

There is no greater master of lies and deception than a dog who wants their owner to simply go stark raving mad. I give you case and point, my beloved, adorable, entirely maddening, Scully. Don't get me wrong, I love this dog. I adore this dog. BUT! She has mastered the art of messing with me to the point that I wish she was just a smidge dumber.

This has been going on since she was a baby, finding all the little ways that she can make life just a smidge frustrating, while looking adorable doing it. I'm going to be so cute and whiny and sad, puppy dog eyes that you are leaving the house, so I'm going to hide under the bed and if you can't get me out then you can't leave me. Adorable! The deception? I'm going to streak under the bed with your brand new glasses that you left on your nightstand like a dummy and I will chew them to pieces so when you do leave me, you'll do so frustrated! I'm going to sit so nicely next to you and curl up and sleep because I've missed you while you were on vacation, and you're going to enjoy your dinner and maybe give me a little bite. Adorable! The deception? The SECOND you get up to get something from the other room I will 100% eat the rest of your sandwich.

Now, for sure, these are mostly the errors of a first time puppy parent and a puppy. However, as Scully has advanced in years, the lies and deception have advanced with her. I'm going to be a good girl and dutifully

take this disgusting chemo medication that you shouldn't touch a ton with your hand, I swear I swallowed it! Adorably sad face. The deception? I come back from the other room and that pill is a gross mess that has been spit out on the floor because she hid it in her cheek and now my fingers are blue and I'm worried that I need surgical gloves to pick it up! Mom, mom, mom, mom, hey, I need to go out! I'm going to annoy the bejeezus out of you until you take me out because I need to go out! Adorable because she's letting me know what she needs. The deception? Ooo, it's so sunny and there are so many things to smell and you thought I *needed* to go out? Ha! Silly human I just wanted to for no apparent reason beyond smelling the flowers. I'm going to whine at you while you're comfy on the couch and make it seem like I need to go out. Again, adorable because she's expressing her needs. The deception? Once you get up! I'm not going to lead you to the door, I'm going to go in the kitchen and stare at the top of the fridge where my snacks are?

It's ridiculous and after 13 years one would think I would have learned all of Scully's tricks, and I mean, I kind of have, but now her ultimate one is just the sad, puppy dog look at that says, Mom, I'm old and look at my cataracts and don't you just want to give me everything I want because have I mentioned I'm old and you love me and want me to have all

of the things even when you know I shouldn't and it's wildly inconvenient and annoying to you? And so yes, the lies and deception work. She gets all the snacks, we go out whenever she wants, even just to sniff, and after 13 years I am aware I have created a monster, and Scully's ultimate plans for parental domination that began when she was two months old have officially been completed in full.

If there is anyone that knows just a smidge about deceit to get what one wants, it's Jeremiah and in turn God, and thus also Jesus. It's kind of a through line of the lessons today, not exactly the peppiest of topics, but there we have it, welcome to the Bible, kids, let's talk about lies and deception! It's true that for most of the prophets their job was pretty thankless and they generally knew it, but few of them had it quite as bad as Jeremiah. He exists solely in a *pre-exile* world, where his *sole* job is to basically tell God's people that the exile is coming. He knows they aren't going to repent. He knows that they aren't going to change their ways. He knows that the exile is inevitable and yet God has tasked him with telling people about it. Not exactly the best job description in history. Go tell people bad news and there is nothing you or they can do to change it!

In the midst of this thankless task, Jeremiah is faced with stark competition, dueling prophets who just tell the people what they want to

hear, who claim to be proclaiming the word of God, but who are really just telling the people they don't have to do anything and it's all going to be ok. They are taking all the things they want to believe in their hearts, the things that they know won't earn them any enemies or evil looks and those are what they're declaring to the crowds. Now, if you're the people of Ancient Israel, who are you going to listen to? Jeremiah and his doom and gloom or the bright, shiny prophet who says it's going to be ok? We all know which one we would prefer to pay attention to.

Fast forward to Jesus and he knows that while a lot of things have changed, some things haven't, in particular, humanity's desire to have *all the things*. They want justice. They want peace. They want warm and fuzzy Jesus. They want to be able to want all those things and have everything run smoothly. They don't want to rock the boat, but they want the boat to be rocked. And Jesus, much like Jeremiah just hits a point of exasperation. While the people are belting out their own version of "I Want it All and I want it now," Jesus is giving them a solid dose of the Rolling Stones reminding them that they can't always get what they want. You can't expect Jesus to come in and teach about justice and a toppling of oppression and love for your neighbors and also expect everything to remain the same in your corner of the world, comfortable and non-confrontational. You can't

get the Messiah and think that feathers aren't going to be ruffled. And that's where you realize that even in the midst of the things we claim we want, we are more often than not swayed by the deceit of our own hearts.

We hear Jesus' words about familial conflict and not bringing peace and we are aghast, wanting to clutch our pearls and say surely not, Jesus! But if we're honest, if we are truly willing to put our words and actions where our faith are, then there is going to be conflict, there is going to be discomfort. If we actually acted upon all of the things we claimed to believe, it wouldn't necessarily create the most happy, go-lucky of worlds, and suddenly Jeremiah's competitors sound kind of nice. Like, sure it might not be what we need to hear, but it keeps things stable and nice and comfy so go on with your bad selves, prophesy from your own heart, not from God and let's see where it takes us.

Let's be honest, we turn a little bit into Scully when we're trying to live out our faith while also living in the world and not rocking the boat. We love our neighbors as ourselves! It's cute and cuddly and gives you the warmest of fuzzies. Of course we love all of God's children. Adorable! The deception? Well...but if we're talking about rounding up the homeless in DC or if we're talking about the impacts of slashing health care for the most vulnerable of populations or if we're talking about revoking the right to

marriage for *everyone* or if we're daring to say that women shouldn't vote, well, then yeah, we probably have some caveats to the whole neighbor thing. Or at the very least, actually talking about that stuff is just going to give people the ick and the uncomfortable so let's just separate all of that from our faith and say they're totally different things so we don't have to worry about it. We don't need to consider the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus or all the people Jesus healed that the rest of the world ignored or Jesus refusing to condemn anyone for their relationship history or all of the women that Jesus included in his inner circle. We can love our neighbor and hold all of our feelings about that stuff separate and it's going to be ok.

Of course, we follow the commandment to not take the Lord's name in vain. We follow the Ten Commandments. Adorable! The deception? When we hear someone speaking allegedly in God's name while also riddling that speech with hate speech or judgment or prejudice, but that person may be a member of our family or someone that we don't want to make uncomfortable, well, we'll keep quiet. We don't want to be that person who calls out the bad behavior or might make someone upset, so I mean they can say what they want, I don't have to believe it, I don't even have to acknowledge it, it's fine, no harm, no foul.

It can apply to so many things if we're willing to be honest. We pray forgive us as we forgive others...deceptively keeping a list in our heads of those that we have held a grudge against since we were in fourth grade who don't get that same consideration. We hold up signs and put bumper stickers on our cars about John 3.16, but forget the next line that God also didn't send Jesus to condemn the world and boy do we have a long list of people we need God to condemn. We criticize and critique and point fingers for any number of reasons but never want to self-reflect and ask but how have I added to that issue, how have I done the same thing? We say Jesus loves you while cataloguing all the reasons he probably shouldn't.

An authentic life of faith is never going to be one without conflict, it's going to cause us to bump up against others and sometimes our own hearts. And everyday we are going to be faced with the question of if we want to listen to what God is saying in our world or what we *want* God to be saying in our world. The boat is going to get rocked, feathers are going to get ruffled, and we have to ask if we're willing to do that for the sake of our neighbor, for the sake of the gospel, for the sake of the hard truth that God ain't here for our faith deceptions, but for the hard won truth that a life of faith is hard and is going to call us into corners of the world we would rather not go. So, will we speak from God's heart or from our own? **AMEN!!!**