

Eighteenth Sunday After Pentecost

October 1, 2023

Free to live, forever, for Him!

Ezekiel 18:1-4, 25-32

“Stupid is as Stupid Does!”

Forrest Gump, quoting his mother, every time someone regarded his simple mannerisms and asked, “Boy are you stupid?” The character, Forrest, in the famous movie would not take it laying down and was ready with this response every time.

I must admit for years I didn't quite understand what that meant. That movie came out long before I was a pastor and nobody who saw it for the first time predicted it would have the cultural impact that it has had to this day. But upon further examination of so much of what that movie means and seeing its application in social and spiritual circles for the last 20 years, I think I finally get it.

You're only stupid if you DO stupid things!!!

Bear with me, I am one of those who has done a lot of stupid things in my life.

Today Ezekiel is pointing out that obvious truth in this prophecy. Play stupid games, expect stupid results. This is what the people of Israel and Judea needed to hear. They thought they could play games, cheating on God, and somehow get away with it. Well, nothing could be further from the truth.

It seems to me, in life there are those who play by the rules and those who think rules are meant to be broken.

I will never forget a fellow Kiwanian I knew, when I was a member of Kiwanis myself, who was a faithful Catholic. I would enjoy sitting with him when his son played for the Catholic school basketball team and came to play us here at Faith. He, like me, really enjoyed the rivalry between our two schools and the fact that it was an equal match. You never knew who was going to come out on top and the down-to-the-wire games were fun for him, even when they lost. He was truly a man of integrity and all about following the rules, which I was grateful for as he was a prominent banker in the area.

He recounted the story of when he was meeting with a congressman over the issues of banking and advising him accordingly. As they were discussing the banking laws and the policies of the government, my colleague realized the conversation was delving into dangerous

territory and immediately expressed his concern saying, “Whoa, I have to stop the conversation right here and make sure everyone understands that what you are proposing is unconstitutional!”

To his utter amazement the congressman looked him square in the eye and said, “Yah, were going to have to find a way to get around that, aren’t we?”

Truly, there are those who play by the rules and those who think the rules are meant to be broken.

Full disclosure: I am a rule follower and a rule breaker or maybe more simply a rule ignorer, depending on the rule. God’s word is absolute, we can all agree on that, otherwise we would not be here this evening/morning. You know you are going to hear the Word of God proclaimed in all that we do.

But, poorly-thought-out-knee-jerk-reaction policies? Unenforceable laws? Ridiculous mandates? Anti-Christ regulations? Well, let’s just say, peaceful and civil disobedience would be my go-to modus operandi at that point. I’m not suggesting that I am some sort of political crusader, honestly, I don’t have time for that; but I certainly take many rules with a grain of salt should they present themselves poorly without objective reasons for said rules. And, I think most of us are mature enough and spiritual enough to know this is probably the norm rather than the exception.

So, nobody follows the rules perfectly all the time. That’s not what Ezekiel is talking about. He is talking about the absolute certainty of God’s Word that is being ignored, like the congressman wanted to get around the Constitution of the United States which *he swore an oath to uphold* when he took that office. I don’t have to tell any of you twice, that is bad, really bad; and what Judah and Israel did, was way worse than that.

They disobeyed GOD! Not only that, they tried to suggest that God was wrong, and they were righteous! The lunacy of that mentality simply cannot be overstated! That’s like a toddler telling their parent that they know how to parent better than they do! That’s like a hardened criminal telling a good policeman what the law is! That’s like a private in the Army telling a General how to move the troops in a major battle. That’s like a high school Home Ec Student telling Gordon Ramsey or Emeril Lagasse how to run a high-end kitchen! We can all agree on every one of those points that YOU JUST DON’T DO THAT!!!

And yet...I would bet...that if I took a quick poll of everyone: Someone, would know someone who lets their children tell them when they think it’s a good time for bed. Someone knows a repeat offender who argues with the police every time they get caught, insisting they

were framed by the police!! Someone here served in the military and questioned the ability of a 4-star senior officer from the lowly position of an enlisted man. And I think it's safe to say, we have a momma or a grandma who is certain that Gordon and Emeril can't bake their way out of a paper bag, compared to their homemade pie recipe.

So, we need not get too picky with the Judeans and the Israelites, like we're superior to them. We all have our ridiculous moments of arrogance in the face of truly superior wisdom. I'm not saying they're never right, but assuming they are from the get-go is a bit presumptuous and ridiculous.

But it's dangerous, spiritually, to our souls when we do that to God and His Word. When we think we can hold back our gifts and talents from Him, Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5 prove that God expects nothing to be deceptively held back when He calls upon us for the mission. When anyone despises the sacraments and takes them lightly or regards them ignorantly, they are in danger of "drinking judgment to themselves not discerning the body and blood of the Lord" as Paul says in 1 Corinthians 11. And when we fail in our mission to raise our children properly for Christ and the church, Proverbs 22 reiterates that reminder of today's Proverb from Ezekiel, that stupid is as stupid does and we teach our children our stupid ways and not God's way.

Sometimes Fishermen are stupid.

Let me explain. I was a fisherman some years ago as a little boy in Minnesota! I had my bait, my tackle box, my Zebco spin cast rod and reel, and a creek or a lake within a 5-minute walk out my front door, any direction I walked. So, I know a thing or two about stupid fisherman. I have seen it all. I watched kids fish with dry kernels of corn, they didn't even get a bite. I have watched kids cheat with salmon eggs, which were illegal in Minnesota at the time. And I have watched adults fish illegally without a license ignorantly thinking the game warden would not come and check. Yup, that cost them all their poles and all their fishing gear because the game warden walks you back to your car and takes any fishing gear you have in the car too! But the worst I have ever seen was recently a professional fisherman who cheated at a bass tournament.

Full disclosure: I am not a Florida Bass fisherman, so mostly I regard tournaments from the viewpoint of an outside observer of the news. So, please forgive my ignorance of the details, but I think I got the gist of the immense stupidity of this professional bass fisherman. What I understand is that the winner is determined by the total weight of their fish, not the total number of fish caught. That may not be the actual rule, but you will understand why I surmised it that way when I tell you the stupid thing this professional fisherman did.

So, I caught the video footage right at the point when the suspicious event's organizer decided to check the contents of the belly of a fish and found they had been stuffed with lead fishing weights. Then, they checked all their catch and found they were all stuffed with lead weights totaling 8 pounds in all, in addition to the original weight of the fish.

<https://video.search.yahoo.com/search/video?fr=mcafee&ei=UTF-8&p=Team+of+Fisher+Accused+of+Cheating+by+Stuffing+Fish+with+weights&vm=r&type=E210US714G0#id=1&vid=1a4b20aeceb7aa09b94d7e4c11656a6f&action=click>

The other fishermen were furious! This was for a \$30,000-dollar cash prize and they almost walked away with it, having found a way to get around the rules. The humiliation, the embarrassment at their stupidity, was written all over their face; and likely, their ability to ever enter another tournament would be denied, changing their careers and ability to even make money doing what they loved.

Maybe you have been there, caught in your embarrassing willful sin. Maybe it cost you your job, your wife, and children, or even your freedom to an all-expense-paid-less-than-luxurious vacation behind bars. You found yourself, just like the Judeans and Israelites, in a captivity of your own making because you stuffed your soul with the weight of sin that finally got exposed by Satan, the accuser who fed you those sins to begin with.

Fear not. For Jesus comes along through the cross, to cut those sins out of your body, and swallows them on the cross never to be held against you ever again. Jesus washes your soul with His life-giving water of Holy Baptism. He comes to you in, with, and under the bread and wine to forgive you, strengthen you, and keep you steadfast in Him.

Yes, we all tried to get around the rules, break the rules, or just plain ignore the rules for our own selfish gain; but Jesus is the rule that breaks the grip Satan had on our lives, so we are now free to live, forever, for Him!

AMEN.

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