

A CONSPIRACY THEORY

John 3: 16-21

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We live in a world in which conspiracy theories abound, a world in which somebody somewhere has this theory that other somebodies somewhere are controlling or manipulating certain events to dupe the general public and thus gain more complete control and power of the universe.

For the latest in conspiracy theories, all you need to do is to check the tabloid rack at the Super Market check-out stand. Among some of the more familiar theories that have stood the test of time, there are, of course the conspiracy theories about the assassination of John Kennedy. Some Elvis fans have asserted that Elvis only faked his death and is actually alive and well today. There are, likewise, conspiracy theories that the lunar landing never really happened, but was an elaborate hoax. Growing up, I remember the rumor and the resulting theories that Paul McCartney was dead and the Beatles hired a look alike to carry on in his absence. Then, of course, we are mindful of some of the even more exotic or, shall we say, more creative conspiracy theories involving everything from Big Foot to UFO's, Aliens and Mermaids to the Lost Continent of Atlantis.

And for those who are truly into conspiracy theory, there is what is known as the "**Grand Unified Conspiracy Theory**" which holds that each of these conspiracy plots is a part of an "inter-locking hierarchy of conspiracies" in which all of the world's events are controlled by a single evil entity.

It is, I think, a fascinating phenomenon that influences more people than we might think. Psychologist **Rob Brotherton** has written a book entitled, "Suspicious Minds: Why We Believe Conspiracy Theories." He suggests that as many as 90% of people acknowledge entertaining one conspiracy theory or another. "**Given a handful of dots,**" he writes, "**our pattern seeking brains can't resist try to connect them.**" He further suggests that even the most rational people sometimes buy into conspiracy theories as a way of reacting to the feeling of uncertainty and powerlessness in the world. When we are cynical about the world in general and politics in particular, conspiracy theories become quite popular. It is no surprise, therefore, that conspiracy theories are alive and well. These cartoons serve to illustrate this point.



Now, this is not to suggest that every conspiracy theory is preposterous or impossible. As Brotherton points out in an article in the Los Angeles Times, "**Dismissing all conspiracy**

theories as crazy is just as intellectually lazy as credulously accepting every wild allegation. “If you had claimed, in the early 1970’s, that a hotel burglary was, in fact, a plot by White House officials to illegally spy on political rivals and ensure the re-election of the President, you might well have been accused of conspiracy theorizing.”

Given the climate of suspicion and fear that we experience today, it is no surprise to learn that there are conspiracy theories concerning just about everything—from government and politics to religion and spirituality. Quite simply, it is the way that some people are wired to think—that somebody somewhere is out to control their thoughts or their choices or their very lives for their sinister and selfish benefit.

This morning I would like to share the fact that I too, have a conspiracy theory. But it is one that is quite different from some of the other conspiracy theories that you may be aware of. It has nothing to do with greed, self-centeredness, or fear and everything to do with compassion, kindness and love.

My conspiracy theory is that “God so loved the world” that God gave us Jesus—and in giving us Jesus, God gave us a vision of what the world can be like when people are willing to conspire together to love and care and give and share—even as Jesus taught by the example of his own living.

By definition, the word, conspire comes from the Latin, “**Conspirare,**” which means to be in harmony with, or to breathe with. I happen to believe that there are quite a number of people, “out there,” conspiring in this very moment to act on behalf of the greater good of many of us. They even have a name. We call them our mothers!

When you stop to think about it, our mother’s often provide us with a beautiful witness to the power of faithful and unrelenting love in overcoming the challenges and the obstacles that life may have placed in their way. I think that it is fair to suggest that, in many cases, Paul’s description of the traits of love fit them perfectly...

Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, and endures all things.”

That is, I believe, a most fitting description of the love that my mother had for me—and I trust that you might say the same. Mother’s, you see, are actively engaged in a conspiracy of love...a conspiracy that is often secret and behind the scenes, but a conspiracy that can make a remarkable difference for good and for God.

There are other networks “out there,” taking part in this conspiracy of love. One of them is a work within our own congregation. As many of you are aware, The Kindness Korps has published a little booklet that has documented this conspiracy of love and kindness that is taking place within the life of our congregation. When you stop to think about it, it’s really

pretty amazing to consider the many coordinated acts of kindness and care that are continually being generated each week in order to help meet the needs of individual people within our community of faith. This is simply a part of who we are and what we do. It is, you might say, a part of our DNA. Thanks be to God!

There are, of course, many other examples of the Conspiracy of Love at work in our world. Thanks to the technology of Youtube, we can see and experience these random acts in a more personal and powerful way

We can see, then, that there are different conspiracy theories at work within our culture. Some people are convinced that the forces of evil are at work, conspiring to bring violence and destruction to us all.

Others are convinced that it is the power of love that is at work and that this power will eventually win out—no matter how great the darkness appears to be. They dare to believe that God’s love for humanity is so great that there is nothing that can overcome it—not even death itself.

I’m wondering, which of these two very different conspiracy theories are you inclined to align yourself with? In which of these theories are you inclined to invest your time, energy and effort? The conspiracy of evil or the conspiracy of love?

While this world can be a very frightening place, a place where evil and injustice and corruption sometimes flourish, the witness of John’s Gospel remind us that, “God so loved this world” that he gave us Jesus and his witness of courage in the face of fear, of hope in the face of despair, of love in the face of hatred. It is this witness that we lift up, this witness that again and again, serves to remind us that we are called to be a part of the conspiracy that he started...the conspiracy that still grows...the conspiracy that is greater than any obstacle evil can put in its way.

What I would like to know this morning is if you believe that? And if you do believe it, do you believe it enough to live like it...to invest yourself fully and deeply in the powerful plot to overcome evil with good, to let love be the light that shines in the darkness, the light that the darkness cannot overcome?

I hope that you do because the Church ought to be a place where people gather each week to take part in the plot to love this world as God has loved it, to take on the assignments for giving, caring, and sharing the good news that God’s love is at work and simply will not be denied.

In closing, this morning, allow me to state the obvious. In this broken and bruised world of ours, we have much work to do. But let us find strength and courage in the opportunity that is ours to share this work together, to conspire together for good and for God.

Let us take heart in the knowledge that God is hard at work even now, working within us—inviting us to use our time and our energy, our gifts and our passion to renew, restore and renew this world in the name of love.

If you ask me, this is a conspiracy not only worth believing in. It is a conspiracy theory worth the investment of our very lives. Amen.