

Sermon for the First Sunday in Advent

“Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel.”

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We, who are sinful, know much about promises; and we know much about lies, for mortal men make many of both; but time condemns the promises of men to be mere empty words; meaningless, without substance, uttered mendaciously in order to make some gain through someone else, but rarely honored. Indeed, if we were honorable, we would not make promises, for we would know the corruption of our own being, and the weakness of our own wills. We would make no promises, for we would know that we may never be able to keep them.

Our daily lives are filled with endless petty lies, white lies you may call them. Lies that are said to appease a family member, to flatter a friend, to ingratiate one to his boss. Such lies hurt no one, we say, and in fact, such little fibs may even be helpful. They grease the wheels of conversation and gain us favor from our acquaintances.

Perhaps we, who are lost, cannot live this life without regularly articulating such complimentary, even if untrue, words. But, that we cannot live without feigning praise for others, and cannot go on without receiving from others feigned praise; this in no way justifies the lies of our mouths, it only confesses the breaking fragility of our egos, the insecurity of our feeble personalities.

Yet the Lord has no patience for our petty, false compliments; neither does He condone the deceitful accolades and acclaim that we so freely pour out upon one another, in hopes of receiving one's favor and approval in return.

For it is written: *'They flatter with their mouths, with their tongues they work deceit.'* For *'everyone utters lies to his neighbor, with flattering lips and a double heart they speak.'* And neither should we believe that God understands that this insincere homage is necessary and useful to us, for *'a lying tongue hates those it injures, and a flattering mouth works ruin.'* Therefore the Psalmist sings: *'the Lord shall cut off all flattering lips, and pierce the tongue that makes great boasts.'* The Lord has no patience for our petty, false compliments.

But we do not only lie in such small ways; we lie in much greater ways. For do you not know the vows made a married couple, 'for better and for worse', 'for richer and for poorer', 'to love and to cherish.' But who, among married men does not daily and regularly breach the spirit of these vows, failing to cherish his wife; and who among married women does not daily and regularly belittle her husband and crush his dignity? Many people, breaking their vows day to day, can hold their marriage together through sheer will, or through resignation. Many others, breaking their vows day to day, allow their marriage to disintegrate, it being endlessly struck by our own falsities and error.

Yet much more terrible than any of these promises broken, any of these lies, are the lies we tell ourselves.

For *'the heart of man is deceitful above all else, and desperately wicked; who can understand it?'* For the one we lie to the most is not our spouse, not our friend, not our boss; the one we lie to the most is our own soul. We convince ourselves of the endless worth of our lives, the unrivaled sacrifices that only we make, the incontrovertible good that only we do. We convince ourselves that our days are singularly painful, and that we therefore deserve singular sympathy. We convince ourselves that our years are singularly harrowing, and that we therefore deserve singular pity. And when we do not receive this pity, this sympathy, which we want to believe we deserve, we condemn the whole world as being cruel, hateful, calloused, merciless, cold blooded.

Our lives are composed of such lies, and it is impossible to imagine what it would be like without them. Very likely, a life lived in utter truth would be intolerable to us, for no one wishes to know the truth about themselves. So we spew forth falsehood after falsehood. *'Our mouths are an open sepulcher.'*

We must lie, for *'we are of our father, the devil. For he is a liar from the*

beginning, and the father of lies.'

So it is written: *'All men are liars.'*

And yet the Lord declares: *'I am not a man, that I should lie.'* *'For verily God is true, though every man be a liar.'*

Indeed, we are all liars; we are all extortioners; and with false vows and commitments we move on through life. But *'God is not a man, that He should lie.'*

Advent has come upon us, the season which awaits Christ's coming in the flesh of His incarnation. We wait, not to see the baby Jesus be born in a manger, not to see the wise kings bring him dear gifts. We wait to see the truth made flesh. We, who are liars, wait to see if the Lord will indeed honor His word, if He will remember His promises.

For what did Our God pledge in ancient times? *'That the seed of woman would crush the serpents head.'* That the child of Abraham would *'bless all nations.'* That there would arise a *'priest after the order of Melchizedek'* and a prophet *'who shall speak unto man all that the Father has commanded Him.'* That a king should arise *'from the branch of David; that he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land.'* *'That he shall be called, 'The Lord is our righteousness.'* That *'He shall save his people from their sin.'*

The Church year has begun, reborn anew, and you have come to this sanctuary to inaugurate it. But what did you come to see? *'A man dressed in fine raiment? A reed shaking in the wind?'*

There is one reason why you have come, there is one reason why, week by week, you enter this humble, but holy hall. You have come to escape a world of broken promises and false words to bear witness to the Lord whose words are ever true, and whose promises are ever remembered. [Him who is truth.]

See, then, that the Lord shall be born in Bethlehem, the house of bread, to

begin His earthly life. See, then, that the Lord shall die in Bethphage, which means 'the house of devouring', to fulfill His earthly ministry, [to be devoured by sinful mankind for the sake of the forgiveness of their sins.]

Walk with Him, as He departs from Nazareth, as He departs from Galilee; as He enters the Holy City, as He enters the palace of Pontius Pilate, as He mounts Golgotha, as He mounts the cross; as He descends into hell, as He ascends into heaven. As He brings us into the unending joys of heaven, as He brings us into the Holy of Holies, the presence of the Father, the fount and source of all life, the bestower of all mercy.

Bear witness, good Christians, to the promise paid in full; to the Word of God, honored and accomplished. Look upon Jesus as He comes to you, and see that, *'not one word of all the good promises the LORD made has failed; all have come to pass.'*

Rejoice therefore, *and glorify God with a loud voice for all the mighty works that you have seen. For I tell you:*

For:

If you were silent, the very stones would pour forth praise.'

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Preached by Pastor Fields

Sermon Texts: Jeremiah

33:14-16; 1 Thessalonians 3:9-13; Luke 19:28-40.