

Sermon Series: The Challenging Teachings of Jesus

March 26

Sermon: The Unforgivable Sin

Scripture for Reflection:

Mark 3:20-30

(for similar teaching, see Matthew 12:31-32; Luke 12:10)

1. What details in Mark 3:20-30 give us a picture of the context of Jesus' teaching here? What do you notice?
2. What is the response of Jesus' family here? What happens later in Mark 3:31-34?
3. In Mark's version of this story, Jesus confronts the religious leaders who came to see what he was doing, the "scribes who came down from Jerusalem." What were they saying about Jesus?
4. Jesus speaks up for himself and confronts the scribes for their false witness against him. When should we speak up for ourselves? Are there times when we should remain silent when people malign us? What other teachings of Jesus inform your response?
5. Abraham Lincoln famously quoted Jesus saying, "A house divided against itself cannot stand," as Lincoln emerged on the national political scene in his fight against slavery. Was this quote a faithful use of the text?
6. Mark 3:28-29 gives a word of promise and word of warning. What hope does this teaching give us?
7. What does it mean to "speak against" the Holy Spirit?

8. In what ways does Jesus plunder the house and property of the evil one?
9. Do you trust that the Spirit can work within you to make you more like Jesus? How can these final weeks of Lent lead us to work with God's Spirit?

March 19

Sermon: Workers in the Vineyard: The Unfair Boss

Scripture for Reflection:

Matthew 20:1-16

1. This week's passage begins with "For the kingdom of heaven is like..." Jesus uses this parable to describe the kingdom, or reign, of God. Do you have a favorite parable? If so, describe it. (It can be a biblical parable or a parable outside of the Scriptures.)
2. If you had to decide a *title* for this parable, what would you choose?
3. Have you ever experienced a work situation you thought was unfair? How did you respond?
4. Do you consider the landowner unfair or generous?
5. What kinds of work are undervalued in our society? What jobs are truly essential for our communities?
6. How do you interpret the closing statement from Jesus: "So the last will be first, and the first will be last" (20:16)?
7. In what ways is grace unfair? How do we extend mercy to others?
8. When are we most in need of mercy?
9. What adjustments do you need to make in your Lenten journey? As we get closer to Holy Week and Easter, how can you take intentional steps toward God?

March 12

Sermon: The Cost of Following Jesus

Scripture for Reflection:

Luke 14: 25-33

I Timothy 4:8

1. Read Luke 14:25-33. What images and metaphors do you notice?
2. What is a word in this text that captures your attention?
3. What does Jesus mean when he says, "If you want to be my disciple, you must, by comparison, hate everyone else..... otherwise, you cannot be my disciple?"
4. What does it mean to carry your own Cross? Is our Cross some burden or responsibility we carry? Or, is the Cross of Christ something we joyfully choose to carry?
5. What does it mean to "count the cost"?
6. Have you ever begun a project and realized that you didn't have the resources or means necessary to finish the project? How did that make you feel? What did you learn from that experience?
7. I Timothy 4:8 says, "Physical training is good, but training for godliness is much better, promising benefits in this life and in the life to come." How do we train to be more Christ-like and Godly? What are the steps to take?
8. What is the most challenging aspect of following Jesus in the 21st century?
9. Are there habits or sins that we need to forsake in order to draw closer to Jesus?

March 5

Sermon: The Narrow Gate

Scripture for Reflection:
Matthew 7:13-23 (24-29)
Matthew 7:7-12

1. Read Matthew 7:13-23. What images and metaphors do you notice?
2. These teachings come at the end of the Sermon on the Mount. When you listen to a sermon, do you tend to find metaphors helpful?
3. What comes to mind when you encounter the word “narrow”? What images come to mind when Jesus says “the narrow gate”?
4. How do we walk through the narrow gate without being narrow *minded*?
5. Can you recall a time when hearing a challenging sermon—or teaching—in worship led you to take clear steps toward greater faithfulness? If so, what was the result of those steps?
6. Twice Jesus says, “You will know them by their fruits” (7:16,20). How do our “fruits” reveal our identity? How do we notice the fruit we are producing in our lives?
7. Matthew 7:21-23 describes people who will not enter “the kingdom of heaven.” In the context of this passage, and the entire Sermon on the Mount, how do we do “the will of the Father”?
8. What do you find most challenging about this week’s passage?
9. Read Jesus’ conclusion to his sermon in Matthew 7:24-29. How do his images here connect to the narrow gate?
10. We are now more than one week into the season of Lent. How is your Lenten journey going so far?

11. How does this season help us find—and walk through—the narrow gate of Jesus' teaching?

February 26

Sermon: Love your enemy....be perfect

Scripture for Reflection:

Leviticus 19:18

Matthew chapters 5-7

Matthew 5:43-48

1. Jesus' longest running sermon is the Sermon on the Mount (chapters 5-7), found in the Gospel according to Matthew. What do you find to be the most challenging part of his sermon?
2. In the Old Testament, Leviticus 19:18 says, "Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against a fellow Israelite, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the Lord." But in Matthew's gospel, Jesus says, "Love your enemies" (Matthew 5:44). Why did Jesus change what was written in the Law of Moses?
3. What is the difference between loving your neighbor and loving your enemy?
4. Did Jesus love his enemies?
5. It is hard and challenging to love our enemy. What should be the first step toward loving our enemy? How can God help us do what seems impossible to do?
6. Do you have an experience that you can share with the group where God intervened and helped you love someone that was(is) unloveable?
7. Jesus seems to ask us to do what is humanly impossible to do. Jesus says, "Be perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect" (Matthew 5:48). How can we be perfect? Isn't this an impossible ask?

8. An additional way of viewing the Scripture is this: “Be complete as your Father in heaven is complete.” John Wesley believed in “Going on to perfection.” He meant, “Perfection in Love.” Can we attain “perfection in love” in our lifetime?
9. What is one thing you would like to pursue or experience during the season of Lent?
10. During Lent, some people choose to *give up* something, like chocolate or alcohol. How does Matthew 5:43-48 invite us into deeper practices of formation in Christ?