



Christ Lutheran Church

605 South Fifth Street • Norfolk, NE 68701

Share God's Word, share His love, and do it now!

Pastor Chip Winter, Director of Ministries

“Good News vs. Fake News.” – St. John 5:9-15

6th Sunday of Easter – May 13, 2018

Pastor Chip Winter

Grace to you and Peace, from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, Amen. The text for our sermon is the Epistle appointed for the day and already read for us from St. John's first epistle.

My dear family in Christ, it was a little over eleven years ago when Christianity's imminent demise was heralded/anticipated on NBC's Today Show (Today archives February 26, 2007) and mentioned on CNN. The report was that they had found the bones of Jesus. What were Christians going to do or believe now?

All the fuss arose from a construction excavation crew who had, in the Old City of Jerusalem, accidentally breeched an underground burial chamber that contained several ossuaries. Ossuaries are carved boxes containing the bones of those who died and were buried according to the custom at the time of Christ Jesus. If it had ever struck you as odd that the Bible goes to some length to explain that Jesus had been buried in a tomb wherein no one had yet been buried (for that is assumed among us!), this is why. A body was buried in the rock hewn tomb and, an extensive time later after decomposition had taken place, the remains would be collected – now just bones – and those would be stored in bone boxes stacked and kept in suitable chambers.

Such an accidental finding had happened before, when the bone box of **Caiaphas**, the High Priest in the day of Jesus, was discovered. This time, one of the boxes was inscribed with the name “**Jesus**,” and another one nearby, “**Mary**.” Well, well! Jesus must have had a wife and kids, so the news blurbs surmised. What a lead in for “*Larry King Live*” that evening! He just happened to have movie director James Cameron already booked to promote his film “*The Lost Tomb of Jesus*” which was soon to be released – Cameron and another director had already heard of this discovery quite a bit earlier.

Actually, the documentary was a rehash of a 27-year-old archeological find that had long been debunked by archeologists and scholars! Among other things “Yeshua” and “Miriam” are extremely common names from that period in that region. Even now, at 38 years after the supposed “find” people have not gotten the memo and just like with Dan Brown’s *Da Vinci Code* the supposed intrigue gets lapped up.

Those who latch on to sensational stories regarding Jesus that appear to be breaking news are discovering nothing new. “**Satan seldom tells new lies**,” an old saying goes. Ancient heresies show up in recycled teachings and movies and articles, today, often around Christmas or Easter. They are couched as “discoveries” of things which the church has suppressed for centuries and now need to be brought into the light.

St. John addresses the false teaching that Jesus could not be God and man. In the previous verses – which we examined last week – John reminds us of three things that testify to Jesus being the divine Son of God: The **Spirit** (Who constantly points to Jesus as the Son), the **water** (from which Jesus rose up at His baptism) and the **blood** (shed for the forgiveness of sins).

Contrary to Cameron’s documentary mentioned above, St. John explains “**If we receive the testimony of men, the testimony of God is greater, for this is the testimony of God that he has**

borne concerning his Son. Whoever believe in the Son of God has the testimony in himself. Whoever does not believe God has made him a liar, because he has not believed in the testimony that God has borne concerning his Son” (9-10). This is the ultimate in Good News versus fake news!

The 2016 presidential campaign popularized the phrase “fake news.” Both sides accused the other of trying to mislead voters into thinking that something was newsworthy and true enough to dismiss the other as a candidate for the highest office in the land. It was confusing and it took diligence to sort things out. Modern campaigns have often been waged with the concept that if a false narrative – a lie – is repeated often enough it will be believed by enough people to make an impact.

But sowing doubt and confusion on purpose plays in a thousand places: on the college campus, in social media, in social relationships and...in religion. The devil is more than willing to share his tactics – time-tested and productive – with all.

The testimony of men says there is no God, that the Bible is a myth made by men, that abortion is not killing a human being, that sexual mores are antiquated and that sin, overall, is an archaic idea introduced to control people. Sometimes these ideas of men are peddled by people claiming to be speaking for God. They try to mislead the casual observer and the weaker in faith by either dismissing or twisting God’s own Word.

The testimony of men keeps us bound in confusion and darkness, bringing nothing but eternal death. The greater testimony, the testimony of God, is the opposite. John speaks of the truth of God’s testimony that **“give us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life”** (11-12). We see that this is

distinction between Good and fake news is of life and death importance and eternally worth the fight.

As believers in the Son of God we have this testimony of life. It was placed in our lives in Baptism and ever since we have born His name. We, too, are God's children who possess eternal life by the work of Christ Jesus, the Son of God, who has delivered us from death to life through His victorious resurrection.

Now does this mean we won't get confused now and then with the testimony of men being forced upon us day and night? Unfortunately, no. Remember, the devil has enthusiastically franchised his methods of deception to everyone who does not believe God and calls him a liar in this vale of tears.

This is compounded by the fact that many Christians are reluctant to study the testimony of God or teach it to their children, and these for myriad reasons. It is overlooking a very dangerous time for people to say (1) they don't have time, or that (2) they are not knowledgeable enough to understand it and teach it to their kids. It (3) clashes with the culture that they've come to enjoy and would put them at odds with their friends or coworkers, should the topic ever come up. We think (4) "Life is too complicated to bring religion into daily activities. Can't we just say 'I love Jesus' and glide through on the strength of what we remember being taught by the nice lady in Sunday School, or the confirmation class we (reluctantly) went through?"

I am in no way saying (and I'm thinking in particular of those graduating high school this weekend) that the teaching you received wasn't good and faithful; it just that when we find ourselves up against the devil, the world and our flesh, we are going to fall for the fake news delivered by enthusiastic unbelieving professors, media, Jehovah's Witnesses, people who are "spiritual but not religious", Mormons, pop culture icons, the cousin who turned Buddhist and all

our hipster friends. Sadly such people are often more willing to talk about what they believe than we are. Some suggest that we are outnumbered by fake news purveyors on a daily basis by at least 10 to 1.

A while back there was a series of public service commercials that featured someone gleefully saying **“If you don’t want to teach your child about sex, I will!”** That was followed by a succession of various types of people repeating **“I will!” “I will!” “I Will!”** The chilling reality is that’s what we’re up against not simply when having **“the talk”** about **“the birds and the bees.”** It’s what we’re up against when it comes to talking about, learning about or teaching children about the testimony of God. If we don’t do it, someone else is eager to engage them in the testimony of men – fake news.

But we are blessed to have ready access to the testimony of God. We assemble here around God’s Word and His sacraments to receive life, salvation, and the forgiveness of sins. As Pastor Goehmann said two weeks ago, throughout his three letters, St. John refers to us frequently and lovingly as precious “children” – children of God whom he did not want to see misled by misinformation and falsehood. **“I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life”** (13).

With this testimony among us we are confident to go in prayer before our Father in heaven for Jesus’ sake, asking anything and knowing he hears us. It is definitely the will of this God that the testimony we bear be a light, not only to our brothers and sisters in Christ, but to our neighbors misled and lost in fake news. Our is the Good news: Whoever has the Son has life! Amen.