

Congregational Church of the Messiah

August 31, 2008

“Truth and Consequences”

I Samuel 2:22-25; John 21:15-17

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There are consequences for everything. In the current issue of *The Costco Connection*, Jamie Lee Curtis, author of children’s books, is featured in an article titled the same as this sermon. She originally wrote in a children’s book, “When I was little I didn’t understand consequences, now I do, but I don’t like them.”¹ Often we expect consequences to be unpleasant.

Before one acts, one may consider carefully what one expects the consequences of the act to be. Even when buying or selling stocks, or signing up for another magazine subscription, or choosing to get out of bed in the morning or not, there are consequences to each action.

Recuperating these last few weeks, I have had the opportunity to make many choices and to experience immediately the consequences of some of the choices I made. The consequences have been good or not so good.

This morning, I bring you some good news that Eli never heard, some good news that Peter never expected and some good news that can change your attitude toward consequences.

With God, the truth is:

Some consequences can be *good*.

Not every consequence of telling the truth is *bad*.

Not every time we act, will the result be negative.

It may also be positive beyond our highest expectations.

The truth is:

When we choose to walk with God,

to be filled with God’s Holy Spirit,

to try and let God’s light and truth shine through us,

the consequences are incredible.

They are amazing!

Keith Miller was driving home from a football game one night after partying with the guys. The car left the road, crashed down the embankment and came to rest in an

¹ Ponder, Stephanie E. Book Beat: Truth and Consequences. *The Costco Connection*; September 2008: 42.

Truth and Consequences

irrigation ditch. As he came to, he realized he could not move his head. His neck had been broken. He wondered what it would be like to die. However, the initial consequence was not the ultimate. Rather he was found, gradually recovered and gained a whole new purpose for his life.²

We do not have to have such a dramatic or life-threatening crisis to trust God who wants to guide us to make the best choices resulting in surprisingly good consequences.

There was a time when people of faith only had a “worst case” scenario from which they imagined the dire consequences of failing to live up to God’s truth.

In the Old Testament, Eli was a faithful prophet and priest for years, but his two sons did not live up to that faithfulness. They turned away from God, rejected honoring God and even rejected their father’s pleas to stop their evil ways and honor God. They not only refused to change, but their father, good old Eli, the faithful priest, was unwilling to discipline them to honor God or force them to leave the temple. Tough love is never easy.

Eli knew the truth. He was told what the serious consequences would be. Moreover, there was no one who could stand up for his sons when they sinned against God Himself. The devastating consequence for their dishonoring God was the death of both of Eli’s sons on the same day and the cutting down of all male members of Eli’s household.

Then the Lord raised up a new prophet and priest in Eli’s place. Samuel was faithful, and through him, the Lord spoke to His people year after year.

However, the truth was that God speaking through the prophets and priests was not enough. Consequently, the people continued to go off on their own, to ignore God and to suffer negative results. Instead of living up to their covenants with God, they failed, and the consequences were dark indeed.

It would be like ignoring your doctor’s best advice and applying your own limited knowledge and outdated ideas to cure illnesses. Even when you fail to improve, you do not change your behavior. The consequence of taking the wrong medicine or too much or too little of even the right medication is significant. This practice of not following sound medical advice is a self-evident truth to all of us who deal with health issues.

God speaking through the prophets and priests gave advice, but the people did not become faithful followers of God. They did not understand how much God loved them and wanted to bless them if they would only follow Him.

Therefore, God decided on a new approach. He would send His Son, and people would see and learn how to relate to Him in spirit and in truth. Then the consequences would be

² Miller, Keith. *The Taste of New Wine*.

Truth and Consequences

blessings, joy, and peace instead of drought, battles, and destruction.

The New Testament is the fulfillment of the Old Testament just as the two great commandments, “to love the Lord with all our heart, and mind and soul and strength and our neighbor as ourselves,” (Mark 12:30-31) are the fulfillment of all the laws and commandments.

God sent the Truth, the Way and the Light into the world in the form of a human being so that we might all relate to God in a new and personal way. You see, God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself. God was not just a transcendent Being somewhere in the heavens to be feared but never known. Instead, God revealed His nature to us through sending Jesus who showed us that the real truth that God is a Spirit—a Spirit who seeks your good—not one who wants to punish you with mean consequences whenever you fail.

Look at how Jesus treated one of his favorite disciples who failed Him when Jesus was arrested. Peter swore he did not know Jesus. The pressure was real. Peter’s faith was weak. He wanted to be alone, but he could not bring himself to stay away. Three times in the same evening, Peter claimed Jesus was not his friend.

How do we treat a friend who has gotten into trouble? Do we also pretend we do not know him or her? How about a public figure that has done something wrong, do we try to distance ourselves from that person regardless of whether the accusation is proven or just alleged? How many times do we forgive someone who has wronged us? And how many times do we want someone else to forgive us when we have sincerely repented and asked for forgiveness? Once? Twice? Three times?

Led in chains past the courtyard, Jesus looked over at his big fisherman disciple whom He loved. For a moment, their eyes were fastened on each other piercing Peter’s very soul. Then Jesus was gone, out of sight. The truth of that moment carried an eternal consequence for Peter, for you and for me.

In those few seconds, Peter realized Jesus had fundamentally changed the old formula for consequences for failure. No longer would you get what you deserve from God: You break it; you pay for it. You fail and you die as the sons of Eli had.

Instead, Peter realized that Jesus totally understood and accepted Peter’s weakness, and Jesus believed in the good God had put within Peter. Jesus knew that Peter had qualities that superseded the denials he had uttered. Jesus believed in Peter more than Peter believed in himself. Jesus reconciled Peter to Himself and to God.

After His death and Resurrection, Jesus met some of the disciples by the Sea of Galilee, where they had been fishing. After breakfast of cooked fish and bread, Jesus asks Peter, in front of all the others, “Do you love me more than these?” Of course Peter responds

Truth and Consequences

that he does.

A second time Jesus asks Peter, “Do you love me?” And again, Peter responds that he does.

Then a third time Jesus asks Peter the very same question using the very same words, “Do you love me?”

Perhaps Jesus was canceling out the three times Peter had denied Him in the courtyard. Perhaps Jesus was making sure Peter knew Jesus also loved Peter and so was entrusting to him the tending of His little lambs, the feeding of his adult sheep, the guiding of all His sheep.

The consequences that Peter experienced were not what he expected but far better than he expected or deserved. Instead of being rebuked, he became the person Jesus trusted to lead the disciples in Jerusalem.

Forty days after the Resurrection, an additional consequence happened. The Spirit of God came and filled the upper room, entering the hearts and minds of all those disciples present, confirming that God’s Spirit was still with them. That Spirit was one of Good News of repentance and forgiveness, of acceptance and joy and salvation.

Today, because of our faith, we are to be the living examples of this New Testament Good News. We are not as dramatic as fireworks and balloons. We are not living with great fan fare or bold headlines. But quietly and steadily, “speaking the truth in love” we are to be God’s Good News to everyone. We are to grow up into the gathering of people known as the Lord’s Free People. We have great good news to share.

With Christ there is truth and consequences that are blessings from God beyond our wildest expectations.

God blesses us always.

Amen.