**The Law Preached with the Gospel Present**

Based on [Matthew 7:15-23](https://biblia.com/books/esv/Mt7.15-23)

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The Eighth Sunday after Trinity

Pastor Nathan Fuehrer

Jesus says “Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves.” It is tragic how easily many christians are led astray by false teachers who claim to come from God. Today the state of Christendom is such that we have lowered our standards, and will accept anybody’s word if only they claim to be a christian.

Anybody can claim to be a christian. Indeed, we live in a time where a boy can claim to be a girl, and a girl claim to be a boy. And we must play along or else we’re not nice. It’s not a coincidence that the word nice originally meant naive. Jesus is not naive. He says that many will come to him saying “***Lord, Lord, didn’t we do all sorts of good in your name***” and His response will not be nice. He will say, “You are not christian, I do not know you, depart from me you workers of evil.”

Be kind, be honest...but don’t be naive. Jesus says to beware of false prophets. This means that there are false prophets, and you need to watch out for them. Don’t judge them by appearances--what they look like, or what your gut tells you--because they will look like sheep. They will appear as soft and humble creatures that wouldn’t harm a fly. But inside there is a wolf. Satan is in them.

There have been false prophets since the beginning; and the first was a snake. Genesis says that the serpent was more crafty than the other beasts of the field. Satan came in snake’s clothing, which probably wouldn’t charm a woman today, but it did charm the first woman. She was deceived by a lie. Her crime was not deliberate, but negligent.

It’s not as though satan said, “***Eve, don’t listen to God, listen to me so you will die and I will get glory over God for destroying you, His beloved***.” No, Satan said, “Did God really say you will die?” Eve said, “Yes”, and the serpent said, “You will not surely die...but...”). The moment Eve heard Satan in snakes’ clothing contradict the word of the living God she should have been aware. At that second she should have closed her eyes shut her ears and said, “Get behind me satan”. Instead she continued to listen.

Bless her heart...the poor thing...she thought the serpent was there to help her. Maybe that’s why you can’t say “naive” without saying “Eve.” The poor dear thought the serpent was a messenger from God, sent to correct his former command. She thought he was a prophet; but he was a false prophet. And because she was negligent, careless in who she listened to, she was deceived; and because she was deceived Adam transgressed; and because Adam transgressed...all of the evil that is now in this world--that the wicked blame God for--is on Adam’s head...because he refused to be the head of his wife. Because he listened to his wife, who listened to a serpent who came openly contradicting what the Lord had said before.

If a prophet comes correcting what God says, you know he is not from God. If a prophet says, “*There is surely no hell...for God loves everyone and he just says these things to scare simple people into doing the right thing. But you are sophisticated, you how loving and merciful he really is, that in his heart he would never really condemn anyone forever.”* There are many such “sophisticated” people who believe the threats of and wrath of God is for the simple; They believe that smart people, like themselves, can see through the cleverly devised myths of the bible to understand what God is *really* thinking. These people are duped by their own duplicity. They will treat true disciples as simpletons, when the truth is they can’t even bear to acknowledge a single mystery of Christ. They are embarrassed of Him. They think God is their confidant, they are his concigliare; He shares his secret council with them and they represent his wishes. Well, that’s how the serpent approached Eve...like he was God’s concigliare; Eve might have heard what God *said*, but the snake pretended to know what God was *thinking*.

May the Lord God preserve us from teachers and prophets who claim to know what God is secretly thinking. These are not innocent people; they are wolves. They are partners of Satan and will get what they deserve unless the Spirit is pleased to cast Satan out of them and bring them to repentance. They come in sheep's clothing: some in clerical robes and mitres, others in purple robes and fine linen, still others in pressed suits and creased shirt sleeves. And some come in rags, others in tight jeans and trendy graphic T-shirts. The point is that satan will be all things to all men so that, through him some might be condemned to hell, the church of Christ ravaged, and innocent children will be deceived by sweet sounding lies.

If you fall for such poisonous doctrines, it won’t be Jesus’ fault, and it won’t be my fault. We have warned you; stay alert and awake. Be sure you know all that Jesus commands. If you think that your okay knowing a few bible stories...that Jesus was born on Christmas, and that he heals people and will take you to heaven...you do well. Satan knows that too, and he knows how to use that against you. Satan knows what you know and what you don’t know, and he will use the bible to exploit your ignorance, especially if you’re nice to him. God preserve us from being nice Christians and a nice church. If you are nice to Satan, you are naive, but we are called to be shrewd as serpents, innocent as doves.

I get very sad when I consider how little christians cherish the teachings of Jesus Christ. He warns us that false prophets will come in his name. He warns us that we will know them by their fruit...by what they teach and how they act. Do they only teach things that the world would agree with? For instance, did they act as though transgenderism was a perversion three years ago, and now they act as though it is something to be celebrated. Did God change his mind about creating them male and female? No, it’s that false teachers bend like a reed in the wind. They have no integrity, no root in themselves. They are simply drones connected to the hive mind of the devil, who is pulling the levers of the world, and working all things for the destruction of those whom God loves.

I realize that I haven’t given you any words of comfort in this sermon...no “Good News”. In my defense, neither did Christ in today’s teaching. It’s all Law. He gives stern warnings, and he teaches a hard truth that every christian ought to keep in the fore of his mind. There are those who believe they are doing things in Jesus’ name, who believe they are saved, and believe that their eternal soul is destined for heaven when, in fact, they will wake up after death and Jesus will treat them like a stranger and a criminal. And it's not because he didn’t give them a way to know him. It’s because they hitched their wagon to false prophets who only pretend to know Christ, but don't. If you listen to people who only claim to speak for Christ, then you are a stranger to Christ. When I was a child, I would occasionally have dreams where my mother or father didn’t recognize me, and treated me like someone else's child. It was a worse feeling than any other nightmare...to not be recognized by someone who once knew you. To be treated like a stranger by Christ is itself a the premier torment of hell.

I don’t have any words of comfort in this sermon. Instead I direct you to consider the liturgy of the church. You have confessed your sins and were forgiven, we sang a psalm and asked God for mercy. You gave Him glory and trusted in his mercy. We have confessed our creedal faith in the true God, His Son, and our one baptism for the forgiveness of sins. Soon you will freely give offerings to God to align with his ministry on earth. Soon we will pray for all people according to their needs as children ask their father. Then we will prepare to receive and receive the holy gift of the body and blood of Christ, which forgives our sins, gives us peace and assurance, and aligns our spirit with His Spirit, who bears in you the fruit that leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life (Romans 6:22).

A preacher of the law is not a false prophet, because Christ, though he was the Gospel incarnate, was a preacher of the law. He can preach all law, because his presence alone is Gospel. Sometimes in our worship, the readings for the day and the sermon are all law, all commands, all threats and warnings. Sometimes, but that’s okay, because the rest of the liturgy is pure gospel.

Thank God that you belong to a church whose life of worship is already liturgically preordained to have the gospel predominate, a church where Christ is literally present in flesh and blood, which is greater than when he was ministering on earth. He tells his disciples, “It is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away then the Holy Spirit will not come to you. But if I go, I will send Him to you.” And he has sent us His Spirit, who comforts us and helps us to interpret spiritual truths, and worship him in Spirit and Truth.

We worship in the Spirit of God, the Comforter. There is no Gospel here, no comfort, no Spirit of peace for those who stubbornly insist upon entertaining false prophets and false spirits. They will not receive the Lord’s Supper, but will be directed to repentance or else back to the false spirit who sent them and in whom they foolishly trust, lest they lead others astray. But to you who are being saved, the Holy Supper of Jesus Christ is the last word, the final word to silence the accusations of the law and give your conscience the peace which surpasses understanding and bids you cheerfully forfeit your life and gain your soul.