suffer and die that the helpless might live. That the Father's greatest glory isn't in sitting in heaven on a gem-studded throne, but in sending His Son to be stripped naked, strung up on a pole, and die the dirty, excruciating, torturous, feces- and urine-smearred death on a cross. That's not a God they want to know about. Because they don't want to even countenance what the depth of their helplessness actually is if that's what it takes to save them.

In biblical jargon, this is known as the scandal of the Cross.

And in the face of the scandal of the Cross, Jesus' Jewish detractors went for the jugular. Say Jesus is a sinner, and none of it can be true. Say He's a Samaritan. That He has demon. That He's not greater than Abraham. That the Word about Jesus doesn't bring life. Build a wall of lies around the truth that Jesus is the Son of God, and the shame and scandal of the Cross—POOF!—disappears.

Protect us from this, heavenly Father! Because this is a lie that kills eternally.

There's something to be learned here. A lesson of great value.

This is the constant drum beat of the devil, the world, and our own sinful nature. Jesus' Jewish detractors aren't special because they're Jewish. They're normal, absolutely normal, because they operate like anyone born with original sin operates.

You know how they put rings in a bull's nose? It goes right through the septum in that sensitive part of the body. And then you clip a lead to it. And you can turn a dangerous 3300 lb animal into a lamb. I've done it. With Mr. Brown's championship Polled Hereford. Mr. Bojangles knocked down every fence he had seen. But put a lead on that ring, and he was a pussy cat. It's amazing.

That's exactly how the devil has the world and your sinful flesh. He leads 'em around by the nose and turns 'em into little puppy dogs. So that you can rightly call the three—the devil, the world, and your own sinful nature—the unholy trinity. Just like God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit work with one purpose in mind, the salvation of sinners. So do the devil, the world, and your own sinful nature. And they stand against one cardinal truth: that Jesus is the Son of God.

And remember how they do it: they crowd out the truth with lies. That's exactly what's happening in the Gospel for today.

But today, some 2,000 years later, the lies haven't ceased. Oh, to be sure, they're a little different. But recognize them for what they are.

Alternate theories that stand against the creation of the world by the Word of the Almighty God. Nothing but a demonic ploy to call into question the truth of Scripture. And with it the central claim of Scripture—that Jesus is the Son of God.

The LGBTQ agenda. It's not a new, more enlightened morality. It's a demonic ploy show the Scriptures and their claim that Jesus is the Son of God to be antiquated. And belief in Jesus even to be immoral.

Representations of Christianity as a myth espoused now by a bunch of hypocrites, now by a bunch of legalistic prudes. And bald efforts to show that the Scriptures aren't true. The fictions of Dan Brown, for example, and the derision and scorn heaped on the Christian Scriptures by the enlightened. That's not about Scripture. It's about what's at the center of Scripture: the scandal of the Cross.

And these are powerful lies. Because the devil has the world and your own flesh by a nose ring.

But fellow-redeemed: Never mistake the animus of the world against the Church and the Bible and Christ for anything more than what it is: Satan-authored hatred of the shame of the Cross. And when you find your own flesh nodding in agreement, understand what it's after. It wants nothing to do with redemption by a Cross because the *devil* wants nothing to do with it. It wants nothing to do with Jesus, who is the Son of God. It wants nothing to do with a God who gives Himself to redeem His lost creatures. Because it's doing fine on its own, thank you very much! And it'll take to any lie that'll preserve that sense of self-sufficiency.

But lies and death. They always go together.

You know, it's a truism. There can be only one truth. But there can be many lies. Because you can make up whatever you want.

And in the midst of all the lies thrown about by His Jewish detractors, Jesus pronounces the straightforward simple single truth: "Amen, amen—that is, truly, truly—I say to you, if anyone keeps My Word, he will see never death."

The truth brings life. The lie brings death. And here Jesus holds forth His teaching and Word as truth and a saving teaching and Word. As a teaching and Word that rescues from all sins, from the power of the devil, and even from death itself.

And He says that His teaching and Word is different and better than any other word. Because it alone has the power to give and preserve eternal life. The truth brings life. The lie brings death.

But fellow redeemed: make sure you know what Jesus is saying here. This phrase, "His Word," isn't the Law. The Law was given to increase sin, to kill, and to condemn.

No. Here He's talking about the Gospel. He's talking about His teaching and Word about Himself. He's talking about His teaching and Word that He is the Son of God. That for our salvation He took on human flesh in the womb of the dear Virgin Mary. That He died for our sins. That He rose again on account of our justification. That He ascended into heaven to prepare a place for His Christians. That He'll return again to raise up all the dead. That He'll take all believers to Himself in heaven. That's "His Word."

Notice what He does with and through His Word. He takes everything He is and has done and puts into that Word. When you hear the Word about Jesus you hear Jesus. Put even better: In His Word Jesus

gives Himself to me. To save me. Because He presents Himself as the crucified One. You can't find this in any other word, because all other words about Jesus are lies. But His Word is true. He is the Son of God. That's the One who suffers and dies for me. And that truth gives me life and salvation."

Fellow-redeemed: Next Sunday is Palm Sunday. That makes today our last Sunday before Holy Week. And so this Gospel comes today prepare you for what you will see.

The One who enters Jerusalem on the back of a donkey. The One who is betrayed on Maundy Thursday. The One who is tortured and crucified on Good Friday. The One who is raised again on Easter. That One is no mere man. He's the Son of God. And alone there do you His great love for you—that He doesn't even spare His own life for you, but gives Himself up, even to death. Even to the death of the Cross. For you. For the forgiveness of all your sins. Through faith alone the crucified God-Man. The truth that rises above the din of all the lies.

Glory be to Jesus who in bitter pains poured for me the life blood from His sacred veins.

Amen.

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