

St Nicholas Parish Church, Prestwick

Sunday 24<sup>th</sup> April 2022

The Thought for the Week

The Glasgow minister was out doing pastoral visits in his parish when he came across four young lads in the street, all standing around a stray dog.

“What are you doing, boys?” he inquired.

“O, we are telling lies,” one of the four replied. “And the one who can tell the biggest porkie gets to keep the dog!”

“Now, now, when I was your age,” continued the Minister, “I would never have dreamt for one minute of telling lies.”

There was silence. Then another of the youngsters piped up, pointing at the Minister, “I guess he gets to keep the dug!”

The name of Daniel Goleman won't mean much to most folk, but he was the legal counsel of President Richard Nixon during the Watergate Scandal some years back.

That meant he was up to his ears in corruption, deception and cover up.

When he gave testimony to the Senate Watergate Committee, we are told that he amazed the committee members with the precise details about who said what, when they said it, and who else was present in the room.

However, when the Watergate tapes were finally prised loose from President Nixon and played for the committee, Goleman's account was revealed to be what the psychologists call “wishful memory.”

Like a lot of us, Daniel remembered some things that didn't quite happen.

And surprise, surprise, most of what he said he remembered put a much more positive light than was the actual case and turn of events.

He remembered what he was hoping was the truth.

The truth got twisted because Goleman was scared, or because the situation was tense, or because his future was at stake.

There is a lesson here for all of us.

Looking back at my own life I remember several instances when I told lies.

It was a sunny Spring Saturday morning in the Manse in my first parish. I was casually dressed, boyish looking, slim, 25! The doorbell rang and there on the

doorstep was a fellow looking fairly the worse for wear. I surmised almost instantly what he was looking for. "Is the Minister in?" he asked. And as quick as a flash, I replied, "No, I am very sorry, my father is out at the moment!" I couldn't get away with that now!

I looked up the definition of lie in the Oxford English Dictionary: "A statement that one knows to be untrue." Here is my own extended definition: to lie is to say two different things with one tongue: to tell only what benefits and omit the rest. To alter the facts due to fears, desires, or feelings such as hate, anger and so on.

Maybe you agree with the wee boy who was asked what a lie was and replied, "A lie is an abomination to the Lord, but a very present help in time of trouble."

St Paul, in his letter to the Romans, declares that everyone is a liar. Although many of us don't want to believe that, somehow we know deep in our hearts that is the truth. Throughout human history, people have lied. They did. They do. They will. East and West, old and young, male and female, we all lie. It is not surprising, and strangely comforting, to discover in the Bible that even people of faith lied too. In fact, that is one of the reasons that I love the Bible. God's Word doesn't hide or embellish. It paints the true picture, warts and all. It calls a spade a spade.

When the people of God lied, it says that they lied.

It never justifies lying.

Rather, it painfully reveals both the good and ugly side of God's people. There is quite a list of them from the pages of the Scriptures – Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Jacob, Saul, David, and even St Peter. It tells me that we are all human and no one is perfect except our Lord Jesus who was sinless and never told a lie.

Everyone else lies from time to time.

What I find quite frightening today is that so many in positions of authority and power tell such blatant lies and block the truth in such a way that it has spun our society and our world into a whirlwind of confusion, and it has huge consequences for us all. You see, a lie has no legs; it requires other legs to support it. Tell one lie and you are forced to tell another.

Without the truth, our society cannot rightly plan its future.

We are now living in a society that has become so desensitised to lying that it has become the norm rather than the exception. Some politicians have reduced lying to an art; sales people and advertisers have been known to deceive people. Truth seems to be in very short supply too in news making and even in some areas of scientific research. Is it any wonder that people have become so disillusioned?

At the end of the day, lying runs counter to the God who made us. St Paul, writing to Titus, says, "God does not lie." There is nothing in God's character that is untrustworthy and unreliable.

When President Abraham Lincoln was 24 years of age, he served as Postmaster in the town of New Salem in Illinois, a post for which he received the annual salary of \$55.70.

The Post Office of which he was in charge, closed, but it was several years before an agent arrived from Washington to settle accounts with the ex Postmaster, who was now a struggling lawyer, and not doing very well.

The agent informed Lincoln that there was \$17 due to the government.

Lincoln then opened an old trunk and took out a yellowed cotton rag bound with string.

Untying it, he spread out the cloth and there was the \$17.

He had been holding on to it for all those years.

Lincoln said, "I never use any man's money but my own."

He could have easily lied to the agent about the money and have got away with it.

But even 24 years before he entered the White House to occupy the highest office in the land, Lincoln was showing the kind of character that earned him the title, "Honest Abe."

St Paul points out to the Ephesian Christians that we are a people committed to the truth. As followers of Jesus, the words that we utter should tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth.

For you see, I so agree with the philosopher, Nietzsche, who said, "What upsets me is not that you lied to me, but that from this moment on, I can no longer believe anything you say."

The Revd Fraser R Aitken, Locum Minister