

Life Sunday Sermon 2020

Genesis 2-3; John 6 “Really”

Rev. David Eibel, Senior Pastor at Living Word Lutheran Church, Grapevine, Texas

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“Really” ... it is such an interesting word. It can be used in a multiplicity of ways. There is the “really” said as a question: “Really?” The “really” formed by gossip: “REALLY.” The “really” that expresses interest: “Really.” The “really” that reflects doubt: “Really?” The “really” as a punctuation of belief: “Really!” “Really” is simply a really interesting word.

The use of “really” abounds in our society. It can alternate between reflecting disbelief and belief, between “really?” (said quizzically) and “really” (said with conviction). Yet, increasingly, the “really” said with conviction is often simply a belief whose origin is oneself. And, such a phenomenon goes a long way back.

God created. The crown of His perfect creation was humans. He placed our first parents, Adam and Eve, in the garden, saying “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth ...” (Genesis 1:28a ESV). The instructions to them were clear: “You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die” (Genesis 2:16). The word was clear to the crown of His creation. Our first parents were not to determine for themselves that which was right and wrong. They were not to pluck from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. If they did, they would die.

Clear. Straightforward. Simple. They were to “do this” and “not do that.” God meant what He said. Really.

“Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, ‘Did God actually say, ‘You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?’” (Genesis 3:1). No. That is not what God really said, and Scripture reveals that Eve had correctly received God’s message. There was no hearing or comprehension problem. Message sent; message received.

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Yet, with the seed of doubt planted, the soil was prepared for depositing the lie. “But the serpent said to the woman, ‘You will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil’” (Genesis 3:4-5). The lie was clear. Straightforward. Simple. Satan’s message was sent. The message was received. Satan’s “really?” enticed.

Rationalization led to Adam and Eve’s own “really” of conviction. It just really seemed right to them to eat from the forbidden tree. “So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate” (Genesis 3:6). The “really” of their belief was simply a statement born out of a conviction whose origin was themselves. Indeed, the genesis of such a self-birthered “really” goes a long way back. And the “really” of conviction born of one’s own thoughts continued.

Take for example the grumbling about Jesus by the Jews recorded in John 6. They say, “Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How does he now say, ‘I have come down from heaven’?” (v.42). They knew Jesus. They knew His parents. It sounded rather audacious to them that Jesus “came down from heaven.” The Jews’ “really” was one of disbelief born of their own assessment.

Later, Jesus states, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you” (John 6:53). His teaching on the subject gives rise to the disciples’ response: “This is a hard saying; who can listen to it?” (John 6:60b). Soon, “... many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him” (John 6:66). The teaching was, well, just too difficult to grasp. How could such a thing be taken as truth? It was easier to

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just walk away than wrestle with deep thoughts. Easier to just enjoy the bliss of what they already knew. Eat the flesh and drink the blood? What? The midwife of their own thoughts gave birth to the “really” of conviction. And the “really” of their conviction prompted them to hit the road.

That sense of “really” (conviction) born out of the surety of our own thoughts is woven deep inside each of us. It started in the garden. It continues in the desert landscape of our sinful existence. It started with the pluck of the forbidden fruit. It continues with the harvest of our own sin. God is really clear in what He desires for us. Yet, we prefer our own clarity.

Adam and Eve realized they were naked after the fall. They had taken their eyes off of God and noticed themselves. They moved to cover themselves, fashioning fig leaves together. In our sinfulness, we have become comfortable in the nakedness of our sin. With our gaze fixed on ourselves, we express the reality of our own convictions. How sure we are of our own assessments of truth. It is woven deep inside of us and transmitted to the next generation.

The “really” (conviction) born of our own thoughts can be ever present. It is manifest in the conversation between a couple as they grapple with the news of a pregnancy. How many other couples long for that news? But for this couple, it simply invokes fear. The pregnancy is not understood as a blessing, rather it is seen as a curse. The “problem” must be dealt with. A family member suggests an abortion. “After all,” the couple is counseled, “it isn’t really a life, just a blob of tissue.” Instead of looking forward to embracing their child, the “solution” to their problem is grasped. “Really,” they reason, “it isn’t life yet.” Their “really” sounds so true to them.

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In another home a man is given the news. The woman timidly approaches the topic, afraid of the response. She shares that she is pregnant. Instead of pictures coming to mind of him playing with the child, he sees dollar signs. Instead of seeing in his mind's eye the baby crawling for the first time, first steps, catching a ball, and squealing with delight when he comes home, all he sees as he projects into the future is an empty bank account. “We can't afford a baby,” he exclaims. “You need to take care of this. You are not having this child!” he yells. “Take care of it. Now. Really!” he demands.

In other homes, the conversations take a different turn, but the “really” born of one's own thoughts continue. The woman discovers the child will have special needs. That doesn't square with the image she held of life after the pregnancy. She doesn't have the extra time that will be required to care for such a child. She doesn't want a child who is different than the rest. She sees the future through the lens of challenge and wants a new prescription. She starts to think about terminating the pregnancy she now sees as a problem. The conviction regarding her solution forms into a resolute “really.”

The “really” of convictions born of one's own thoughts has an impact on not only the youngest but also the oldest among us. “Quality of life” becomes a governing principle regarding the elderly, opening up the conversation about euthanasia. The concern is raised about older people “burdening the limited resources of society.” The conversations occur among the young, while the old are excluded. Soon the conversations become monologues. The “really” of conviction is formed. The course of action can seem so right when the only one you have to convince is yourself.

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Confusion regarding truth reigns. It started in the garden, was exemplified in biblical times, and is manifest today. Satan’s question: “Did God actually say ... ?” (Genesis 3:1) is still asked. In fact, we can be the ones voicing this question. Confusion shows in what we believe. Really. And amidst the confusion what is God’s response?

I am reminded of the story of Elizabeth and Mary. The angel had given Mary the message that she would bear the Messiah. Along with this amazing news, she was also told that her relative Elizabeth was sixth-months pregnant. Mary goes quickly to Elizabeth. Luke 1:41a records: “And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby leaped in her womb.”

Fast forward to the birth account of our Lord. Luke 2:12 records: “And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.” Importantly, the same Greek word for baby, *brepheos*, is used for the baby inside and outside of the womb. Clarity. God values life in all stages, from birth to natural death.

And God’s value of life extends into all eternity. The baby carried in the womb of Mary and born in Bethlehem grew. The toddler Jesus learned to walk. And with the legs of an adult, He made the journey to Jerusalem. There, He was crucified for our sin, including the devaluation of life and our quietude regarding protecting the most vulnerable among us. He was raised from the dead. The sacrifice for sin accepted. We are washed in His victory in the life-giving waters of Baptism. Life eternal bestowed upon us. Peter said to Jesus, “You have the words of eternal life ...” (John 6:68b). And those words of eternal life are declared for us. Really!

The world needs your voice to declare Jesus’ words of eternal life. The world needs your voice to declare God’s value of life in all of its stages. The world needs your voice to declare God’s convictions born of His Word. The world needs your voice to declare that God’s word of

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forgiveness purchased with the blood of Jesus extends to all of us sinners, including those who have chosen abortion. The world needs your voice! Really. Really. Really!