



Good Shepherd Lutheran Church

Watertown, WI

“Satan’s Song and Dance”

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“But the serpent said to the woman, ‘You will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil’” (Genesis 3:5).

November 25, 2012

Collect of the Day

Lord Jesus Christ, so govern our hearts and minds by Your Holy Spirit that, ever mindful of Your glorious return, we may persevere in both faith and holiness of living; for You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God now and forever. Amen.

During World War II, thousands of American servicemen in the Pacific theater listened to the voice of “Tokyo Rose”, part of the Japanese propaganda machine. The intent of the radio show was to destroy the morale of American troops. Yet it was a well-liked show because of the popular big-band music, and the husky voice and sultry ways of “Tokyo Rose”. She had a habit of calling her listeners the “Fighting Orphans”, implying that nobody back home cared about them anymore. She told stories of their wives cavorting with other men stateside, and of American politicians enjoying a comfy lifestyle while the “Orphans of the Pacific” marched toward a rendezvous with their graves.

I called one of our members, Colonel Lou Rieder who was a fighter pilot during the war. He remembers Tokyo Rose, but mostly as an amusing distraction, a show full of lies and half truths. She tried to convince them, Lou said, that their attacks were ineffective, they were losing, they should give up and go home and live rather than die out there for a lost cause. Sometimes she could be unnervingly informed . . . naming units, even individual servicemen, and telling them their efforts in a recent battle were futile. This was when she was most dangerous. The more truth she mixed into a lie, the stronger it became. Mostly, Tokyo Rose was ineffective. But sometimes her lies found their mark and were destructive.

On a side note, the main voice of Tokyo Rose, a woman by the name of Iva Toguri, after the war, moved to the north side of Chicago where she quietly operated a Japanese import store until her death in 2006.

Lies, half-truths, exaggerations . . . remember how the serpent lied in the Garden of Eden? One suspects it was a rather lengthy conversation, and that we have just the

extract, the synopsis. In any event, Satan doesn't come on too strong. "Did God *really* say you shall not eat of any tree in the garden?" Satan gives the impression he's on a fact finding mission. He's gathering information, that's all. What's the harm in that? And notice how cordial he is with Eve, how polished and polite. He's not hissing, or cursing, and Eve doesn't feel any need to flee from him. In fact, when asked about it later, Eve would report the serpent was "beguiling", that is, rather charming and attractive. William Shakespeare wrote, "The devil hath power to assume a pleasing shape." He seems to have done that in Genesis 3. One of the greatest lies that we all tend to believe is that those who are beautiful or handsome are also good. Make no mistake, Satan might be playing the part of a charming and well-mannered gentleman, but he's out to murder Eve and all mankind.

And notice how grievously he misquotes what God has said. What God said was, "You may surely eat of every tree of the garden", but not of this *one* tree. Not too much to ask! All these are yours; this one is off limits. Now, listen to Satan's summary of that: "Did God really say you shall not eat of *any* tree in the garden?" He misquotes and introduces a little confusion and simultaneously plants the seed of doubt. "Did God really say. . .?" In other words, "This doesn't seem quite right to me" Satan says. See how he cozies up to Eve and convinces her he's in her corner, and that maybe God really isn't. Maybe God is looking out after his own interests and not hers. Then, only after Eve is absolutely comfortable with her new friend, only then does the Serpent set the hook, and it's a whopper: "You will not surely die" he says. "For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God."

The Men's Group met again a couple of Saturdays ago. We noticed that first, the devil accuses God of lying to Eve, and then the devil goes on to lie to Eve. Isn't that just like the devil?! And we also noticed that just as he caused Eve to doubt God's Word, so he's been doing that ever since and every chance he gets.

A few weeks ago, there was another example. Some academic wanting to make a name for herself. . . throws out a fragment from a Gnostic writer who lived some 200 years after Christ (that's like you or me writing about Benjamin Franklin as if we were eye-witnesses) and this fragment alludes to Jesus being married. Of course, there's nothing to that, but the media has a feeding frenzy and by the time the church is voicing a reply the media is already tired of the topic; it's already old, stagnant news.

These things, (the DaVinci Code, the Gospel of Thomas, the Gospel of Judas, and the like), they are flashes in the pan. They're sparkly and draw a lot of attention to themselves and then, just like that they're gone and nobody thinks or hears much about them anymore. But they've already done their damage, especially for those on the fringes of the faith, those who, as God said, "hardly know their right hand from their left" (Jonah 4:11). These are the ones who can easily be led back into doubt and unbelief. And when they decide the Bible is no longer trustworthy, the consequences can be tragic.

Do you believe the devil exists and wishes you ill? Then know also this: every chance he gets, he will try to attack the integrity of God's Word. Remember how Jesus defeated the devil's lies? For forty days and nights Jesus had fasted, and at the end the devil makes his move and tries to tempt Jesus into sin. In response to each temptation, Jesus says, "It is written. . ." and then he quotes Scripture. Not even Jesus leans on his own reason or strength; he clings to God's Word instead. Should we do any different?

Back to Genesis 3: After the deed Adam and Eve hide themselves from the Lord. And when the Lord calls out to the man, Adam says he's only hiding because he happened to be naked. That's not the whole truth, is it. Adam is trying to mislead or distract the Lord away from the real issue of Adam's sin and rebellion.

One lie leads to another. One liar begets another. Adam and Eve have children, among them Cain and Abel. Cain murders Abel. "Then the LORD said to Cain, 'Where

is your brother Abel?” (4:9). Of course, God already knows, but he asks the question to give Cain an opportunity to confess. “Where’s your brother?” Cain takes a pass. “I do not know” he says. It’s a bald-faced lie.

Sinners beget sinners, and liars beget liars . . . all the way down to you and me. It starts early. I remember one Christmas Eve my nephew, a toddler at the time, came into the room, and he was fuming, not with rage, but with a dirty diaper. The stench nearly drove us out of the house. His mother asked, “Ben, do you have a dirty diapy?” And he looked her square in the eyes, stern and even a little angry at the insinuation, and shook his head [no].

Lying is easy for us because it’s in our nature. It’s who we are. As Isaiah says, we are “the offspring of liars” (57:4). And again, from chapter 6, Isaiah cries out, “I am a man of unclean lips living amidst a people of unclean lips.” Falsehood is so easy for us, the truth sometimes so difficult. Psalm 12 says “Everyone utters lies to his neighbor; with flattering lips and a double heart they speak” (v. 2). And we tolerate our own lies, but hate it when others lie to us. For example, someone desperate to win an argument, or at least not lose, makes up a lie and says, “I remember you specifically saying . . .” and then they quote you as saying something you never said, something you never would say. Anyone ever do that to you? Your options are limited. You can say, “I don’t recall that” which would be the truth but it makes you sound feeble minded at best or blatantly dishonest at worst. Or you can say, “You’re lying. I never said that!” which immediately escalates the confrontation to a new level.

Don’t you hate it when people lie to or about you? Otto Von Bismarck once said, “People never lie so much as before an election, during a war, or after a hunt.” That’s what made the political campaigning these past months nearly unbearable. We were buried in spin and exaggeration, rhetoric and slander. We were buried in numbers and statistics. And just how are we to know the truth about the Federal budget when it’s all we can do to balance his own

check books? So we leaned on the “independent fact checkers”, but were they perfectly unbiased and accurate and trustworthy? Were their sources? Candidates attacked each other during the debates, then afterwards oozed praise on each other and each other’s families. It was all so disingenuous. Proverbs 10 says, “Where there are many words, sin is not absent.”

Don’t you hate it when people lie? Turns out the Lord hates it too. Proverbs 6:16 says, “There are six things that the LORD hates.” That’s not a long list is it, but two that make the list are a) “a lying tongue”, and b), “a false witness who breathes out lies.” Don’t you hate it when people lie to you? The Lord also hates it when we lie. Psalm 5: 6, “The Lord abhors the deceitful man.” And Psalm 101, “No one who practices deceit shall dwell in my house; no one who utters lies shall stand in my presence” (v. 7).

Did Jesus ever lie? One of the things that got Jesus crucified was his uncompromising commitment to the truth. The truth about us and the truth about himself was intolerable . . . and in many places of the world, still is. Yet Jesus only spoke the Truth. In fact, he said, “I am the Truth.” He also said, “If you abide in my Word, you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free” (Jn. 8:31). That is, abide in his Word. You can trust it. It will not mislead you because He will not mislead you. Titus 1 simply says, “He is a God who never lies” (Titus 1:2). Think about that. That means you can trust him more than anyone else in the world because he will not lie to you.

Though he was completely innocent, some liars and false witnesses were rounded up to testify against him, and the religious authorities also tinkered with the truth as they lobbied Pilate to have him crucified. Pilate could sense people were lying to him, but which ones? Back inside, Jesus told him, I have come into the world – to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice.” Pilate, it seems, has had too many people tell him too many lies. He’s become jaded, and so in reply he simply says, “What is truth?” He’s saying he cannot trust what anyone says. Yet the one

person in the world he could have trusted was standing right in front of him. He was so close!

You know what happens next. Pilate caves in to the lies and demands of the crowd, and Jesus is crucified, and somehow at his crucifixion, all the lies of the world, yours and mine too, are on his back. Somehow in his death, those lies, and the punishment due them die with him. Somehow in his death and resurrection, we have forgiveness and life.

That's the promise of God's Word, and his Word is truth. It is untainted by lies. Psalm 12 says, "The Words of the Lord are pure words, like silver refined in a furnace . . . purified seven times." You can count on it.

The devil uses words to mislead and murder. God uses his Word to forgive and give life. Thanks be to God. Amen.

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