

## **The Big Lie and The Bold Truth**

Ephesians 4:1-7; 11-16

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I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.

But each of us was given grace according to the measure of Christ's gift.

The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ.

We must no longer be children, tossed to and fro and blown about by every wind of doctrine, by people's trickery, by their craftiness in deceitful scheming. But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love.

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July 4, 2021

Rev. Michael Catanzaro

### I.

Linda and I snuck away to Maine this week for some “Lobstah” (and visit Chris and Nicole. First thing Tuesday morning, we drove to North Creek, and took our son, Tucker, out to breakfast; inviting his two roommates and fellow “back country stewards” to join us. Aware that they are getting paid more in experience than money we, of course, told them it was our treat and to order whatever they wanted; “Load up!” We told them. After ordering just two pancakes each (\$2.85) I admonished them they needed to learn to be better moochers.



We then set out for the first night’s destination, Conway NH, to visit our friends Jake and Mabel, and to meet their 8 month old son, whom we have been referring to as “Refrigerator Otto” owing to the place his picture hangs in our home. We now have a new photo to put up on the frig (that’s Otto there in the middle).



### II.

Owing to discovering too late that the Ticonderoga Ferry isn’t running, we ended up taking a rather circuitous route between Lake Champlain and Lake George, then crossed Vermont, stopping in for an a brief, unannounced visit to Linda’s nephew, Corey, who lives outside of Killington.

Then it was on to New Hampshire with the final leg of the day's journey taking us the full width, 43 miles, of the White Mountain National Forest, which was spectacular. We checked into a motel called the Scenic Inn, which continued to affirm in us our belief that lodging in side of the road motels that cost under \$100/night is always the best way to go: such establishments have too much charm and character to pass up (almost always mom and pop) with the people who tend to stay in such places far more interesting and interactive. We had a lovely dinner out with Jake, Mabel and Otto; falling in bed exhausted at 9 p.m. A great day.

### **III.**

The remainder of the trip was terrific as well, but I regale you with only the first day because about halfway through it I received a phone call, and that is what I'd like to speak to you about today; from a person on Long Island. She called and introduced herself as an old friend of a member of our church who has long since moved from Canton. Apparently I had met her, at some point, but it was quite a few years ago and, honestly, I did not recollect. She had just read my pastor's report from the summer newsletter which had been forwarded to her from her friend and our church member. Another unexpected fruit of the pandemic is the way the word gets out when you email the weekly sermon and the monthly newsletter, people share them with others; who knew? For years this woman had been advocating for *her* church, about the same size as ours, to hire a director for their Church School rightly recognizing the importance of reaching out to children in their community.

### **IV.**

All to no avail, however, as others in the church kept countering her dream with concerns about what it would cost; pinching pennies in service of the Gospel. She was shocked when I shared with her our church's annual budget, and flabbergasted when I told her we have 50 kids connected to our church; she seemed to be like Moses peering into the promise land, but realizing she may never set foot in it. We talked for quite a while and, at a point, we independently and simultaneously exclaimed that the key to the matter is *leadership*.

Then, it got eerily quiet on the other end of the phone and my “Pastor Sense” started tingling, then I heard soft whimpering; she had begun to gently weep. I asked if she was ok? She replied “yes,” but that she had been carrying this dream in her heart for so long, and this was the first time someone, anyone, had affirmed her in it; these were tears of relief watering long dormant seeds of hope.

## V.

After a few moments she returned to me, and I told her that she wasn’t crazy to have such a huge hope. And then I said, I’m going to tell you the truth about something: the “The Big Lie.” The Big Lie being perpetrated these days in every denomination all across the country, is that smaller churches like hers, and mine, are doomed to fail; that it is just a matter of time and there is nothing to be done about it. The best we can do is pinch pennies to prolong the death and stretch it out for as many years as possible while, at the same time, attempting to find some joy in dying and seeking solace in believing such a death was always inevitable. “*Don’t you believe it!*” I said to my Long Island friend. This is just an excuse church officials use to assuage themselves for their own ineptitude, meager gifts, poor performance and lack of vision. So powerful and persuasive is the Big Lie, though, that they, themselves, don’t even recognize it.

## VI.

Unfortunately, the Big Lie doesn’t stop there, it rolls right on down the hill to the local level, and firmly ensconces itself in the life and leadership of the local congregation. Here, in our pulpits, pews and programs it seeks to stain deeply into the grain of our life together, ever ready to explain why we *can’t* do something and how futile it would be to even try (it costs too much, we don’t have the volunteers, people would never show up).

Though the Big Lie now rages uncontrolled across our land like wildfire, it has always smoldered wherever fear and a lack of hope are left unaddressed and when people, good though they may be, fail to lead a life worthy of the calling to which we have been called in Christ. Finally, at the end of my conversation with the lady from Long Island, I simply told her, “*You are not the crazy one for not believing the Big Lie, you just keep believing the Bold Truth.*”

## **VII.**

Today's scripture reading from Ephesians 4 is another manifestation of the Bold Truth that the Apostle Paul consistently and constantly proclaims: that God, as parent to each of us, is above all and through all and in all; and, that we are tied together, one to another, in the bond of peace and in the unity of the Spirit. Moreover, that each of us, in large churches and small, have been given grace according to the measure of Christ's gift equipping the saints for the work of ministry; for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ. As the church, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, so each part is working properly, promoting the body's growth in building itself up in love.

## **VIII.**

Frankly, for many in the church such an understanding of the Gospel of Jesus Christ is simply too bold a truth to be believed and too much work to make real. So, people shrink their hope in God to fit the meager measure of their own faith and settle, instead, for the Big Lie; which is a much easier portion. The rationale they use for doing so sure is sober sounding, though, I'll give them that: the world is changing, everything has a season, we need to be realistic and fiscally responsible; above all, we must do things decently and in order. So, they blithely follow the siren song of the Big Lie to the very threshold of their own ecclesiastical graves, and relegate those who refuse to hop on such a bandwagon to the back of the bus and drag them along for the ride just the same.

## **IX.**

Of course, the Big Lie of which *we* speak this morning is not the only Big Lie currently at work in the world. Today is Independence Day, the occasion we have set aside as an annual celebration of our nationhood. It commemorates the passage of the Declaration of Independence by the Continental Congress on July 4, 1776 which asserts:

*We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all people are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.*

*That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among people, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed.*

The document then goes on to articulate every grievance the colonies had endured under the King of England, concluding:

*A Prince whose character is thus marked by every act which may define a Tyrant, is unfit to be the ruler of a free people.*

## **X.**

The other Big Lie at work in our world today, is that all people should not be equal in their ability and access to cast their vote, and that the institutions of Government which confer power by consent of the governed are not up to the task and, thus, can be manipulated and usurped by tyranny. The leaders and officials who drafted, signed and issued the Declaration of Independence understood that words alone would not suffice; that great sacrifice and much resolve would be required.

They also believed, however, that they would not be alone in the pursuit of this dream they shared. The last sentence of the Declaration reads:

*And for the support of this Declaration, with a firm reliance on the protection of divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes and our sacred Honor.*

## **XI.**

A firm reliance on the protection of divine providence, and the willingness to pledge our lives, fortunes and sacred honor. That sounds like the exact recipe we have used here at our church, here on the Park to build ourselves up in love; and one which *any* church can use to do the same. Certainly there many occasions and causes which require honor, financial commitment and the offering up of one's life; both in terms of time and energy and, even, in terms of making the greatest of sacrifices.

However, as the authors and signers of the Declaration of Independence clearly believed, and as we here on the Park have certainly demonstrated, reliance on the divine, our faith in God, is the axis around which everything must spin. Without it, the rotation around all we cherish is reduced to only what we, ourselves, believe we can achieve and, thus, settle for the Big Lie over the Bold Truth of the Gospel.

## **XII.**

In today's scripture passage, Paul tells us that we have been given grace according to the measure of Christ's gift which is the salvation of the cross. God welcomes us to a splendid feast featuring every manifestation of grace in over-flowing abundance and invites us to "load up" because Christ is picking up the tab. All too often, however, we refuse to give ourselves over to God. Rather than "digging in" to sample and sate ourselves with every manner of delicious dish, drink and dessert, we settle for the equivalent of a roll with butter and a glass of water. Or, as was the case this past week, a couple of pancakes. Now, in the instance of Tucker's two friends who accompanied us to breakfast this week, they were probably just trying to be polite, or perhaps they really weren't that hungry; which is fine. However, the metaphor is instructive as it reminds us we all must learn to be better moochers of God's grace.

## **XIII.**

As it turns out, at least in my opinion, the best place to learn the art and practice of mooching God's grace is the small church: those side of the road, "mom and pop" establishments of charm and character who tend to be filled with the most interesting and interactive people (like all of you) where folks are always welcome to drop in unannounced and join us. How ironic, then, that the very place where the Big Lie portends to be doomed to failure is the *one* place where the Bold Truth is most easily witnessed, discovered and believed.

## **XIV.**

This Friday we will be reopening the fountain in the Park; a great day. Though many individuals, organizations, and businesses have certainly contributed financially to this very important endeavor (with Presbyterians leading the way with their generosity) the real contribution our church has made to the whole affair is *leadership*. Leadership in presenting to the community a congregation which seeks not to demand respect but to garner trust, to speak in actions which are always louder than words, and to counter the Big Lie of what we *cannot* do, with the Bold Truth of all that is possible through God's ever spectacular grace and our faith however circuitous. This week, as that water starts to flow, you should all be extremely proud of what our church has done and, most importantly, of how we have done it. Amen.