

Fake News
Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30
Sermon by: Joanne Gallardo
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16 "But to what will I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling to one another, 17 "We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we wailed, and you did not mourn.' 18 For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, "He has a demon'; 19 the Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, "Look, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!' Yet wisdom is vindicated by her deeds."

25 At that time Jesus said, "I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants; 26 yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. 27 All things have been handed over to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him. 28 "Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

The Lectionary text this week comes from Matthew, often referred to as the “teacher’s gospel.” This passage in particular is one that highlights the blessing that is the teaching of Jesus. To be honest, this scripture goes everywhere. At first, we find Jesus followers, and Jesus in particular, to be under harsh scrutiny. Then, we learn some things about wisdom. After that, the lectionary saw fit to include some verses a few lines down, the famous passage about Jesus’ yoke being easy, and his burden light.

I found it difficult to wrap my head around each direction this scripture seemed to be going, but the scripture seemed to be getting at something, warning against something, prompting us to move in a certain direction.

As I came to understand it, I found that to avoid being “fake news.” That thing that we need to pursue is its opposite: wisdom.

These scriptures have a lot to do with wisdom, but just as accessible as wisdom is, so is foolishness. The book of Proverbs is an entire book of the Bible dedicated to wisdom. Wisdom beckons us. She says, Come, eat of my bread and drink of the wine I have mixed. Lay aside immaturity, and live, and walk in the way of insight.” But as available as wisdom is, so are lies. So are any and all things that are fake. Fake knowledge, fake understanding, fake news.

Jesus talks about a generation that can’t see the truth right in front of them, a claim that could easily be applied to our generation, or in reality, any generation that has come

before us. In an age obsessed with personal freedoms, many of us have seen the protestors storm the capitol steps of Michigan and Ohio demanding that the economy open up for haircuts, dining, and partying in bars. This is in contrast to the advice of attorney generals and county health officials who warn about the risk of coronavirus transmission in those exact settings. This week I was especially taken aback by a Palm Beach County Board of Commissioners meeting that turned into a rather dramatic near-television show involving references to Nazi Germany, going against God's plan in reference to our breathing, and even offering to die for the US flag over, of all things, being required to wear a mask in public. Florida, it almost need not be mentioned, has become a hotbed for COVID-19 in recent weeks. Is this taking heed of what's true? Or is this foolishness?

Now, I am sick and tired of hearing the phrase "fake news," and I know many people are. It is said we live in a post-truth era, and honestly, that's a bit terrifying. If truth is indeed an ontological reality, a reality that actually exists in the world as its own concept, which is what we as Christians profess, post-truth means lies. "Fake news" is lies. And it's not something that can be thrown around at things we don't like.

The book of Proverbs tells us that wisdom calls out to us. But so does foolishness. I believe we all want to be wise instead of foolish. We all want to say the right thing and do the right thing. Typically, we think wisdom comes with age. Wisdom comes from life experiences, careful study, and dedication to the truth.

What we learn in today's passage is that God bestows wisdom on infants, and hides wisdom from the intelligent and scholarly.

That sounds great, depending on whether you consider yourself intelligent or more like an infant. Sometimes I think we're quick to call ourselves "the least," "the meek," or the "lowly" when in reality maybe we're more like the learned Pharisees.

Jesus is calling us to look for wisdom where you least expect it. And don't expect yourself to always know what wisdom looks like. You may not see wisdom from the people in charge. You may not see wisdom from the oldest and most learned among us. Truth, the beginning of wisdom, comes from revelation. And revelation, as we learn from the whole scope of the Bible, comes to anyone and everyone, deserving and undeserving, young and old, wise or foolish, uneducated or educated. Revelation comes to a young woman engaged to be married being told she was the mother of God. Revelation comes to a man named Saul, who, unbeknownst to him, will have an experience on the road to Damascus that will change his life. Revelation comes to John, who then becomes a voice in the wilderness, a baptizer, a man who makes meals out of locusts and honey.

Revelation is the opposite of "fake news." Revelation is the beginning of truth. Revelation is Jesus, God made flesh among us. Jesus shows us the wisdom of God. This revelation isn't for a select few or an elite group. This revelation is for everybody, especially infants, especially those society thinks isn't very important.

When I think of wisdom coming from places I don't expect, this makes me think of the wisdom I've seen come out of young people in the past several years. While many of us think highly of young people, when we look for "wisdom" or "leadership" we often look elsewhere. I remember Malala Yusef, advocating that women have a right to an education, who only recently graduated from university. I think of the young people of Parkland, advocating for gun control measures and safety in schools, barely old enough to drive. I think of someone like Greta Thurnburg, speaking and teaching on the dangers of climate change and the implications it would have for young people's futures. Wisdom is hidden from the wise and bestowed upon infants.

Age, intelligence, education, none of these matter. What matters is being open to revelation. And being open to revelation can happen to anyone. In fact, maybe it's better if you don't consider yourself to be better than. Or smarter than. Or more deserving than.

Having wisdom also goes hand in hand with being misunderstood. This text is also a consolation for those whose company is diverse and ways might be a bit eccentric. It reminds us that John the Baptist was thought to be demon possessed, and Jesus himself was thought of as a glutton and a drunkard, friend of tax collectors and sinners. More fuel for the "fake news" fire. Jesus is being judged by the company he keeps. Who of us hasn't had that happen? We're often told by older, wiser people that we will be judged by those we surround ourselves with. So often we forget that Jesus surrounded himself with some of the most reviled people in Jewish society, people the wise and scholarly wouldn't be caught dead hanging around.

Anyone who had spent time with Jesus or knew Jesus in any way would have never characterized him as a drunkard or a glutton. But it seems even antiquity isn't free from people making assumptions with the smallest amount of information possible. In diving into this further, it reminds us how superficial it can be to have a "general" knowledge of someone. We see a gender identity, or skin color, or sexual identity, or assume an economic class, and we are quick to peg someone to be a certain kind of person.

And wisdom, knowledge, and insight just doesn't come from "certain kinds of people," or so we like to think. Of all the people revelation can come to, why shouldn't it be us? We seek after wisdom. We study it. We've "earned" it.

But again, Jesus has revealed himself to infants and hidden things from the wise and intelligent.

In an era of fake news, lies, and alternate realities, Jesus extends to us an invitation. Jesus beckons us, "Come."

"Come to me, all who are weary, and carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest."

That, my friends, is the call to us at this time. In the midst of the fake, of the lies, in the turning on of the news and wondering what fresh hell awaits us this week, or this day, or this hour. We are told, come. You're tired. I can help you find rest.

Jesus says his yoke is easy and his burden, light. We're often taught that a yoke is used on animals to train them, but in rabbinic literature it's a word that's used in reference to obedience to the Torah. Jesus isn't inviting us to dogma. Jesus isn't inviting us to do this right, and do that right, and get your reward when the time comes. The purpose of instruction is to receive wholeness and completion. We often talk of life teaching us "harsh lessons" or we refer to circumstances happening to someone as a "harsh lesson." Jesus rebukes that here. Jesus, as Rabbi, says that his instruction is not harsh, it's not arrogant. It's easy. Jesus is our instructor, not our brash dictator or judge. Jesus wants us to seek wisdom, and in that wisdom, self-reflection. Getting to know Jesus helps us to know ourselves better. Just as we pursue Jesus, we should also pursue wisdom.

Our current time of fake news can make us weary. Lies are painted as truth, and the truth is up for debate. As people seeking after Jesus and therefore seeking after wisdom, what is there for us to do? The truth matters. It matters a whole lot.

So what is true? What is true right now, is our day in age? What does wisdom look like?

What I know to be true is that Jesus is Lord of our lives, our teacher and model. With that being the case, we look after one another as we look after ourselves and our loved ones. We put others' needs ahead of our own. We wear a mask, we check in on our neighbors, we proclaim that the lives of our Black siblings matter, we work for justice even though we are physically distanced right now.

Revelation is true. God is revealed to us not through the powerful and learned, but to people we least expect. People from other cultures, other generations, other socio-economic statuses, other sexual orientations. God makes the unlikely and improbable possible. God takes our expectations and turns them on their head.

Wisdom is true. The teachings of Jesus beckon to us to lay down our burdens, and to take up wisdom. Through wisdom we will find wholeness, completion, and rest. We are promised rest. Rest in a world that tells us to keep going, and going and going. Rest in a world throwing news, statistics, and general fear and anxiety in our laps. Rest in a world of fear.

Let us go into this week seeking wisdom, learning from her, hearing from her, seeking her face, and allowing ourselves to become yoked with the divine.