

Sermon - August 14, 2016 - Pentecost 13

Avoid the Big Lie

Jeremiah 23:16–29



Dear Friends in Christ,

Grace and peace from Christ our Lord be with you, and his comforting affirming spirit grant you times of understanding and peace.

Especially at the face of so many lies that we hear all around, especially the lies that come disguise as Gospel, as God's word.

There are many so called preachers today, as it has been always, that are praised for their preaching abilities, their thoughts, their contribution to the betterment of humanity, and even the transformation, or so they say, of people's lives for the better. Some are respected, given honorary doctorates, praised and honored, and followed by thousands if not millions. But of all they say, some say one thing, others another, and some even contradict each other. Some are called conservative theologians or preachers, also known as fundamentalist, others are to the other extreme, they are called liberals, or humanistic. The some conservatives turn the gospel into law and many liberals turn the human ability into gospel. Have you ever wondered who really has the truth, who really is speaking God's word? Did God really say or intend what they are saying God spoke or intend to do? Or are they telling us their own opinions? Now if they are just opinions, then sure, all of us have the right to your own opinion, right?

No, having and expressing you own opinion I think is good, but once, again, as long as it is just an opinion, but when those opinions become God's words, then we are given a lie and they are false prophets. And we, dear friends, we must watch out for those lies, and those false prophets. Because in the end there are consequences as the Old Testament reading for this morning tells us. There, God tells his people to watch out for those false prophets and to be aware of the consequences.

Now, from time to time we preachers might say the wrong thing, or speak something that we shouldn't, a false word; but that is not much of a problem, but when we hear preachers say: "Thus says the Lord," they we are in trouble.

It's one thing to make a mistake and repent; it's another to keep on speaking a lie with confidence as many preachers do today and sadly many are accepting their opinions as God given words. But one truth that comes across is how those preachers treat sin. Fundamentalists want you to work out your salvation not through confession and absolution as God requires of us, but as by you own abilities, or by not talking about sin, and liberals, want to get rid of sin, there is no such a thing as sin, they say, just imperfections.

But, then again, is nothing new, in the Old Testament we see the same thing happening. We see false prophets lying, removing sins from their preaching. (v 21).

As you see disaster was coming to God's people (vv 19–20). Judah had sinned against God and rejected him. Therefore, the storm of the Lord goes out in rage. The people of Israel will suffer the consequences for their sin.

But, their “experts,” professional prophets, their theologians, are oblivious to or are ignoring the truth (v 18). These false prophets continue to tell the people not to worry or be afraid. That they should go on as before, because there is no consequence to sin, they were free to be, free to be humans. These prophets don’t want to upset the status quo. But their claim they say came from God. They said this is what God desires for people, this is in God’s heart, he will not punish Judah for their sins. But that wasn’t the case, there was a consequence for their sins.

And only one man was telling the truth: Jeremiah, the prophet. Yes there was something happening because of Judah’s sins.

Now, it is a difficult truth to hear. The truth says that the sin of God’s people has consequences. This Word of God will break the people to their very core God said so: “Is not my word like fire, declares the LORD, and like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces?” (v 29).

This is harsh Word, harsh Word that may hurt the listeners and cut them to the core but it will also save them. By alerting them to the impending doom, they can turn away from their evil deeds (v 22). In other words to avoid their self-destruction.

In our society, “sin” is a word that is no longer in fashion, even inside the church. Many people don’t believe that sin is even real. If it is, it’s those “really bad” things—mass murder and terrorism, domestic violence, child abuse. Those “things” we do, things the church used to call “sin”—most people don’t believe they have any real consequences. And if you are listening to a liberal preacher, you will not hear of sin, but of hope, that you can be better, that better days await humanity. There is no discussion of sin there is no call to repentance, just a call to be better, after all one preacher said, that’s what Christ came to do, to help us be better, to make this planet better.

And many like to hear those words. We don’t want to be told we are sinners, good for nothing, because we do have capacities. Now that might be so, and sure we need to stress those human capacities, but we must remember that our human capacities do not bring us closer to God.

But that is something difficult to understand. God’s wrath against sin is nothing but a fairy tale. After how can a God who is loving and caring punish us for something stupid we have done? The liberal preacher also said. To mention sin and punishment is diminishing, is giving an image of a horrendous God who on the one hand loves, but on the other destroys. But God is not like that, the liberal theologian said. Instead God, he said loves for us to love what makes us feel good, therefore become better. There’s nothing to worry about. Everything will be just fine.

Now, in the midst of these false prophets, there is one group that must tell the truth: the Church and its true prophets.

God has given the Church his Word. He has spoken to us. We then are called to speak this Word with faithfulness (v 28) and denounce those prophets who say they speak for God but instead speak a lie.

There was a time when smoking denoted a social status, until cancer appeared, so people begun to protest and sue the cigarette companies. But the cigarette companies spent a lot of money to tell a lie, they paid doctors off to assure consumers that cigarettes are fine, they don’t cause cancer, but we all know too well that we have been lied to. And in the same way today, society spends a lot of money and resources

so that the Word of God is drowned out. Pop churches of positive “thinking Gospel” often leave out sin, thinking it’s not positive enough.

We, the Church, must call out sin for what it is. We must draw attention to the ugliness that all humanity carries. We must say that because of sin, disaster is coming.

Not because it’ll make us popular—no! We’ll surely draw the scorn of society and today’s false teachers. We do so that people can turn and repent (v 22).

Now, do we shy about hope then? Not at all, on the contrary, there is a better hope, true hope, for God’s wrath is for a purpose.

God’s Word and his wrath carry out the desire of his heart (v 20). He doesn’t anyone to perish, to be destroyed because of sin.

Yes, God’s Word breaks down and destroys. However, there is another purpose of God’s Word: forgiveness, life, and salvation, we must keep that in mind. We must look for it whenever we hear other modern day prophets and theologians.

Jeremiah tells us that in the last days, we will understand this clearly (v 20; Heb 1:2), and we ought to today. But the only way we would understand it is through Jesus Christ, God sends his Word made flesh.

He is the truth. He has taken the wrath of God against sin upon himself on the cross. By Jesus taking our wrath, we are now forgiven. Our sins are forgiven

And not only that, but actually his death destroyed all the lies that we are being fed today. And if there are lies still, it is because those who are false prophets have walked away from the benefits of Jesus death and resurrection. They have missed that important fact. And more, we do get a new nature that is able to understand God’s purposes. Therefore, dear friends, when the appeals or the nice words, ideas, or opinions of those false teachers seem sweet in your ears, ask this one question, where is Christ in their preaching, where is the redeeming power of Christ? If none there, walk away, and instead walk to the cross for there you will find life, life will be given to you, not by your powers and abilities but a gift given by God himself, through Christ. All begins with hearing God’s hard word, but that God’s hard word speaks the hard truth about sin so that we are saved.

Hearing about our sin and its consequences is never easy, but it is lifesaving, because it turns us away from destruction and to the arms of Jesus. Jesus takes our sin and gives us forgiveness. For God’s plan and his desire are not to condemn us, but to save us through his Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.