

The Sermon - In 10 Sentences Or Less

1. So much of what we now call "news" is really more entertainment and opinion, designed not to inform but to gain attention, clicks, and viewers, and as such generate income for the news outlet.

2. As a result, now 2/3s of the American public doesn't trust its politicians or journalistic outlets to differentiate clearly between fact and opinion or bias, up 24% since 1984 (see Gallup, 2017).

3. In this way, American politicians and media companies, as conveyors of information, have taken on some of the traits of the false prophets in scripture: a) they tell us what they know we want to hear, b) they steer us away from our own personal responsibility, and c) personal financial gain/profit drives what they say and how they say it.

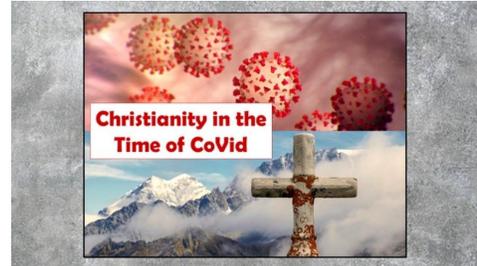
4. Cambridge University's School of Journalism has given us these five warning signs of misinformation, or a biased, skewed news story: a) fear mongering, b) the use of pseudo-experts, c) scapegoating, d) oversimplifying a complex issue down to a sound byte or two, and e) pre-bunking, which means to discredit or rebut the opposing side before they have a chance to speak.

5. We all have biases; it's important to know yours as you listen to news stories, because they impact what you hear and how you interpret it.

6. Everyone of us has the innate, irrational desire "to be right in our own eyes," a recurring phrase in the O.T. Proverbs; this shows up as confirmation bias and the backfire effect, among other ways.

7. None of us are experts at everything, in fact few of us are experts at more than one or two things, thus it's crucial for us to lean on experts to teach us what we don't know; if we aren't willing to dig into an issue or story, we shouldn't share it with others.

8. The O.T. Proverbs advise us to counteract our inherent sense of rightness by a) seeking out information that challenges, not confirms, what we already know or believe, b) listen to the perspective of others who aren't like you (class, race, nationality, education level, etc.) in order to hone and shape your own perspective, c) find trusted wise voices to heed, those who show an ability to be self-critical, self-reflective, and malleable, and d) assume that your views are incomplete and likely limited without taking these steps.



9. Use "The Jesus Test," based on St. Ignatius of Loyola's application of Colossians 2.3, when you're listening to or reading the news: ask yourself, "What would Jesus hear in this? What would catch His attention? What would bother Him, what would He doubt, and what motives would He question? And how could His Kingdom - His goals and values - be expanded or diminished by what I'm hearing?"

Scripture Reading this Week

1. Want to read up on the tactics of false prophets in scripture? Then check out...

- 1st Kings 22.1 - 40: [1 Kings 22.1-40 NSRV](#)
- 2nd Peter 2: [2 Peter 2 NRSVUE](#)

And here's a nifty Bible study/article from The World Council of Churches engaging with Jeremiah 27-29 on the same subject: [Telling Unwelcome Truths: True and False Prophecy](#)

2. Read through the selected Proverbs from yesterday's service a few times this week, even pray through them for yourself and others you know, as a way of remembering God's call for His people to be wise:

- Proverbs 9.8-9 - Do not correct those who make fun of wisdom, or they will hate you, but correct the wise, and they will love you. Teach the wise, and they will become even wiser; instruct good people, and they will learn even more.
- Proverbs 12.15 – Fools think their own way is right, but the wise listen to advice.
- Proverbs 13.20 - Whoever walks with the wise becomes wise, but the companion of fools suffers harm.
- Proverbs 14.16 - Wise people are cautious and stay out of trouble, but fools are careless and throw off restraint.
- Proverbs 18.15 – An intelligent mind seek to acquire knowledge, and the ear of the wise is inclined toward even more knowledge.
- Proverbs 26.28 – A lying tongue hates its victims, and false praise can ruin others.

Quotes for the Week

From Gandhi -

"Truth never damages a cause that is just."

From "Willful Blindness," by Margaret Heffernan -

"The psychology of willful blindness is a human phenomenon to which we all succumb in matters little and large. We can't notice and know everything. So, this means that we train our brain to filter or edit the information we want to let in. Consequently, what we choose to let out is crucial. The tendency is for us to let in information that makes us feel good about ourselves, whilst conveniently filtering out whatever unsettles our fragile ego and most vital beliefs. Fear of conflicts and fear of change keep us that way. The problem with this is that everything outside that warm, safe circle is in our blind spot."

Prayer for the Week

Adapted from the Mission and Discipleship Council of the Church of Scotland:

Gracious God, increase our doubt in our own perspective, for our smugness far exceeds our rightness, and our arrogance outpaces our expertise. We cannot cure everything, control everything, or deduce everything, though we like to pretend otherwise. Pride, often driven by insecurity, is easy; humility is hard. We are far more inclined to resist a challenging idea than heed it.

Give us grace to acknowledge our mistakes and misguided assumptions, forgiveness for our foolishness, and power to live as stewards of creation, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Almighty God, You have brought us to this hour and have kept faith with us. Pry us from the host of distractions and delusions to which we give ourselves so freely. Strengthen our resolve to commit ourselves to the good news of Christ. Counter our desire for certainty and reputation with an urgency to seek and serve Christ, amen.