

Sermon Proper 16 Year C 2025 (All Saints)

In the Name of God the Creator, the Christ Jesus, and the Holy Spirit. Amen

To Follow the Way of Christ

I don't know if you've noticed or not in our recent readings from Luke, but Jesus has become increasingly frustrated, and seems to be getting angry. His language has become harsh, even judgmental. Something is going on... Hold that thought. We will explore it further in a minute.

First let's take a look at how so many within Christendom have visualized and come to understand Jesus. He is the lamb, gentle and kind, meek, nice, also strong. He wraps his arms around us in love. "Jesus loves me this I know, for the Bible tells me so. Little ones to him belong. We are weak but he is strong." I'm sure you've heard that before. And it's true—at least that's part of what Jesus is like. And then as the religion evolved and became more organized, as more people got involved and began deciding how the church should think about Jesus, many began to see him as a King, seated on a throne, dressed in royal robes, looking down on humanity from above. If you have never looked at our painted glass window in the narthex behind you, I invite you to do so now. You will get the picture. There is Jesus, all decked out in royal clothes, sitting on his throne, looking down at us. I can picture in my mind Jesus looking at this window now—and the many thousands of others like it throughout our churches worldwide—saying "Good people, I'm afraid you've missed the point." I believe that many have indeed missed the point, that being the message that Jesus was trying to deliver, his mission, what this Kingdom he is always talking about really looks like. And so, back to what has been going in Luke's gospel lately, that being the increasing frustration of Jesus as he continues on his journey to Jerusalem: something is going on here. Our gentle lamb Jesus is not so gentle after all. Listen to some of the things he has said. A few weeks ago he told a parable about a rich farmer who had collected so much grain that all he wants to do is build bigger barns to store it in. His only concern is his possessions—how much more he can

collect and save up. God says to him, “You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be? So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves and are not rich toward God.” And then last week Jesus gets even more caustic. Our peaceful Jesus says this to his disciples: “I came to bring fire to the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled! Do you think I have come to bring peace to the earth? No, I tell you, but rather division!”...households divided, father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother...” A tough message don’t you think? Jesus has come not to bring peace, but rather division and fire! N.T. Wright wrote that these words in Luke are high on the list of “Things We Would Rather Jesus Hadn’t Said.” It’s not gentle, it’s not meek and mild, it’s not even nice. And then Jesus goes further. Surely frustrated, or in his own words “what stress I am under,” he says to those listening who do not understand, who in his words “do not know how to interpret the present time,” who in the words of John Dear “refuse to wake up to the political reality of the world”: “You hypocrites!,” he proclaims. And next we get to today’s reading. Jesus is in a synagogue when he encounters a woman who has been crippled for 18 years. She is bent over and unable to stand up straight, probably due to some type of arthritis or bone deformity. So what does Jesus do? He heals her of course. He places his hands on her and she immediately stands up straight! She is resurrected! There is a problem, however, and that is that Jesus is healing on the Sabbath, which is prohibited according to Jewish law unless it is a life-threatening occurrence. The leader of the synagogue gets angry and says to the crowd “There are six days on which work ought to be done; come on those days and be cured, and not on the Sabbath day.” Jesus quickly sets him straight: “Hypocrites,” he says,...You will untie your ox or donkey and lead it to water on the Sabbath...Ought not this woman be untied—be set free from her bondage—from her crippling illness on any day, the Sabbath included?” “Fools,” “Hypocrites,” Or even better in Eugene Peterson’s interpretation in The Message: “Frauds!” Yes, to say the least I think

Jesus is frustrated. And why not? Here is a man who has been fighting that uphill battle fought by so many throughout history, people like Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr, and so many others who have led the cause for justice and for mercy. He is constantly harassed and opposed by those in power. Why? Because he is trying to change things. He is calling for justice and mercy, to model the way of truth and of love, and exposing those who oppose it. He is trying to show us a better way, the way of the Kingdom.

Jesus is a complicated figure. He is not only filled with the divine—as Richard Rohr puts it, the “blueprint” for the divinity of God within humanity—he is also fully human. We see him frustrated and angered with the Pharisees’ today—“hypocrites” he says—because of their hard hearts and their rigid adherence to the rules of their religion. In Matthew 23 he calls out the scribes and Pharisees over and over again saying “Woe to you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites...for you lock people out of the kingdom of heaven...on the outside you look righteous to others, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.” In our story today, the healing of the crippled woman on the Sabbath, what Jesus is doing in his day is radical. It is a scandal. It is even illegal. A holy rabbi simply did not go near an unclean person, much less a woman, much less a woman most in that day would have considered to be cursed because of some kind of sin she must have committed. A holy rabbi would never touch that unclean woman. Jesus breaks every rule to heal her. Notice that she doesn’t ask for healing; she probably cannot even imagine being healed. Jesus takes the initiative and announces that the woman is set free, then heals her. He also calls her “a Daughter of Abraham,” the only time in the Bible where that exalted name is given to a woman. Luke includes this story to show that Jesus includes women in his ministry of healing and liberation, that for Jesus all are equal, all are children of God. This passage is important to understand the real, all-inclusive, welcoming and civilly disobedient Jesus.

Where I am going with this is to say that while Jesus may at times be the gentle lamb in whom we find compassion, comfort, and love, he is much more than simply gentle. This fire he says he brings is a refining fire, a fire that purifies, and it can burn. Jesus' love is a tough love. It calls us to confront those things—those people, their actions, ways of living at odds with the path Jesus walks and calls us to walk with him. It is often not easy to accept or to follow this calling. It is often much easier to just stay quiet and not rock the boat. Who among us has not done that? There is a cost for this discipleship, even at times the cost of death—people like Dietrich Bonhoeffer with his opposition to Nazi Germany, and of course like Jesus himself on the cross. Jesus is trying to usher in a Kingdom so different than any other. He describes it in his parables, and his life models it. It is a kingdom of compassion, of love, of justice, of mercy, of nonviolence, of peace. By this time in Luke's gospel his message has become more urgent. He knows what lies ahead—what awaits him on the cross in Jerusalem—and he knows his time is running out. Therefore his frustration.

Let's look at this Kingdom, so radically different than the status quo in Jesus' time and in our time today. What does this Kingdom of God look like? Jesus uses all sorts of parables to describe it. I think we need look no further than Jesus' own words where he describes it in the 25th chapter of Matthew, in what has been called the Judgment of the Nations, where God is separating the sheep from the goats, placing the sheep at his right hand—the “good” hand—and the goats at the left. “The king will say to those at his right hand, ‘Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.’ Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, and when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw

you sick or in prison and visited you?’ And the king will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.’”

“The least of these...members of my family...” All of us! The Christ is present—although often hidden and buried—in all of us: no exclusions, no exceptions. And that means not just within this church today but everyone we encounter, everyone, everywhere, including those who don’t—like you have seen on the Inclusivity signs around—don’t think, pray, talk, look, dress, or vote like us. I would venture to say that Jesus saw the Christ not only in his family, his disciples and followers, but also in the very people—the leaders of the Jews, the Romans—the very people who opposed him, even murdered him. What were his last words from the cross about those murderers? From Luke 23: “Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.” Wow! Can we do this? Can we forgive, can we love, can we live this way? Needless to say, it is not easy to follow Jesus. He is demanding. He is uncompromising. He sees into us and through us to our very core, to the truth of who we are. And he calls us to follow him wherever he thinks we should go, with sacrifice, with compassion, love, mercy, humility. What is it that we might find if we follow him on this path? Perhaps we will find wholeness, well being, peace, a world where all of creation including all of humanity stands with dignity. The Hebrew word for that is Shalom. Wouldn’t that be something?

I read Jim’s sermon from last week about the label “progressive church” that apparently many have given us here at All Saints. Jim said that such descriptions as liberal, conservative, progressive, Christian right, and Christian left, and other such labels do little more than offer a false equivalency between ways of reading and following the Gospel. There is only one way. It is the way of truth and of love. That is the way that we here at All Saints, at what I think of as a “Church of the Gospel,” seek to find and to follow. It is the Way of Jesus. Yes, as we have seen

over these past few weeks in Luke's gospel, Jesus was and I am sure is still frustrated. God, help us to persevere on this journey with the Christ.

Rev. Bob Donnell (8/24/2025)