

Trinity 8, 2020

Fleeced and Accepted

Matthew 7:15-21

St. Andrew's – Jacksonville, OR — By Fr. Bill Baker

I titled today's sermon "Fleeced and Accepted" for a very pointed reason; we have been warned by our Lord of wolves in sheep's clothing and yet we are slowly accommodating and accepting the lies and deceptions they present that are contrary to Christian ethics. The more we accept the ideals and practices of the wolves the less fleece they need to cover their deceptions. I was going to give you a list of several anti Christian practices being accepted today until I came across one in particular that shouts loud enough to be on its own, a prime example of a frog sitting in hot water. Ever hear of Polyamory?

Polyamory is the practice of having more than one significant partner, with equal and consensual consent of all partners involved. It is being described as "ethical and responsible non-monogamy." While still not legal, the debate has begun and it is the Christian stance of monogamy that is said to be creating a taboo against its acceptance. One way they propose to circumvent the normative ideals of monogamy is to abolish marriage all together. Far fetched? From what I see in this world today...I'm not going to take anything for granted. The New York Times ran an article on July 5, 2020 on page A21 announcing that the city of Somerville, Massachusetts is now recognizing polyamorous relationships. "Love is love" they claim, "why limit it to one person."

"Beware of false prophets, (our Lord warns), which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves." They are attractive deceivers, liars and manipulators with misleading narratives and false agendas! St. Chrysostom warns us that *"...false prophets here does not refer to heretics but rather to persons who live morally corrupt lives while wearing a mask (cloak) of virtue."* It is this cloak of virtue, the very fleece of deception that is no longer required as the ideals of the wolves are becoming more and more acceptable to a world afraid to stand for Christian morality. Jesus is reminding those willing to listen to remember what happened to their ancestors who were led astray by

false prophets so long ago...left to wander in the desert, separated from Godly commune, failures in battle, and idolatrous corruption by enemy tribes. Jesus is reminding those who are truly seeking eternal life to understand that the false prophets of the past continue to play the same game but with new rules. And I would tell you that we are still being reminded that the devil has not given up on his false narrative to lead even the elect astray. We seem to be wandering, asking where is God in all this turmoil; we may even feel defeated by and succumbed to the enemy of God. But we are not to give to the spirit of fear, but to remain strong in faith...a faith that can remove a mountain of anxiety, faith that allows us to pray instead of hiding behind closed doors, faith that tells us to bare our burdens as we focus on Christ's forgiveness fulfilled on the Cross. The reminder comes not to frighten us, but to strengthen us, to keep us from despair and to embolden us to face the anxieties and difficulties in a way that edifies our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Remember, Jesus warned that the devil invents nothing new but continues to introduce deception as newly uncovered truth. We must walk contrary to common opinions that lead us off the straight and narrow path of eternal salvation. We are not given the spirit of fear...but are to relish in the God-given spirit of love through faith and prayer.

And it is by their fruits that we will discern the Godly from the Ungodly. Put aside your biases and affiliations and seek the truth. *"Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit."* Do we seek acceptance in our social environment...or do we seek God? Do we side with the leading team because it makes us feel like winners...or do we seek truth and righteousness above all? A good tree will bring honor and peace in the end, but a corrupt tree will only bring disorder and chaos.

And I get it...It can be so difficult to see the truth through the clouds of deception that surround us. Who is telling us the truth? Who is leading us down the right path? *"A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit."* How do we know who is producing either? It is difficult if not impossible for the simple minds of mankind to understand the movements of God as he guides us through the turmoil of the day. And this is the point...we must never forget that

it is the Lord our God who has ultimate authority and who is the true guide on our journeys. Sometimes we must wait and see, staying close to our Lord and walk in continual faith. When the journey gets dark, Jesus continues to be our light.

“Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.” Powerful don't you think? Lip service does not fool the Almighty! Don't trust words but instead look to actions that promote and edify the Lord. We must not let false narratives justify immoral acts but judge worldly affairs by the Word of God. And I understand, it is tricky, we see through the glass darkly and may unknowingly be supporting ideals outside the will of God...God forbid. But the devil is so cunning that if it were not for Gods hand in our lives we too would succumb to the devils deceptions and fight against our creator and redeemer. There are none that are good except by the grace and mercy of our Lord.

Just listen to the words written in 8th chapter of First Samuel found in the seventh verse, *“And the Lord said unto Sammuell, hearken unto the voice of the people in all that they say unto thee, for they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them.”* If we accept the words of corrupt leaders, if we follow the crowds bent on lawlessness, if we forgo our right to worship the One True God, then we too shall be left to our own devices fighting the devil on his terms. Do you remember the first words of deception recorded in the Genesis account of the Garden of Eden? Let me remind you:

“Now the serpent was more subtil than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made. And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden? And the woman said unto the serpent, We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden: But of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die. And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die: For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil” (Genesis 3:1-5).

Did God really say? Yes...yes he did. And Paul reminds us in Romans 8 that we are to “mortify deeds of the body” and “be led by the Spirit of

God.” God did say and God does speak to us through the Holy Spirit. Seek truth and speak truth knowing that your brethren in the Faith are suffering in the spirit just as you are. So speak kindly, loving one another, praying continually, persisting daily in the reading of scripture that your faith may move mountains of doubt revealing the straight and narrow path that leads to Salvation. God bless you and keep the faith.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.