

TRUTH LIES CONSEQUENCES

“Teacher, we know that 1) You are a truthful man; 2) You teach the way of God; 3) You are not concerned with anyone’s opinion; 4) You do not regard a person’s status.” Every one of those short statements about Jesus happens to be true. Those challenging Jesus are the ones speaking them BUT... even though they are speaking them AND they are true--these challengers do not believe one word of the truth they have just spoken. They are using these expressions of truth to soften Jesus up and get him to lower his defenses so that they can spring a trap on him and pounce on him. They are using the Truth like a weapon against the One who actually is The Truth. This is one of those damned if you do; damned if you don’t conundrums. But they are too clever by half. Actually they never stand a chance against Jesus. Talk about smart and quick. They are not. He is.

Those religious leaders hate him—for a variety of reasons. And they are afraid of him—for a variety of reasons. They have decided for “the good of all” that he has to go. For them the end (removing Jesus from the scene) justifies the means (use the truth in a false way to entrap and then remove Jesus from the scene). They believe that their hatred for him is justified and therefore justifies whatever it takes to get rid of him. There is a lot of the very same attitude of mind around in our country today. There are an awful lot of people who have deep anger and great hatred in their hearts for a particular person or a certain group of people. They feel perfectly justified in their hatred. They will use and misuse the truth and they will do whatever it takes by pretty much any means necessary to emerge victorious. And defeat their enemy. But all of that is false and we cannot allow ourselves to follow in their footsteps.

They forget that the moral maxim is NOT: The end justifies the means. The moral maxim IS: The end does NOT justify the means. I preached on this a few weeks back. No. We are not free to do whatever we want and whatever we think we can get away with just because we think or feel we are right. Especially if our thinking we are right is based solely on the feeling we have of being right. Feelings are notoriously fickle when used as a moral barometer of what we should do. My feelings ARE NOT my conscience. All these Pharisees and Herodians feel sure they are right and justified but they have become so sure and so outraged that they are now lying and actually plotting murder and conspiring to eliminate the Holy One of God all in the name of God’s Word. They have already decided that they have quite the proper understanding of God’s Word, thank you very much, and

they are purposely able to defend that interpretation of God's Word. They are no longer listening for God to speak anew. They feel sure they know.

Sometimes those who get carried away in their devotion to their convictions go overboard because they are so sure that what they are doing is serving God and purifying the landscape of any blight created by a sinful man or woman. And there they are--full of resentment, full of bile at their displeasure at and distaste for the person; and full of glee at the person's destruction or demise. They are full of mean spirited rancor. Folks, we have to be very careful not to fall into similar thinking. I mean, how can one serve the living God if at the same time he or she is filled with hatred and vengeance? They cannot. We cannot. If you are harboring hatred, contempt, disdain for another person or persons then you have stepped away from the kingdom of God, no matter what your reasons. No matter how justified you feel. For none of those realities are to be found in heart of God or the kingdom of God.

In today's story of Jesus being challenged we must see ourselves as being challenged by Him in terms of our attitudes toward an individual person or a certain group of persons or a certain kind of group of persons. The second of the two great commandments of Jesus is "Love your neighbor—as yourself." There is nothing in the words or teaching of Jesus ever that supports despising another. On the contrary his teaching bids us love our enemy. If we do not we shall end up being destroyed by our hatred instead. It's just too easy to fall into that trap. Let's accept Jesus' admonition instead. To render to God what belongs to God. Which, by the way, is everything we have and are. Heart and soul. That's what belongs to God. And let's leave the judging—of us and others—to Him.

May the Lord bless us today and give us his peace.