

## “No Deceit”

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Wittenberg Lutheran Center

It's good to be back up in the pulpit again! It's a new year, and a new semester, and we've got some catching up to do, don't we? So... Heard any fake news lately? Ran into anything deceptive or deceitful lately? A rhetorical question, I know... of course you have. We're surrounded by deceit – frauds, imposters, dishonesty and guile of every kind, on both sides, in front and in back of us. Every level of government seems to be prone to deceit in one way or another. The news media is inclined to deceptive journalism, whether they lean left or right. They'll never admit it. Many team sports openly incorporate deception into their game plans. Of course, that's all part of the game and good, clean fun, but it reveals how engrained we have become with regard to trickery. We know better than to trust what's on the surface all the time. All that glitters is not gold. Celebrated showmen like P.T. Barnum remind us, “There's a sucker born every minute.” He would know.

Because for every sucker that's born, there's a dozen who are eager to take advantage of them. Parents send their children off to school, and regardless of their age, they pray for their protection from the wolves out there lurking, who might catch some naïve waif off guard. The source of all this deception is the father of lies, the old evil foe; “*deep guile and great might...*” are his dread arms in fight. And in the last days – these last days, John the evangelist warns us of the spirit of antichrist [2 John 1:7], deceivers with regard to the person and nature of Jesus. John had seen the Apocalypse, witnessed the final destruction of the beast Satan, and he is the one who testifies of the things he saw Jesus do – things he and his friends saw with their own eyes. He has warned us about these deceivers. So it's really refreshing to hear John speak about his colleague and friend Nathanael [John 1:43-51]. Here is a man Jesus calls a model Israelite, one who harbors no deceit.

The Psalm [32:2] on the cover of your bulletin announces, “*Blessed is the man... in whose spirit there is no deceit*”; the Lord counts no iniquity against him. Jesus saw this quality in Nathanael. That doesn't mean that he was pure or righteous on his own, but his transparency before Christ is notable and commendable. No deceit, no guile, no B.S. Now maybe Nathanael wasn't the best Spades partner you could pick, nor would he have been a very successful poker player or used car dealer, but he was clearly who he was. What you see is what you get. No false motives; no hidden agenda. What a gift of God, and what a nice introduction to Nathanael Bar-tholomew, the son of Talmay. If you know someone like that, you know how refreshing that is; a friend that you don't have to figure out in order to know. It's the kind of friend who calls it as he sees it, tells it like it is, whose words you can trust. Don't let go of a friend like that. They may be the only one who can cause you to look at yourself honestly. John knows how important that is, too.

John's letters warn us about the trap of lying to ourselves. You see, our enemy the devil will use whatever means necessary to trick us, even if it involves deluding our own perception. Satan tempts us with the delusion that we're good enough on our own. He leads us away from God's truth that we've come to know through the Holy Bible. John talks about the danger of self-deceit before God [1 John 3], “*If we say we have no sin...*” if we deny that we have broken our covenant with God, we're fooling ourselves, we deceive ourselves “*and the truth is not in us*”. Devoid of that truth, we would have no hope of seeing our Redeemer Jesus as He is, as our rescue from the punishment we deserve. And once we think that we don't need Jesus, we're

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empty; there's no truth to be found in us. We're open to any and all deceptions that come along, because there's nothing to stand in their way. That's a scary thought, but it's certainly not out of the question, is it?

God's plan for our rescue includes our honest confession, and a humble view of ourselves. The Holy Spirit produces that kind of faithful humility. Like when we sing [LSB 613], “*Oh God, be merciful to me.*” It's a hope that's prompted by faith, trusting not the devil's lies, but trusting instead in the steadfast truth that God has told us about Himself and about ourselves. By that faith, we see the truth of our sins and realize that our omniscient, all-knowing God has already seen them, too. He sees what's down deep in our heart, and if we think we're living a life that's free of sin, we're fools. Worse than fools, we're liars. “*BUT, if we confess our sins...*” if we're honest about our thoughts, our words, and our deeds, and admit our shame and sinfulness before God, “*God, Who is faithful and just, will forgive our sins and cleanse us of all un-righteousness.*” The precious blood of Jesus cleanses us, and washes all our sinfulness in a flood of divine, righteous mercy. By that purging of our sin, we're justified before God – made righteous in His eyes, and at peace with Him Who knows all and sees all.

We need these reminders, and we come in faith to hear again what God has done for us in Christ Jesus. We've been delivered from the punishment we deserved! Now we're free to live in that grace, and to live openly proclaiming it, not hiding our deliverance in our heart, but exhibiting it for the world to see. Today's epistle [1 Corinthians 6:12-20] reminds us of God's promise of a resurrection from our earthly grave, just like Jesus was resurrected. And with that joyful good news in mind, St. Paul gives us an exhortation, that we flee from immorality of all kinds. He urges us to turn from the evil Satan uses to try to lure us into sin. God's Word warns us of the temptations we are bound to face, so that when they come we'll be prepared – armed with the weapons we need to repel the onslaught. And God sees us...

Just like He saw Nathanael, sitting there under the fig tree, the all-knowing, all-seeing God has seen you. He knows the worldly lies you face every day, and the temptations that are placed in your path. But He has better things for us! He desires that your heart be cleansed and free from the treachery and guile that stands between us and grace. He wants us to cling to Him and His truth and not let go, to place our confidence and trust in Him alone, and to be the kind of Israelites we were meant to be – true children of God by faith. He desires that we confess that faith the way Nathanael did, saying to Jesus “*You are the Son of God!*” That's the same confession, by the way, that we hear several times in John's gospel. Read them for yourselves... Nathanael's proclamation joins those of John the Baptist and Andrew (ch. 1), the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well (ch. 4), Martha (ch. 11), Thomas (ch. 20). Jesus truly is the incarnate Word and the Son of Man.

Not only that, Jesus most certainly calls Himself the Son of God in John's gospel (ch. 10, 11) too, and John begins and concludes his gospel with his own firm confession: “*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God... These things are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you will live.*” Divine wisdom and love sent Jesus; He is the true Son of God and the Son of man. He has purchased you with a great price! That's the truth! His love has found you. He calls you by name. He gives you a new name – His own. Baptized into His name, you bear the title

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“Christian”! Blessed are those whose spirit harbors no deceit! Blessed are those who don’t go astray after a lie!

There’s a lot of Oprah fans out there... She has a lot of followers (disciples?) and she’s now encouraging everyone to follow “your own truth”, but she doesn’t seem to want to limit this to the truth of God. This is pretty concerning, really. We’ve seen all kinds of trickery and collusion passed off as situational truth – alternative truth. We’ve seen dishonesty and treachery hiding under the veil of “personal truth”. Just in the last few years, we’ve seen a famous Olympian express his own truth that he’s a woman, when it’s obvious that he’s not. We’ve seen a fair-skinned bureaucrat falsely insisting that she’s an African American, based only on her own truth. Satan uses all kinds of wicked deceptions to drive us into the fog, and cause people to perish because they refuse to live in the light, and love God’s truth and be saved.

That’s why it’s so important to proclaim God’s truth according to His Word. The Word of the Lord endures forever! So shen confronted with the fake, the deceitful, the false, don’t go astray after a lie; don’t hide God’s deliverance in your heart [Psalm 40:4, 10]. Know this: Jesus is the Way, the Truth, and the Life; NO ONE comes to the Father except through Him! ...and respond with confidence, and you will see great, great things! Amen.