

3rd Sunday in Lent      3/8/15  
Exodus 20:16            B

## YOU SHALL NOT BEAR FALSE WITNESS AGAINST YOUR NEIGHBOR.

A heated debate on Facebook has landed a Fargo police officer in trouble. In light of a shooting in Grand Forks involving a UND police officer, a man posted on Facebook, “UND cops will shoot anyone they please.” In the heated debate that followed, the Fargo police officer apparently wrote, “u should do us all a favor and hang urself,” which means that he is now the subject of an internal investigation by the Fargo police department.

But, he is not the only person in controversy on social media this past week. Curt Schilling also drew attention to his tweets. Some of you may not know who Curt Schilling is, so I suppose I should point out that he is a former standout pitcher for the Boston Red Sox. His daughter decided to attend a certain university after she was offered a scholarship to play softball, so he tweeted words of congratulations. Several people responded to his tweet with incredibly vulgar, sexually-implicit tweets aimed at his daughter. Schilling responded to the postings, which resulted in the New York Yankees firing an employee and another being suspended by the university he was attending.

No, My Fellow Redeemed in Christ, the sermon this morning is not about the responsible use of social media. Its about the 8th Commandment. Honestly, we don't even need social media to break the 8th Commandment, the the Friday night get together when tongues get loose over a glass of wine or two, the breakroom at work, the coffee shop -- all offer us ample opportunity to harm and ruin the reputation of our neighbor.

Take the example of two men, one named Peter, the other name Paul. Jesus entrusted to Peter the task of preaching the Gospel to the circumcised, ie, the Jews, and entrusted to Paul the task of preaching that same Gospel to the uncircumcised, the Gentiles.

To put this in context, we must remember that in the Christian faith and life, circumcision doesn't matter. What matters is being in Christ Jesus, being a new creation in Him. In Christ, "there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female, for you all are one in Christ Jesus" (Ga 3).

Peter and Paul knew that. Maybe we should say they should have known that, but here's what happened. Peter knew that circumcision doesn't matter and that Christ had freed us from the demands of the Jewish dietary laws, as He had all the law. Peter would eat with the Gentiles. He would eat what was set in front of him. That is, until certain men from Jerusalem came. They were members of what was called the circumcision party. They believed that even Christians had to be circumcised and followed other Jewish laws. Peter was intimidated by them so he withdrew from eating with Gentiles and reverted back to eating only kosher foods. This of course caused problems. There were divisions in the Lord's Church because of false doctrine and lies of the devil. They were no longer one in Christ.

So, how did Paul handle it? He didn't go to the coffee shop to defame his neighbor. He didn't send out an anonymous letter destroying his neighbor's reputation. He didn't log onto Facebook or send out a tweet cutting down Peter. He didn't update his blog, listing one-by-one each and everyone of Peter's mistakes and shortcomings.

Paul doesn't do any of those things. And that's not because Facebook or Twitter hadn't be invented yet. Paul knew the Commandments of God. Paul knows the 8th Commandment, "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor." Paul knew that God was in this Commandment teaching that we talk to our neighbor, not about our neighbor. That means, Dear Baptized, as simply as it can be said, If you have a problem with someone, God demands of you that you talk to that person, AND NO ONE ELSE. And if you are not willing to talk to that person and that person alone, keep your mouth shut. And keeping your mouth shut means do not send a nasty email, or or a vicious post on Facebook, or a cruel tweet. Because if you open your mouth or send out that tweet, you will not be speaking well of your neighbor. You will be spreading lies, gossip, rumors. You will most certainly be sinning against the 8th Commandment.

The end of the story of Peter and Paul is that Paul tells us in the book of Galatians, "I opposed him to his face." Paul goes directly to Peter AND NO ONE ELSE, "If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you force the Gentiles to live like Jews" (Ga 2)? Peter knew he was wrong. There was reconciliation and they were one in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Facebook posts, tweets, wagging tongues that talk about your neighbor do not accomplish that. Walking in the Commandments of God does.

So, we ask that LUTHERAN question: What does this mean? When you, Child of God, have a problem with someone, do you think you should do what Paul did? Do you think you should go and speak to that person and that person alone AND NO ONE ELSE? If the self-described chief of sinners lived that way, you can too. The Gospel that Peter and Paul

proclaimed is the Gospel that makes you a new creation in Christ Jesus and that enables you to live according to God's Commandments.

Before the Gospel is ever preached to you, God tells you that He has a problem with you. The problem is that you're a sinner. When you use your tongue, Facebook, tweets to slander your neighbor, to spread gossip and rumor, you're not speaking well of him, defending him, or explaining his actions in the kindest way. You're sinning against the 8th Commandment. And note that when God does that, He doesn't go around telling everyone and their brother what you have done. He speaks to you -- You have sinned. You have broken My Commandment.

But, He doesn't stop there because He has something else to say to you. And what He says is this: My Son became a man for you. All that He suffered was for you. Onto Himself, He took your sins, your iniquities, your gossip, your slander, your lies, and suffered the punishment you deserved. He shed His blood for you. He died for you. In doing that, He won for you the free forgiveness for all your sins.

Its that Gospel that brought Peter and Paul together and enabled them to have a face-to-face conversation to resolve their problem. Its that same Gospel which moves you to talk to the person that you have a problem with AND NO ONE ELSE.

In Jesus' Name. Amen.