

## Sermon

February 12, 2023

Pastor Kristy Daniels

(after reading the Gospel, Matthew 5:13-20)... and, that's the whole sermon for today!  
[laughter]

...This is the kind of text pastors plan their vacation around —

But it's important that we hear these texts, because they still speak truth to us. So let us put it in context of the season: That we are in "Sundays after Epiphany" again, when the Magi were led to Jesus. During this season, we use the color green to remind us it's a season of growth, and it is growth in our understanding of who Jesus is, this *God incarnate for us*. So, we are coming to know Jesus more clearly, in that we understand more fully what it is God would desire for us.

And as harsh as this reading — and actually also the Old Testament reading, which is just more beautiful — was, it is meant to help protect the vulnerable, to help us think about our relationships, and our community, and what is needed, it is meant to call us back in repentance, to right relationship, because that is why Jesus came into the world: to draw us back into right relationship with God.

I think this text is still hard for us to hear today, though. I come from a family with divorced parents. I have other experiences in this text that make me cringe. People that have taken it very seriously. And in our program, I think of one person in particular, who *cut off part of himself* following this scripture.

So, is that what is intended? I'll tell you I used to get letters from my grandmother telling me how my parents were going to hell because they were divorced.

No. Again: these texts are about healing. And wholeness. What do we need in our communities? We need to be seen and heard. And we are called to live faithfully and well, not because of what we receive (although we do receive riches in a sense, right); when we're all looking out for each other, when we're all thinking kindly of one another, think how much better our communities would be!

It's not turning away from injustice and sin. It's *seeing* it, and *speaking truth* to it, in ourselves and others, out of love.

So, I had a couple of things come up for me when I was pondering this text during the week. And the first thing that jumped right out at me, for both, or really for all the readings today, is that *we all sin and fall short of the glory of God*. It's not an excuse, then, to do whatever we want. It's a recognition that we are all on this "plane" together. All in need of repentance, forgiveness, and life.

But it also made me think of all the different dualities we have in Lutheranism, how we love to confuse people, so that we are at the same time *saint and sinner*. And also this idea of *bound and free*. You're at the same time, completely *free* as disciples, as children of God, to do what we want, but also *bound* in love to neighbor, servant to all.

So we have these different things going on. And as you know, I don't write my sermon, so I thought I was going to be talking about something different this morning. But then I read my devotional, and I wanted to share with you what it said today, because it fits so well. It's called "Standing up Again," and it is from *Faith Alone*, a daily devotional based off Martin Luther's writings.

"Everyone who sins breaks the law. In fact, sin is lawlessness. (1 John:3-4). We are all sinners, and at times we fall into sin. But when true Christians fall, they soon come back, turn around, and struggle again, against the sin, so they won't offend their neighbor. To illustrate, it's difficult to avoid being wounded in times of war, yet it's an honor if one stands up to fight again. But it's a disgrace if someone retreats. Similarly, even if Christians are completely surrounded by sin, they should still fight against it.

Some people think they are Christians because they have been baptized. These people give their desires free reign and don't care about conquering their sins. They merely follow their own cravings. Committing sin comes from following the enticement and desire to sin. Many give their sinful desires free reign. They don't want to repent or stand up to fight again. Today they commit adultery. Tomorrow, they want to live purely... It's impossible for these people to avoid offending their neighbor. If they don't offend them by something they do, then they certainly will by neglecting what they ought to do for their neighbor.

An important part of Christianity is love. And love is not self-seeking [1 Corinthians 13:5]. "Insisting on your own way" is not loving our neighbor, but following our own desires. So, not showing love is the same as being disobedient. Those who aren't pure, who don't struggle daily against themselves, will give in to sin and do wrong. Those who don't have the fruit on the inside, won't show it on the outside towards their neighbor. If we have not died to ourselves so that we can disregard our own desires, how can we seek what is best for others?"

I also think, for those of you who were able to attend that very powerful class this morning, that that's one of the issues that Jan touched on repeatedly, about looking outside of oneself. Jesus calls us to look outside of ourselves – for our own sakes, and for the sake of all creation. He doesn't say we "are only good people when..." He says, "You are my beloved child, and I will never forsake you."

God gives us a reason for hope, and for joy. God loves us without end, and without question. God calls us to repentance, so that we may experience life to its fullest.

Today we encounter the One who was able to take our sins and our death upon himself. The One, who by allowing his body to be broken, gives us life. And He invites us to the table, to hear, to see, to know, to taste Forgiveness and Love. He invites you to this table to be strengthened and sustained. And He invites us to this table because *we need this meal* before and as we are propelled out into the world, to choose life.

Thanks be to God.

Amen.