

Sermon Notes
“That’s What Friends Are For”

Martino Cartier @ Gloucester County Community Church

I. Intro- Have you ever believed a lie?

Well good morning! It’s so wonderful to be with you all today. Ya know, there is something about a lie that is just catastrophic and can destroy everything. Have you ever believed a lie? Have you ever been told a lie?

In fact, sometimes you are told a lie by someone and the person sharing it with you doesn’t even know that its a lie. And that exact thing is what can cause people to miss their purpose and miss out on knowing a loving God.

II. CCD

So, let me explain something to you. When I was really little, before I came to the Gloucester County Community Church. I went to something called CCD. And when I was at CCD, we were leaning one day about purgatory and about how you had to be baptized as a baby because if something happened to use before we were baptized and we died, we would go to purgatory. And I asked her, why would God do something like that? And she gave me a pamphlet to back it up. And at that young age, I didn’t want the pamphlet. I wanted to know where in the Bible did it say that. And I found out that it didn’t. At that moment, I told my mother that I was not going to CCD anymore.

There is a reason why the last 4 verses in the Bible are one of the most profound verses in the Bible. It says in Revelations 22:18. 18“I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this scroll: If anyone adds anything to them, God will add to that person the plagues described in this scroll. 19 And if anyone takes words away from this scroll of prophecy, God will take away from that person any share in the tree of life and in the Holy City, which are described in this scroll. 20 He who testifies to these things says, “Yes, I am coming soon.” Amen. Come, Lord Jesus. 21 The grace of the Lord Jesus be with God’s people. Amen.

III. Angelo's Diner

There is a reason why lies aren't good, because if they deter people from coming to church, believing in God and finding everlasting life. There's something about lies. Now, when I was about 12 or 13, I remember I was all dressed up. I walked in to Angelo's Diner like Rico Suave.

And this man says to me "You look so dapper! Where are you going this morning?". And I said "I am going to church!". He said "Wonderful! Are you going to St. Bridgets?". And I said "No, I am going to Gloucester County Community Church". And he said "Gloucester County Church! With that cult leader?! That fraud?! That fake minister?! Says he's saving all this money to build a church! Debt free?! You mark my words young man! He's gonna take that money and run to Venezuela!"

I went to church that morning and I was mad! I stormed right up to Pastor Bruce who barely knew me at the time. And I pointed my finger and said, "Are you taking this money from the church, and going to run to Venezuela?!" He looked at me like my head was spinning and he laughed. And I got to tell you, many years later I was here for the ground breaking ceremony.

I helped build this platform with his father. If I believed the lie that was told to me at Angelo's Diner and decided not to ever come back, thousands of lives would not have been touched or changed, including my own. You can't believe the lie.

IV. Oprah Winfrey

Recently, I had the opportunity to be with Oprah Winfrey

Oprah believed a lie for so much of her life that it costs her so much pain and she shared this story with me about her mother who never showed her love. Her father never showed her love and on her mother's dying day, she went to see her because hospice called. And sat before her mother with so many things left unsaid but couldn't find the words to say them. She said, "I am Oprah Winfrey. I have interviewed 37,000 people one on

one, face to face and I can't think of one thing to say. Making the story short for time today, but God gave her a word after she prayed with one of her friends who is a famous gospel singer. And she said, "Mom, do you need anything?" "No." "Do you want to say anything?" "No". She said I didn't know what to do so I picked up the hospice handbook. It says talk about something fun that you can remember. "And there was nothing fun I could remember." Talk about something she taught you. "She never taught me anything. And then God gave me this. I said mom, I have something I want to say to you. I thought my whole life you were never the mother I needed, nor the mother I wanted. But when you were 17 and you were poor and you were broke and had no education, you were pregnant and you were told get rid of that baby. You better get rid of that pregnancy, I know someone that could take care of that. But you didn't. You kept that baby. And I want to thank you for being the mother I needed. The mother I had to have because you kept that baby!" You see she believed the lie that put a burden on her, her whole life. Lies destroy people.

V. Bring A Friend Weekend

A few weeks ago, when Abby Johnson was here- it was an incredible service for those of you that were here. I went into the bookstore to purchase her book and to buy a travel bible. So I get in there and Janet Buck is at the register. This credit card machine is like ancient. Uh PB, you need to update it. And I'm sitting there getting very impatient, but thank God I waited. This woman walked in and she said "I am so happy to finally meet you." And Janet said "You've been coming for a long time". And the woman said "Yes, but I've never met him". And I said "Its such an honor to meet you. How did you come to the church?". She said "Someone invited me to come see the Easter Play and I've been coming ever since".

Follow me. I wasn't three steps out of that bookstore and that voice we hear, ya know that voice, that thing that happens, that crazy thing- instantly said to me "You have to go to Pastor Bruce and tell him that we must have a Friends Weekend!" Thats what fiends are for, right? Friends are to bring people that they love to something that they need and to be there for them and to educate them and to lead them to the well of life. Right? Mind you, that week we had a members meeting and the whole

year was already planned from January to December. Pastor Bruce spent two hours telling everybody and the lead team, this is what we are doing! And here I come running to Pastor Bruce right away “Can we have lunch tomorrow? I have to talk to you”. And I thought to myself, if we have a Friends Weekend and we invite people that would never come to church because of a lie, they would never come to church because they say “if I walked in, it would burn down! The wall would crumble!” Guess what? Pastor Bruce, your mission from the President is to dispel the lie. Introduce people to the true God, the One who loves you. The One who says in Psalm 103:11-12 11 For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him; 12 as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us.

The One that shows people that it is OK, that He forgives you. And all those man-made rules don't exist. They're not in this book. They're nowhere and whoever tells you that, tell them to read the last four verses of Revelation.

Now! Just getting started. But first, to set the scene, Ladies and Gentlemen take a look at the screen and listen closely to the words that Dez Childs is going to sing.

Did you hear those words? Ya know the one I really love is “a missionary came to your church. His pictures made you cry. You didn't have much money but you gave it anyway and Jesus took that gift you gave” and that's why I'm here today. Think about that.

VI. Frank Gabrielli

I'm going to personalize it now. I was very young and a woman came to me to get her hair done, a lovely woman. Her name was Mary Gabrielli. When Mary was young, she and her girlfriends would go to a payphone outside the Army barracks and they would call the payphone inside of the barracks to see if a guy would answer. And one day, Mary made that call and this guy picked up the phone. They started talking, they started dating, they got married.

His name was Frank Gabrielli. Frank became one of my clients too and back then I didn't have two pennies to rub together. Frank had a very successful business. He loved to fish and I loved to fish.

And Frank used to say to me, "Ya know I'm going to Costa Rica, if you want to come, we catch really big marlin. You're more than welcome to come" I said "How much does the trip cost?" He said "\$5000". I didn't have \$5 so I was never able to go. And then Frank build this beautiful custom home. I wanted to be Frank. Frank had a successful business, he lived a wonderful life. I wanted to be Frank. And then, years go by. I get to play Jesus here at the church. I wanted Frank to come see me. Frank said "You want me to what? If I walk in that church, those walls will crumble and that place will burn to the ground".

I said "Frank c'mon!" He said "Martin" because that's what Frank called me, he said "I love you but I'm an atheist. I'm sorry, I'm not going". Years went on and the economy crashed. Frank lost his business. On top of losing his business, Frank developed ALS, also known as Lou Gehrig's disease. I was heart broken. I loved Frank and I knew what the end of this story was going to be.

So, I decided to raise money for ALS. We had a cut-a-thon outside. I went in a dunk tank. Kiki was throwing balls- the little girl that I granted a wish for with Justin Bieber before she passed away. We raised \$13,000 for ALS of greater Philadelphia.

Now, it starts to hit me. Frank is an atheist. How can I let someone that I love and care about die, not believing in God. So I go to Frank's house and I said "Frank, I have to talk to you about something and its very difficult for me to do." He said "Whats that?" I said "What if you're wrong and I'm right? If you're wrong and I'm right, you're the only one that loses" And he said "Martin, how can I believe in something I can't see, I can't hear. It just doesn't make sense" I said "Frank, I don't know but I know this. 7 "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. 8 For everyone who asks receives; the one

who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.”
Matthew 7:7-8

So I left that day and Frank fell, he was in the hospital and it wasn't looking good. And I have text messages that I was going to put on the screen, but we don't have time. They texted me that this was it. I texted back, "Its not it because I'm praying. Its not time" And that day, he blinked. And the daughter who's a nurse texted me and said "I don't believe it" I said "Yeah, well I knew because there's power in my God". And Frank made it home and I went to see him again and I said "Frank, listen to me. Just do me a favor. Can you just say Hey! Yo! Buddy, if you're real, I'll believe. Can you just kinda show me something?"

He said "Fine! I'll do it! But I'm doing it for you" I said "I don't care why you do it, just do it". So I left him a Word For You Today and I came back a couple weeks later. I said "Anything Frank?" He goes "Nope!". I said "But did you try?" He says "I even did it when I was sitting on the toilet by myself. Hey God! Hello?! Hello?" I said "Frank, keep trying". And then the day came, I got the phone call from Mary Gabrielli. She had tears of joy! So happy! Frank heard! I don't know what he heard, but he heard and he got saved. And he wanted to be baptized. And he did. He got baptized and then shortly after, he went to be with the Lord. And one day, when I walk upon the streets of god, but the crystal sea, he will be one of the names that calls out to me to say thank you for giving to the Lord. Now, Frank's (conversion) was so cool. He knew he was going to die. So in his will, he left me the marlin from the trip that I couldn't go on with him when I was young. Take a look...there's Frank with the marlin, and there it is hanging on the wall in my office.

He also left me a bottle of scotch and a letter. I'm going to read the letter (its like 4 sentences) Today, in light of Bring A Friend weekend, I invited Frank's wife Mary Gabrielli who's with us today. Mary would you please stand up?

VII. Denny

I have one more story for you. I have a very close friend that I invited to this church a gazillion years ago. She has served in this church as an

usher. She is my son's godmother. Wonderful person, wonderful family, wonderful children. We became so close, we spent every holiday together for countless years. And her husband because one of my really good friends. Just like Frank, I would invite him to come to church, more aggressive than Frank. And because we were friends, he felt comfortable saying "Cult! I'm not going to that cult just because you're a bible thumper!". Whats a bible thumper by the way?

So he wouldn't come and years and years and years go by. He wouldn't come. He was young, healthy, thin, the whole nine. And then one day, he was going through something and he called me up, broken... very upset. And he said "I think I want to go to church with you" and I remember we sat up in the balcony right about there, and that day we sang "Still" which was one of the songs we sang today. When it said "when the oceans rise and thunders roar, I will soar with you above the storm. Father, you are king over the flood. I will be still and know You are God'. The tears came and Denny gave his life to the Lord just like that. I couldn't believe it. He gave his life to the Lord, after all these years of calling me a bible thumper and I go to a cult and all this crazy stuff. He gave his life to the lord. He was instantly changed, a completely different person.

And it was just before Easter and I thought, I can't believe it. I said "God you are so stinking awesome! That my friend is going to come see me in the play after all these years!" So Easter came! Back then, we did the play on Easter. I don't know why we don't anymore. Sorry PB!. It was Easter Sunday and I'm going through the shows and I'm peaking with one eye and I'm looking and I'm trying to see, and I don't see Denny at any of the shows. So its the last show and I'm sure he's coming. Or maybe I missed him, maybe he did come to one of them and I just didn't see him. Its hard to see when the lights are shining in your face, ya know? So its the last show, and they take me off the cross and they place me in my mother's arms and I'm reenacting the scene. I'm playing dead but I'm looking at all of you out there, drying to find Denny. And I can't find him, so I'm like its fine. I know for sure, for sure he came.

So I get off the lift at the end of the play and I'm exhausted. I've got bruises, cuts, slimy with all sorts of stuff on me under my robe. I'm limping, we had done like 12 shows. I'm limping, they beat the heck out of

me, ya know? And get into the choir room behind this back wall and I'm getting ready to go to Pastor's office where all my stuff is, my phone my keys, I leave everything in his office. And someone comes running to me, and says "you're phone won't stop ringing! Non-stop!" So I go grab my phone and I missed countless calls... countless text messages... My friend Denny died on Easter in the shower, getting ready to come see the play. I'm like what?! What?! He had a brain aneurism. Nobody knew it. His son, 13 years old at the time, found him... devastated... Marco, Matteo, Dana, Denise... the whole family obviously destroyed.

And I said to God "Are you kidding me?! After all these years, are you kidding me?! He's finally coming to see me in the play!!!" God said "Are you kidding me? You're mad that he didn't get to see you in the play as Jesus? Guess what moron?! He got to be with the real Jesus on Easter Sunday!" That is why we are having Bring A Friend Weekend.

That is exactly why and I'm telling you! Listen to me, the energy will be so infectious that it can't do anything less than change your life. The balls on the pendulum! Everybody knows what they are, when one ball hits, it forces the other one to go and then that comes back and that hits.

Its called when you give, it comes back, pressed down, shaken together, running over and whatever you do unto the least of these... you know what that means? It means when you hold the door for someone, you're holding it for God. It means when you give someone a gift, you're giving it to God. It means when you give someone love, you're giving it to god and I'm telling you when you invite someone next weekend, may the energy be so infectious, may you be so full that your cup runneth over. And after Bring A Friend Weekend, make sure you invite them back because that is the weekend for the Easter Play "So Loved" I love you all! I will see you all next week!