

Sermon August 30th, 2020. “Don’t be Deceived” Mark Knauss. Final Draft

I would like to start this sermon by throwing out a few conspiracy theories that I found on the internet.

- 1 - The earth is flat
- 2 - The moon doesn’t exist – it is a hologram
- 3 - Stonehenge was built by aliens or by knowledge that aliens gave to humanity
- 4 - The years of 614 – 911 did not exist (297 years) and has been faked
- 5 - Elvis is still alive.

https://www.boredpanda.com/crazy-unbelievable-history-conspiracy-theories/?utm_source=search.yahoo&utm_medium=referral&utm_campaign=organic

There is plenty of information out there that is meant to deceive us. I think we can all agree that you cannot believe everything you read or hear. Let’s bring this closer to home.

Sometimes, we are not honest. **[SLIDE – picture of a man or woman being dishonest]**. For example, my family has confronted me on more than one occasion with discrepancies surrounding how many cookies I really eat at Christmas, or how long I truly napped.

Honesty exists as a range. We have ‘the little white lie’ on one end and full-blown lie on the other. It gets complicated when we deceive ourselves. For example, when I have to work the next day I tell myself that I will go to bed by 10 pm. But when 10 pm rolls around, I jump on the computer “for just 10 minutes.” One hour later, I realize that it is after 11 and there go my plans for a full night's sleep. I tell myself, ‘five to six hours of sleep is enough!’ The next day I am craving a nap at 1 pm. Later that night, I sit in front of the computer at 10 pm “for just 10 minutes.” I keep lying to myself because I enjoy reading ‘who knows what’ until late into the night.

In our Gospel reading today, Peter says something wrong, at least in part, because he is deceiving himself. Jesus tells Peter that he will die at the hands of those in power and Peter

responds, “God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you.” (Matthew 16:22). Jesus responds harshly to Peter with **[SLIDE Matthew 16:23. “Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.”]**

Jesus foretells what lies in his future and Peter doesn't want to believe it. He is deceiving himself in believing that the status quo is good enough. **[SLIDE picture of rocks]**. Last week Jesus told Peter his faith was like a rock that the church will be built on. Now Peter's rock is a stumbling block that is getting in Jesus' way, and Jesus calls him on it.

Peter doesn't mean to be offensive or to be an obstructionist. He is just watching out for Jesus and perhaps himself. But in doing this he is standing in the way of God's plans. Jesus calls Peter Satan! This could be a reference to when Satan tempted Jesus in the wilderness.

[SLIDE – picture of Jesus being tempted by the devil]. Now, Satan is tempting Jesus to maintain the status quo. Like in the wilderness, Satan tempts Jesus to put his needs first and turn stones into bread. After all, he is hungry. Jesus doesn't do it. Instead, Jesus uses God's power to turn a few loaves of bread and fish into a meal that feeds the 5,000. **[SLIDE – picture of Jesus feeding the 5,000]**. God's Kingdom is for the benefit of all. Conversely, Satan is tempting Peter and Jesus to take care of themselves.

I can't blame Peter. **[SLIDE – picture of Peter with Jesus]**. I imagine he is comfortable with the way things are going – with the status quo. He gets to hang out with Jesus, he is learning who Jesus is, and they get to do really great things together. Peter is content. Heck, Peter is happy. Isn't that what we all want? To be content and happy? We deceive ourselves if

we think that is all there is to life with Jesus. God's kingdom is about more than our happiness and comfort. It's about the heart of God.

How do we know what lies in the heart of God? Well, at the beginning of Matthew's gospel, we have the beatitudes. I want to take a moment to read the first eight as they provide a framework for our sermon today.

[SLIDE Matthew 5:3-10

3" Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

4" Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

5" Blessed are the gentle, for they shall inherit the earth.

6" Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

7" Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.

8" Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

9" Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.

10" Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.]

The beatitudes tell us what posture of the heart gets God's attention. That when our hearts are oriented to these things, they align with God's heart. There is nothing in here that says, "Blessed are those who watch out for themselves." When we place our desires in place of God's wishes, we are deceiving ourselves, but God is not fooled. God has another plan.

Trying to do what seems right can be tricky. One moment we can be the rock on which Christ's church is built. **[SLIDE – picture of rocks obstructing a path]**. Another moment we are

throwing those same rocks in the path of the kingdom workers. Just like Peter, we too can be deceived.

Jesus is on a path that will lead to great suffering at the hands of those in power who are complicit in the structures of oppression and holding back God's Kingdom. Jesus is going to fulfill God's plans and upend the status quo that Peter finds comfortable.

What do we know about God's plans? Well, they are the same today because God does not change. Know that we have a God of justice. God hates oppression and injustice. **[SLIDE – picture of the poor in biblical times]**. The Bible is filled with stories of God saying, "things need to change" and humanity replies, "yeah...maybe," or "let's not rock the boat too much, because it may cost me too much." Sometimes we respond, "Can't we make a little change but keep the status quo?"

What's wrong with the status quo? Well, we live in a world where all people are sinful. That we all agree on. Let's go deeper. We live in a society made up of institutions that are designed and maintained by people. If we know that all people are sinful and fall short of God's glory, does it not logically follow that societal structures (institutions) are sinful too? The status quo is influenced if not maintained by these institutions. To say that an earthly system is without sin is to turn it into an idol. That breaks the first commandment. **[SLIDE - "You shall have no other Gods!"]** Only God is perfect and sinless. Only God (Father, Son, and Holy Ghost) is worthy of our praise. Let's make that clear.

We have a God of Justice. **[SLIDE – Picture of God on a throne]**. When our institutions treat people differently because of their race, age, gender, or belief system, that is injustice. If we benefit from such systems in any way or at any time, then we are a part of this mess too,

and God calls all of us to make it right. It is easy to be like Peter and say, “I know we are followers of Jesus but let us not talk about the cross and what this might cost me.”

Only God’s justice is true and pure. If the status quo makes us secure and comfortable, then we, like Peter, must not be deceived into believing that all is good. Do institutions that make us secure provide all people in our country with the same security? If these societal structures in any way support injustice or inequality then we can be assured that God wants them to change. **[SLIDE – multiracial picture]**.

What is our responsibility as the Church of Christ? This is where we stand apart from the world. This is where we separate from many in our own country, and we answer biblically. We answer from the cross where God said, “I want to dismantle systems of oppression and injustice so badly that you can’t stop me. Not even by nailing me to a cross.”

[SLIDE – picture of standing at the foot of the cross]. That’s where we stand, at the foot of the cross, looking up. We are not to try and take the reins like Peter and slow down or derail God’s purposes. We are sinful. If we try and take the reins from God, then we will mess it up. We are called to get behind Jesus and to follow him because Jesus goes where we can’t. Christ goes through death and paves the way into eternity for us all. **[SLIDE – picture of people following Jesus]**. We follow Jesus because we know that God’s justice will prevail in the end. Injustice never has a chance with God. If we try to get in front of Jesus and take the lead, then we will be deceived by our sinful nature.

One day, for all of us, this life will end. We will leave it all behind. Not one coin, piece of property, item of clothing or societal institution will accompany us. The only accompaniment into heaven is the only one we need – Jesus Christ.

What do we do now? We must ask, “What systems do I benefit from that others do not?” Know that God calls US to do the legwork and find out. We are to clear the rubble that causes others to stumble. **[SLIDE – picture of people moving stones out of the way].**

When you think about the changes our country is in dire need of, search your heart first. Remember the words we pray every week, “We deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.” Don’t be deceived by the false security of the status quo. Look for the heart of God trying to settle into your heart. Are you longing for peace, mercy, righteousness, or justice? If you are, then you are not alone, because God is there too.

We don’t make this journey alone. Pastor Doug has a camp T-shirt from Colorado with the following scriptural quote on it.

[SLIDE - “What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God.” Micah 6:8b]

These are the rocks we stand on that sets us apart from our culture.

What do we do now? It is not a big leap here to suppose that many people go to bed and pray for an end to suffering, poverty, oppression, and all forms of discrimination and racism. Of course, we should pray the same. But we are God’s people, and God’s people act! With God in our hearts, the Reverend Dr. Joy Moore says for us to ‘be the answer to someone else's prayer,’ because that’s what followers of Jesus do.

AMEN