

Sermon Text for October 18, 2015

By Rev. Robert K. Bronkema

Acts 5:1-11, Genesis 20:1-7

“Confronting our lies”

You have all heard the popular statement that truth hurts. As counselors we are trained to encourage the one we are helping to face the issues head on no matter how difficult they may be. We encourage others to confront their lies, to never allow things to fester inside but to bring it out. Today we have an example from Scripture where Abraham is afraid to tell the truth, and it wasn't the first that he lied in this way. In chapter 12 he fell into this same sin and here he endangers a whole nation because of his dishonesty.

In our New Testament reading we hear about Ananias and Sapphira who because of their untruthfulness, hurt the early Christian community and ultimately destroyed their lives. We learn today that the reason we feel the need to lie, the reason we are unwilling, I'm not going to say unable, but the reason we are unwilling to confront our lies is because we are not ready to rely solely upon God for our protection and deliverance.

In Christianity, as in counseling, it is always best to confront your lies because our truthfulness, or lack of reflects upon us as individuals, reflects upon our families and it even reflects upon our church. Let's understand what happened to Abraham in chapter 20 as he refuses to confront his own lies.

One of my professors in seminary told us about his high school French teacher who every year would show a slide show of her trip to France and every year the classes would have to put up with it. By his senior year he knew the presentation by heart and he also knew when she, the teacher, would get up from her seat and get the most passionate, the most involved in her slide show when she would show her pictures of Mount Blanc. Every year when they would get to the Mount Blanc slides the teacher would stand up, go to the projector, lean over and point to the screen and tell her students, “And there she is, Mount Blanc, can't you just see it?” She would practically have tears in her eyes and as she would tell the class to look she would lean over the projector and her generous body would cover part of the projector and even if the kids wanted to see the slide, she was blocking their view, she would be in the way of the slide. The most important part of the presentation for the teacher was blocked because of her passion and her enthusiasm.

How true that can also be for the Gospel message. As preachers we tend to get in the way a lot more than actually allow the screen to come into focus and speak for itself. Sometimes we need to get out of the way, sometimes we need to move aside in order for the Gospel message to come through loud and clear.

This is true of all of us especially if one is not considered consistent in their message or even worse yet, is considered dishonest. There is nothing worse that a person can be accused of if not dishonesty. It destroys your credibility and it destroys your ability as a Christian to be an example and a witness for Jesus Christ.

On our mission trip to Italy there were quite a few days when our schedule would change and the itinerary that each kid had hardly reflected what we would be doing that day. So, many times I would begin the day by saying, okay folks for today, once again I lied to you and this is what we are going to be doing instead. So much so that it would not be unusual to hear one of the kids say: Pastor Bob lies.

Today we find Abraham's credibility badly at risk. And the worse part of it is that this same scenario, this same sin happened in chapter 12 of Genesis. Abraham and Sarah and their clan are on the road again. Abraham and Sarah are in their mid to late 90's and they find themselves in a land called Gerar. The king of Gerar is Abimilech. Abraham, as he did 30 years earlier, feels the need to tell the people of that land that Sarah was his sister because of her beauty. You see, if he told the truth and said that she was his wife and if another more powerful man wanted her then Abraham would have to die before she was free to marry again. Basically, Abraham felt that because his wife was so beautiful that he would be murdered.

So not relying upon God's protection, Abraham feels the need to lie and say that his 95 year old wife is in fact his sister. I don't know about you but I get a feeling that Sarah must have been a good looking 95 year old woman. If Abraham had to worry about another man, and the king at that, coveting his wife, she must have been an extremely well kept woman. For it to be a problem that 95 year old could still turn some heads. Amazing what being one of God's chosen people can do for you.

Well, Abraham's bluff is called because the king takes Sarah to be his wife. The same exact thing happened in Egypt and I am sure Abraham said then, I'll never make that mistake again. Isn't it amazing that when we have recurring sin in our lives it takes more than just our own effort, our determination, our own promises to be rid of that sin. We can only overcome recurring sin through the power of God. We can only eliminate

recurring sin by recognizing that we are too weak, unable to stop it on our own so we turn and rely completely upon God to handle it. That is the only way, but Abraham does not rely upon God, does not confront his lies, and he very nearly destroys a nation because of it.

Who was it that discovered Abraham's lie and faced him with it? It wasn't one of his family, it wasn't God in a dream, but it was a heathen, non-believing king who that evening got to know and love God. It was one outside of the circle of believers who ultimately had to correct Abraham, the friend of God. Don't let that happen to you. So many times we are so sure of our positions, so determined that we are right, and all the while we are hiding our own lies and we take our position in order to hide behind them so we don't have to face the truths in our own lives.

As Christians we should never have to be in a situation where we are so afraid to confront our lies, as Abraham was, that it takes an outsider, someone who may not even know God, or rather knows God through our presence and is disappointed by our actions, sometimes it takes an outsider to put us straight as in the case of Abimelech and Abraham.

Abraham, the only Jew and lover of the true God, had put King Abimelech and his whole family and his nation at risk because of his lie. Fortunately for Abraham Abimelech was much more moral and righteous than he was. He hadn't even slept with his wife and agreed to return her. One of the most embarrassing realities in this world is that there are so many people who do not know God, who have not accepted Christ as their personal Savior and yet their actions, their morals are much more in keeping and in line with what we would call Christian morals than Christians themselves.

We need to be able to as a church confront our lies just as the reformed church in apartheid South Africa encouraged the racial division and eventually had to confess and confront the lie in which they lived during that time. Just as our own churches encouraged slavery. Just as our own churches today foster racial and social division within our society. There are lies, bad testimonies, troubling tales that are a part of our churches here in this country that we need to confront.

How many of us carry around secrets, how many of us secretly hide, afraid to confront those lies or those feelings of inadequacy that stir us up.

But God saw right through Abraham and made him confront his lies. Our Savior Jesus Christ sees right through us and tells us where we are and what we need.

Sometimes the truth hurts, but not confronting our lies will hurt even more. Remember when Christ was asked by the rich man, I have done everything, what else... Jesus didn't hem and haw he said give all that you have to the poor. Jesus talked point blank to the Pharisees and called them a brood of vipers. Jesus does not mince words but he confronts us daily with our lies through Scripture.

Ananias and Sapphira are a perfect example, although an extreme one, of what happens when a church, when a people do not confront their lies. In the early church they all had everything in common. Whatever land or money they had they distributed evenly to those in their community. Ananias and Sapphira held back which ultimately hurt the community. Whenever we do lie we ultimately hurt those around us and not just ourselves.

The two, one at a time, are then called into the pastor's office to answer a few questions. Paul Duke calls this the worst case of pastoral counseling on record. Ananias, I want to talk to you about something and the next thing you know a member dies. He needs to talk to the wife also, and she dies too. But ultimately what we find out is that they had both lied to God and this was their punishment. It is serious business when we do not confront our lies, especially as a church if we do not do it. It is better that two should die than the whole community be contaminated and brought down.

Confronting your lies allows the Spirit to work and allows you to open up to the truth, and as Christ states, it is the truth that will set you free. When Christ is a part of our lives, when we make our decisions, when we know that our witnessing is reliant upon what we say and do and that only through Christ can we be coherent and consistent then we can rely upon God to protect and guide us and be able to live according to the truth. What freedom. May God watch over us as a church and as individuals as we confront our lies. Amen.