

Honey Deception

November 15, 2009

(Pentecost 24 – Year B)

Mark 13: 1-8

St. Alban's Episcopal Church, Waco, Texas

I must confess to you that I do love Bush's Chicken.

The iced tea at Bush's Chicken is the perfect remedy for a hot, 100 degree, summer day in Waco.

And when I go to Bush's, I like to order the Number 1 combo, which includes four fried chicken tenders, French fries, cream gravy and a homemade roll.

Now when I eat those fried chicken tenders and those fries - and dip them all in that cream gravy - I must admit that I feel a little guilty for indulging in such a high cholesterol meal.

Yet I have always rationalized this fried and fatty meal by making a dessert out of the homemade roll.

I take the homemade roll and dip it into the honey that Bush's Chicken gives you in these little packets.

To me, honey is all-natural and a healthy way to make things sweet.

So I have deceived myself into thinking that the honey that I put on my roll cancels out all the fried and creamy stuff that I have eaten before dessert.

One evening, I picked up Bush's Chicken for our family on my way home from work.

I had just about finished eating my number 1 combo, when I picked up that packet of all-natural and healthy honey to smear onto my roll.

Yet, for some reason, I read the writing on this packet of honey.

The plastic packet did not say: "honey."

The packet actually said: "honey *sauce*."

And when I read the actual ingredients in this honey sauce, I discovered that the ingredients were corn syrup, high fructose corn syrup, sugar, some honey, water and natural and artificial flavors.

My heart sank as I discovered the deception.

Here I thought that I was eating all-natural honey, straight from the hive,
Yet all along I was eating nothing more than flavored corn syrup.
Here I thought that I was eating pure honey,
Yet I had been deceived.

Jesus warns us about being deceived.

Just days before Jesus' death, Jesus sits on the Mount of Olives, opposite the temple.

And Peter, James, John and Andrew ask Jesus a private question.

These disciples ask Jesus when it will be that the temple will be thrown down.

Jesus responds to them, saying:

“Beware, watch out that no one deceives you.

Many will come in my name, claiming, ‘I am he,’ trying to deceive you.”¹

The disciples had just been admiring the large stones and the large buildings that made up the temple.

And Jesus warns them, and he warns us, about being deceived into thinking that the ways and the structures of this world are life-giving.

Jesus warns us, about being deceived.

Now I know that I am probably well on the road to becoming a grumpy old man, because I seem to get more and more angry and grumpy at the deception that goes on in our society.

I am very aware of the catalogs from Eddie Bauer and J. Crew and L.L. Bean that clog our mailbox.

And I can see that they want to deceive me into thinking that a new black sweater is exactly what I need this winter to compliment my mostly black wardrobe.

I know that I am probably well on the road to becoming a grumpy old man, but I can barely walk into a shopping mall anymore without noticing the deception.

And Jesus warns us about this deception, as he says:

“Beware, watch out so that no one deceives you.

Many will come in my name, claiming, ‘I am he,’ trying to deceive you.”

¹ New International Version (NIV)

You know, I don't run into many people these days who tell me that they think that they are Jesus, the Messiah, who has come back to earth.

I don't think that many of us are deceived by false Messiahs who are just crazy whack-jobs who claim to be Jesus.

Yet I do think that many of us are deceived by the false messiahs of advertising and busyness that claim to improve and save our lives.

So how do we keep from being deceived?

Jesus tells us to be aware, to read the labels carefully to check out the real ingredients, and to be constantly vigilant for the ways in which we are being manipulated and deceived.

In just two weeks, the season of Advent will be here.

Advent is the season when we are vigilant and on the look out for Jesus, as we prepare for him to be born in our hearts at Christmas.

And I have to admit that I get especially grumpy when I see the deception that happens during Advent and the month of December.

I get grumpy when I see Christians, who should know better, think that the celebration of Christ's birth should be an occasion for unbridled spending and for frantic schedules that keep people away from worship.

This is why, at St. Alban's this Advent, we are going to participate in the Advent Conspiracy.

The Advent Conspiracy is a movement that began just a few years ago.

A group of pastors, from various denominations, noticed that the way the people in their churches were celebrating Advent and Christmas was not working.

They noticed that people were being deceived by a consumerism and by a busyness that kept people away from worship.

They noticed that Americans spend \$450 billion dollars a year on Christmas.

And yet it would only take \$10 billion to provide clean water around the world through new wells and educational programs.

So these pastors formed a conspiracy, an Advent Conspiracy, to challenge people to:

1. Worship Fully
2. Spend Less
3. Give More

4. Love All.

Of course, one of the things that we all have noticed is the obscene amount of money that is spent on Christmas.

Yet one of the things that I have also noticed is the way that our busy schedules keep us away from worship during December.

We have deceived ourselves into thinking that we are too busy to be in church for Advent and for Christmas.

It still amazes me when I hear members of St. Alban's say to me:

"Oh no, we don't go to worship on Christmas Eve because that is the night that we spend with our family."

That is part of the deception, my friends!

The advent and the birth of Jesus was first celebrated by the Virgin Mary who worshiped and angels who worshiped and shepherds who worshiped and wise men who worshiped and, for gosh sakes, we even show in our manger scenes that cows and sheep who worshiped.

Therefore, we are deceived if we think that Advent and Christmas are primarily for families or for children or for retailers to make their profits.

The Advent and Christmas seasons are primarily for worship.

Advent and Christmas are for the worship of Jesus, the true Messiah, who gives us a life that far surpasses family and children and profits.

And because Advent and Christmas are primarily about worship, I am asking each of you, as a part of our Advent Conspiracy, to promise to worship, once a week, for each of the four weeks of Advent.

You might be asking why I am preaching today about Advent and Christmas, when those seasons are still weeks away.

The reason is that I have already seen Christmas lights up and on in my neighborhood.

So I am keeping awake - and alert.

And I want you all to beware – now – of the deception that can lead us astray in the next few weeks.

For false Messiahs will most likely not deceive you in the form of a crazy man on the street corner.

But false Messiahs will come to you in the form of a mail order catalog that insists that a new golf club is just what you need to be completely fulfilled on the golf course.

False Messiahs will come to you in the form of a busy calendar that insists that you just don't have the time to worship God.

So beware, be alert.

Don't be deceived by flavored corn syrup - packaged as honey.

AMEN.

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