

15 March 2023
Lent 3 Midweek

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“Truth and Consequences”

In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

Truth and consequences. Not the game show that was on television when I was a wee lad, but the fact that when you tell the truth, there are often consequences. That’s what we heard in the Passion reading tonight.

But before getting to that, think about the fact that we don’t have to be taught how not to tell the truth; that is, to lie. Children figure that out early on. That when there are consequences to telling the truth, the way to get out of those consequences is to not tell the truth; that is, to lie. And sometimes it works. Not always, but if we can get out at least some consequences with our lies, then why not? And as we grow older, it continues. Maybe increases. And then maybe we don’t just lie to get out of consequences (like cheating on your taxes to pay less), but to get something I want (like lying on your resume). But it’s no surprise that if satan is the father of lies (as Jesus calls him, John 8), then injected with the poison of sin, lies become part of our vocabulary, what we sinful human beings do, too.

First up in the reading tonight were those false witnesses against Jesus. Were they lying to get what they wanted - maybe their 15 minutes of fame? Or were they lying because they had been paid to do so, so the Jewish leaders could get what they wanted - Jesus convicted of breaking their law. Or were they just repeating what they had heard, what everyone was saying, not knowing it was false? Whatever the reasons, whatever the cause, it wasn’t working. Their evidence did not agree, and according to the Law of Moses, you couldn’t convict without the uniform testimony of two or three witnesses.

But Jesus tells the truth. Though He knows there will be consequences for it; but He is willing to suffer the consequences. This is why He came, God in the flesh. To be life in the midst of a world of death. To be love in the midst of a world of hate. To be truth in the midst of a world of lies. So He will not lie. For while speaking the truth would have consequences *for Himself*, lying would have *far greater* consequences *for the world*, namely, it would mean the victory of satan. In the wilderness, satan tried to get Jesus to confirm who He was through signs and miracles. Here, satan wants Jesus to deny who He is, to save Himself. Jesus sees through it all, and simply speaks the truth. ***Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed? I am.*** Jesus is the great I AM; God in the flesh. He will not, can not, deny that. And contrary to what the high priest said, to speak that was not death-deserving blasphemy, but the life-giving truth.

The consequences then immediately start. The guards blindfold Him and strike Him and mock Him as they drag Him away.

Peter, meanwhile, is facing his own truth and consequences moment. Would he confess the truth or would he lie? This was the moment of truth. He had just hours before this boldly and defiantly told Jesus that *Even if I must die with you, I will not deny you!* (Matthew 26:35). But Jesus knew he would, and told Peter that he would. And now was the moment. While Jesus was inside, truthfully answering the question: ***Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?*** Peter is outside, lying: ***I do not know the man.***

Did he hesitate? Did he pause? Or did he speak quickly? The first one, the first denial, the first lie, was probably the hardest. The rest came easier. One lie leads to another, the heart hardens and the tongue gets used to it. Until the rooster crows. The rooster crows *the truth* - that day has broken, but it's really Peter's heart that breaks. Not that it wasn't broken before - broken by sin. It was. But now it is revealed. Peter's sin, fear, weakness, cowardess, all laid bare.

Peter feared the consequences. But what would they have been? Would he have gotten arrested and locked up with Jesus? Maybe. Would he have been mocked, made fun of? That seems more likely. But I recently heard someone wonder . . . what if the people in the courtyard who asked Peter about Jesus just wanted to hear more about Him? What was Jesus really like? Did He really do all those signs? Where did He get His knowledge from? If so, then like Jesus, Peter telling the truth would have consequences *for himself*, but his lying had consequences *for others* - maybe robbing them of a chance to hear and believe.

It is said of scandals in Washington that while what is done may be bad, the cover-up is worse. For us, perhaps we could say that the consequences we fear might be bad, but the lying makes it worse.

And then, of all people, **Judas** speaks truth. ***I have sinned. I have betrayed innocent blood.*** To which the chief priests and elders deny the truth by saying, ***What is that to us? That is your affair.*** No, that was the priests' affair. To offer sacrifices for sin. To lead the sinner to forgiveness. *That's* the truth they were to speak, *but would not*. And the consequence for that was a despairing sinner left in his sin. The consequence for that was Judas' life.

What are you afraid of? What are you ashamed of? What are you trying to get or get out of? In the world there are so many untruths, half-truths, twisted truths, and outright lies that it's often hard to know the truth. And a lie told often enough becomes the truth for many. And the consequences of this is the world as we see it and know it. A world that is a mess and a cesspool of sin and death. And the lies that live in our hearts and minds and

too often so easily roll off our tongues reveal the same in us.

So it's time to tell the truth. Lent is a time to tell the truth. To confess the reality of my sin, the depth of my depravity. To tell the truth and repent. And to hear that wonderful truth spoken back to us: *I forgive you all your sins*. The truth of Jesus. The truth of the cross. The truth that our great High Priest does not leave despairing sinners in their sin, but is faithful, and has provided forgiveness, leads us to that forgiveness, and speaks to us that forgiveness. For the truth is that Jesus suffered the consequences for your sins - all of them! - and died that you may live. Live in His forgiveness, live His life, live knowing that you cannot lie to God **and that you don't need to**. For as lie begets lie, so does truth beget truth. The truth of our sin is met with the truth of His forgiveness. You can lie and deny your sin, but the consequence of that is not life but death. Better is the truth. And while repenting of your sin may *feel like* dying, it is in reality the way of life. For the way of life is death and resurrection. First Jesus', and then yours. Dying to sin and rising to a new life. Dying to the lie that you can somehow find and do life yourself, and rising to the life Jesus has for you. A new life. An eternal life.

So Lent is about life. Jesus is life. The truth leads us to life. So it's time to tell the truth. For your life, the life of the Church, and the life of the world.

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.