

Fake News, Fake Food and a Fake Faith”

Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43, Proper 11-A

July 23, 2017

The word “fake” seems to me to be a word that we are all hearing much more frequently these days—perhaps—than we have in times past. And what does the word “fake” mean? It identifies something that is false, inauthentic and bogus and sometimes—something that is even downright counterfeit.

Today, on the American political scene, both Democrats and Republicans are speaking to us about something that they have come to now classify as “Fake news.”

And what is fake news? According to one definition I came across: “Fake news is a form of yellow journalism that deliberately disseminates false information—all in the hopes of swaying public opinion!” Fake news is fake news—quite often—because it publishes only one segment of a much larger story—in the hopes of somehow “spinning” the truth.”

Yes, we probably have, at least heard—of fake news!

And yet for something to be identified as fake is certainly not a new concept! It is as old as the hills! Take for example those 300,000 Americans who all moved out west to California during the 1840’s Gold Rush! There were times when some of those very inexperienced prospectors got all excited for nothing when they discovered something that they thought was gold, though in fact it was only “fake” gold.

The mineral they discovered is called “pyrite;” the most common form of iron sulfate found throughout the world. But when pyrite is glistening in the sunshine and reflecting its brassy-yellow, metallic luster—it can certainly appear to the inexperienced prospector to be gold, although in fact it isn’t. Yet this problem became so prevalent in the 1840’s California Gold Rush that “pyrite” was soon assigned a new name: “Fools’ Gold.”

So you may have heard about “fake news” or “fake gold” but have you ever heard about “fake food”?

In February 2016, that FEDERAL AGENCY known as the FDA (“The Food and Drug Administration”) began to really crack down on those food manufacturers across our nation for selling food products that they discovered were a far cry from what they professed to be on their labels and in their packaging.

Take the case of parmesan cheese for example; not the kind of fresh parmesan cheese that can now buy grated in a little clear plastic container located in the “refrigerated” dairy case at your local supermarket!

I am talking about that kind of parmesan cheese that has been sold for years in those little round cardboard containers on the same grocery store aisle with those many different types of pasta, along with that wide assortment of those precooked spaghetti sauce—you know—like Ragu, Prego and Bertolli!

The FDA discovered in 2016 that some of those brands of parmesan cheese, that you buy in those little-round cardboard containers—in actuality—didn’t contain any real parmesan cheese at all—therefore making it a “fake food!”

Take, for instance, that brand of parmesan cheese that was being marketed by THE CASTLE CHEESE CORPORATION! On the front of their containers appeared three bold words: “100% REAL PARMESAN.” This was a “fake food” run amuck—if indeed there ever was one—because that particular brand of parmesan cheese didn’t contain any real parmesan cheese at all. The CASTLE CHEESE brand was only an imitation cheese, mixed together with the trimmings of some other less expensive cheeses like: Swiss cheese, White Cheddar Cheese, Havarti and Mozzarella cheeses!

And if this was not bad enough, the FDA further discovered that the CASTLE CHEESE CORPORATION was also adding some filler material to their “so-called” parmesan cheese, the bulk of which was “cellulose”—better known to most of us as wood pulp.

You talk about splintering consumer confidence!

To be fair, a lot of cheese manufacturers do use cellulose in their parmesan because it prevents the cheese from clumping together. The problem for CASTLE CHEESE and other corner-cutting manufacturers was the percentage of cellulose they were using! While the cheese industry considers 2 to 4 percent cellulose as acceptable and a safe level, some of these parmesan cheeses were as high as 8% cellulose.

But listen to this! The FDA also reported: “That’s way too much filler but probably not nearly enough for even the MOST DISCERNING OF CHEESE AFICIONADOS to detect even the slightest hints of a maple tree pulp or an oak tree pulp in their tasting of it!

Therefore today, the FDA is constantly on the lookout for food manufacturers who are trying to cut corners and sell “fake food.”

Brothers and sisters, while manufacturing cheese was a pretty big business in first century Palestine, so much so that the Jewish historian Josephus reports that the ravine between Mount Moriah and Mount Zion in Jerusalem had actually been named: “The Valley of Cheesemakers;” Jesus didn’t tell any parables about cheese because none of the cheesemakers present in Palestine at that time had ever even thought about adding wood pulp to their gouda or imitation ingredients to any other types of cheese products they were manufacturing!

However, Jesus was fully aware that all types of food in his day could easily have become contaminated and there was no other form of food contamination that could have done more harm to those people living all around our Lord as his contemporaries—than if their vast production of wheat had somehow become contaminated!

Why? Because wheat, made into bread, was the number one staple in every Jewish person’s daily diet—and there really were no “gluten free” products for sale at the local market back then!

This much we do know—it was common during that time-period for a rival landowner to sometimes sabotage his neighboring landowner’s crops! And all of this would be done usually in the hope that the malicious landowner—would then receive—a higher price for his wheat—due to the simple economic reality of supply and demand!

Unfortunately, this kind of agricultural sabotage became so prevalent in the world at that time—that the Roman Government even went so far as to pass a law specifically forbidding people from sowing these kinds of “poisonous” weeds that Jesus is talking about here in another person’s field!

Brother and sisters this is now the second parable in Matthew 13 that Jesus shares with us about “sowing seeds,” but this parable is unlike the first, because here Matthew tells us about two different times that someone went out into that field to sow seeds. The first man who sowed seeds in that field was the landowner himself—who sowed those seeds by proxy—through the faithful laboring of his faithful servants!

Sometime later, however, during the night—when all was dark—and the landowner and his servants were all asleep—a second man—identified here as “an enemy” went and sowed weeds among the wheat—before dawn when the sun was about to rise on the horizon!

For a few weeks, at least, neither the landowner or his servants knew what had happened—but later after all those seeds had germinated and these plants became a foot or two tall—the weeds, called “darnel,” that looked completely identical to the wheat—began to show their true colors. When the actual

grain began to appear at the head of each stalk—the difference between the two different kinds of plants—was then—unmistakably obvious!

The heads of grain on the real wheat stalks were drooping—but the heads of grain on the poisonous weeds, the darnel, were standing straight up like an arrow.

The point of this parable is that God's people sometimes wonder how evil, in its many different forms, has now come to manifest itself in this world; for after all—everything that God created was good! But here is one of those places—when Jesus himself—is being totally upfront with us about the reality of the devil and all his wicked hosts of angels—that only seek to cause us misery and distress!

Sometimes, Christians become mightily perplexed—when according to their own perception of things—there are other people in the Church who called themselves Christians—but whose behavior seems to be anything but Christ-like at all!

The temptation is always there, for Christ's followers, still today—to pass their judgments on one another—judgments that we, Jesus teaches us here, are really not qualified to make at all!

Just as we sometimes can't tell the fake news from real news, and sometimes can't tell "fools' gold" from real gold and sometimes can't tell "fake" food from real food, neither do we have the skillset to look into other peoples' hearts and minds to see if they are possession of a "fake" faith or in possession of a real faith.

When the master replies that an enemy has sown these poisonous weeds, the faithful servants want to intervene and hopefully pull up all of those nasty weeds from the soil. But the master restrains his servants from doing so—teaching them that in their attempt to gather the weeds they could do some massive damage to the wheat growing in those fields too! Therefore, the master orders his servants to let both grow together until the harvest. Then he will send out his reapers to collect and burn the weeds and to gather the wheat into his barn (Matthew 13:28-30).

Jesus explains that the one who sows the good seeds is the Son of Man, the field is the world, and the good seed are the children of the kingdom. The weeds are the children of the evil one, and the enemy who sowed them is the devil. The harvest signals the end of this present age and the reapers who will come and separate God's true people from those people who have become absolutely adverse to the righteous ways of God are the angels of God themselves!

Jesus himself has already told us in Matthew's Gospel: *"Not all of those who say to me, 'Lord, Lord' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but those only who do the will of my father in heaven"* (Matthew 7:21)!

And I for one will always be immensely grateful to our Savior for those most encouraging words he shares with us on the day after he fed the 5000 men in addition to many women and children with those five barley loaves of bread and two fish. On that day Jesus said: *"I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger and whoever believes in me shall never thirst. For I have come down from heaven not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me. And this is the will of my Father that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. For this is the will of my Father—that everyone—who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life and I will raise him up on the last day"* (John 6:35, 38-40)

In the first of those two letters of St Peter preserved for us in the New Testament, Peter writes: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy he has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead! ⁶ In this you rejoice, even if now for a little while you have had to suffer various trials, ⁷ so that the genuineness of your faith—being more precious than gold that, though perishable, is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed" (I Peter 1:3,6-7)! AMEN