

“The One in Whom There Is No Deceit”

St. John 1.43-51

2nd Sunday after the Epiphany 2006

The Word of God for our sermon meditation on this 2nd Sunday after the Epiphany is recorded for our faith and life in the Gospel of St. John, the 1st chapter, verses 43-51 as read earlier.

Six years ago during the 2000 elections Senator McCain of Arizona made quite a stir with His so-called “Straight Talk Express.” Portraying himself as a straight shooter, as one who would give the country the truth without deception, brought him quite a bit of support, even from those who were not Republicans. Eventually he lost the bid for the White House that year but the idea that Senator McCain is a straight talker still accompanies him to this day.

By and large we all like someone who gives it to us straight, who doesn’t hem and haw and beat around the bush. We like such people, despite their bluntness, because they get to the point even if we do not like the point they are making. Yet, such forthrightness and honesty resonates with people, even if the person speaking gets ahead of him or herself, even if the person is speaking before thinking. We like a person in whom we believe there is no deceit.

Nathanael is this sort of fellow we learn from the Lord Jesus Christ Himself in our Gospel lesson for today. Philip comes to Nathanael with exciting news – they have found the Prophet foretold in the Scriptures. He is Jesus, the Son of Joseph, of Nazareth. Nathanael, as you can tell, is not impressed. After all, he knows what the Old Testament said about the Messiah, how He would come from Judah, from Bethlehem. He also knows that Nazareth is an insignificant town, a backwater place, from which nothing of note had ever emerged.

Nathanael blurts out what he thinks when he hears this about Jesus rushing to judgment and prejudging Him all on the basis of Nazareth’s insignificance as a town. Yet, Philip’s invitation to set aside his bias and to come and see Jesus brings Nathanael before the all-knowing Lord of all. Upon seeing Nathanael the Lord Jesus reveals His knowledge of him sitting under the fig tree and proclaims that here is an Israelite in whom there is no deceit. Nathanael is amazed at the Lord’s knowledge of him and

announces that Jesus is who Philip proclaimed Him to be – the King of Israel.

As God's people we know that we are to be forthright and honest with all people. This is the very intent of the 8th Commandment where we are exhorted not to bear false witness against another. We are taught by the Lord in this commandment to speak well of others, not to speak ill of another and ruin their reputation, and to speak the truth in the kindest way. Yet, despite these instructions to watch our tongue, we in our sinfulness often prejudge others wrongly and are deceitful.

We often, many times without even thinking (much like Nathanael) will say what is on our minds without even considering the consequences of such words. Some of us have the attitude that we are going to say what we want to say regardless of what the Scriptures teach us about speaking and the use of our tongue and how it might hurt and harm another. With bluntness and with harshness words are spoken often with the defense of "at least I spoke the truth."

Such unloving speaking of the truth, however, is not acceptable to the Lord. Nathanael was no doubt embarrassed that the Lord Jesus knew what he had said to Philip while under the fig tree. Nathanael knew there was no way he could hide his rashness and bluntness from Jesus since Jesus had already told him what he had said. True, Nathanael spoke his mind, but he also sinfully prejudged Jesus and spoke in an unloving manner about our Lord and Nazareth itself.

We can see a lot of ourselves in Nathanael at times, can we not? For do we not, based on words and the reputation that precedes the person or place, make derogatory comments and biting remarks about other people and places? When we speak do we even stop and consider the 8th Commandment and the Lord's instructions about the use of our tongues or do we, in imitation of Nathanael in our text, just blurt it out without a second thought?

Just as we resemble Nathanael in this in our lives, saying hurtful things about others in their presence or not, we also in our sin, hoping not to upset anyone, speak on the sly, deceiving others and withhold the truth as well, do we not? How often do we find

ourselves when confronted by another, whether in school, in the workplace, at home, and elsewhere, hemming and hawing, beating around the bush because we do not want to tell the truth about ourselves or another? How often do we deceive and present a flattering but untruthful picture all for the sake of saving our skin, avoiding punishment, and creating hard feelings?

It is remarkable that, like Nathanael, we are willing to speak behind the back of another and say whatever is on our minds, but when the time comes to speak face to face we are deceitful and do not say what we had the courage to say in their absence. This is not how we are to behave as God's people. This is not how we are to use our tongues, our mouths, and our words.

If we have an issue with someone, the Bible teaches, if someone has offended us and sinned against us, we are to go to them and speak to them alone about it. We are not to run off and tell everyone else about it. We are not to deceive the person with whom we have the issue should they come to confront us by dismissing it and saying "it's nothing." We are not, the Bible teaches us, to be deceitful, to speak badly of another, and prejudge others based on what others have said any more than Nathanael should have said what he said of Jesus and Nazareth.

Knowing that each of us does this, that we misuse our tongues and our words with our fellow members here at St. Paul's, with our family members, and with others at work, in politics, at school and more, are we willing to speak frankly without prejudice about ourselves when it comes to our sinfulness in this area of our lives? In other words, are we willing to be as harsh, judgmental, and critical of ourselves as we are of others, even those nearest and dearest to us at home and church?

The Holy Spirit announces through St. John in his First Epistle (1.8) that "if we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us." Though we are to have no deceit, we are not always honest about ourselves before God and others. We are willing to speak of the faults of others but we do our utmost to hide and conceal our own. But it does us no good for if the Lord knew what Nathanael had said under the fig tree, He certainly knows what we have said and thought as well in our lives.

Such violations of His will should put us under God's judgment and damn us and they would were it not for the Lord Jesus. For Jesus is the One in whom there is truly no deceit. Jesus is the One who is the True and Faithful Witness. Jesus is the One who always spoke the truth, never deceived or spoke a word in sin even when He was suffering and dying on the cross. Even when He was being taunted and cursed on the cross, Jesus said nothing sinful and continued to His dying breath to fulfill the whole will and law of God for our forgiveness and salvation.

So teaches St. Peter when he writes in his First Epistle (2.22-24a) "[Jesus] 'committed no sin, Nor was deceit found in His mouth'; who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed *Himself* to Him who judges righteously; who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree." The all-knowing Savior of the world entered our world speaking the words of peace and pardon to us while bearing our words of sin, deceit, and harm on His own body on the cross of Calvary.

All this Jesus did willingly as the Savior of us all, as Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of Man come to deliver us from our sin to the glories of heaven. The Scriptures teach that for Jesus' sake and on account of His innocent sufferings and death on the cross, our sins, including our sins of misusing our tongues, our mouths, our words, have all been paid for and by faith in Him we are forgiven our every transgression. For the Spirit also teaches through St. John in his First Epistle (1.9) "Whenever we confess our sins, [God] is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

In the One in whom there is no deceit we hear the pronouncement from the Father in heaven Himself that our sins are forgiven us. In the One who knows all things and in whom there is no deceit we hear the decree that our sins have been washed from us and God remembers them no more. In the One in whom there is no deceit and who always keeps His word, we hear that God's judgment for our sins has been served and on Judgment Day we will see heaven open and the Son of Man, Jesus our Savior, with the angels, and be welcomed into His eternal kingdom. In the One who is the final revelation, the last Word of the Father to the world,

we are pronounced to be those in whom there is no deceit through faith.

Since Jesus is the truthful One, since there is no deceit, and no lie in Him we know His word of forgiveness for us is true and sure. We never have to doubt it, never have to question it, never have to wonder if He is telling us the truth. For Jesus always puts it to us straight and tells us truthfully we are, through faith in His name, forgiven all our sins and have the assurance of life everlasting with Him in heaven.

Therefore, as those who have been redeemed through the cross of Jesus of Nazareth, through the One in whom there is no deceit nor any sin, strive by the Spirit to use your tongues, your mouths, your words in ways pleasing to God. Live to righteousness, setting aside your prejudices and the deceitful ways of the world. Labor by God's grace to follow and fulfill the will and commands of God by faith that He may be glorified and praised by you in every thought, word, and deed knowing that you have been saved by grace through faith in the One in whom there is truly no deceit. Amen.

+Soli Deo Gloria+