

Naming Trauma and Practicing Resilient Love

A Lenten Sermon Guide and Toolkit



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The United Methodist Health Ministry Fund (Health Fund) developed this sermon guide and toolkit to help faith leaders begin meaningful conversations on the importance of naming trauma and practicing resilient love. In this sermon guide, we define trauma as a traumatic event or chronic, long-term stress. Resilient love is that love that brings forth life in the midst of trauma. Our vision for this sermon guide is to help individuals and communities recognize trauma and seek healing through resilient love.

The Health Fund is also very grateful for the valuable assistance of several organizations and individuals who shared their time, expertise, research, and resources with us to support this project. In particular, the Health Fund would like to thank the following individuals and organizations who contributed to and reviewed this sermon guide and toolkit:

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ABOUT THE HEALTH FUND

The United Methodist Health Ministry Fund is a statewide health foundation that facilitates conversation and action to improve the health and wholeness of Kansans—especially those in rural and under-served communities. Through funding programs and ideas, providing hands-on expertise, and convening influencers, the Health Fund advances innovative solutions to improve Kansans' health for generations to come. Located in Hutchinson, Kansas, the Health Fund has provided more than \$75 million in grants and program support since its inception in 1986.

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Sermon Guide and Toolkit

At the Health Fund, we have partnered with non-profit organizations, universities, and state agencies to make health care more accessible for *all* Kansans. Yet, we know that the heartland holds a variety of lived experiences and histories that can leave negative imprints on their bodies that show up physically and emotionally in long-lasting ways. We call this trauma.

There has been a growing recognition of the lifelong effects of trauma, particularly from adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) such as poverty, abuse, or neglect. Research demonstrates the best way to offset the impact of ACEs is through strong, stable, and nurturing relationships, especially with caring adults. A major focus area of our work at the Health Fund is early childhood development, including work to help families and communities build resilience in order to prevent and mitigate the impacts of trauma.

We know that untreated trauma negatively impacts the quality of life for the trauma survivor and those closest to them. Trauma may contribute to behaviors linked to poor health outcomes, like isolation from others, poor impulse control, anxiety, or increased use of substances to numb the pain or shame from intense feelings. Our vision for this sermon guide is to help individuals and communities recognize trauma and seek healing through resilient love.

Practicing resilient love helps individuals and communities return to the healthiest versions of themselves while simultaneously creating space to receive and give compassion, love, and respect to their neighbors who may have lived and experienced different realities from their own. Turning away from shame and drawing closer to Christ emboldens communities to call out the impact of trauma on their physical and emotional health and restore healing.

In this sermon guide and toolkit, you will find a call to worship, hymns, children's sermon, exegesis, sermon notes, and benediction to lead a seven-week Lenten series centered on the trauma experienced from economic hardship, relational wounds, environmental insecurity, and communal divisiveness. Included are resources on understanding trauma and connecting others to behavioral health services in Kansas and Nebraska.

HOW TO USE THIS SERMON GUIDE AND TOOLKIT

Greetings and welcome! Whether the season of Lent is imminent or still months away, preparation for Lent thrusts the worship planner into a beautiful yet odd position. You go ahead of the congregation, preparing the way that they will follow to the cross and ultimately the empty tomb. While necessary and sacred, this is also a lonely task as you live the journey to the cross without the comforts of fellow travelers. Our hope is that this sermon guide can alleviate some of that loneliness while also inviting you and your congregation to engage the season of Lent, Good Friday, and Easter from the perspective of trauma and resilience.

While the verbiage of trauma and resilience has only been present in the popular vocabulary in recent decades, the truth behind these concepts is as old as humanity. For as long as humans have experienced catastrophic events or chronic stress, we have also learned to build strengths through adversity, discovering the ways in which life and love continue in the midst of trauma. This guide welcomes congregations to hold trauma and resilience in tension throughout the Lenten journey, refusing to erase the impacts of trauma on our lives while also gleaning practices of resilient love from Jesus' teachings and actions.

The sermon guide includes a call to worship, hymn selection, children's sermon, scripture, exegesis, sermon notes, call to action, and benediction for the six Sundays of Lent and Easter Sunday. Lent 1 and Lent 2 focus on the concepts of trauma and resilience, respectively. The subsequent weeks of Lent focus on specific areas of trauma in our society: Economic Hardship, Relational Wounds, Environmental Insecurity, and Divisiveness. Between Palm Sunday and Easter Sunday, you will find a Good Friday service adapted from a traditional Service of Tenebrae liturgy. Within the Service of Tenebrae, you will find laments following each reading that connect Jesus' Passion with experiences of communal violence today. Easter Sunday brings together many of the themes discussed throughout Lent and on Good Friday by exploring the

resurrection as God's resilient response to cyclical trauma.

The Call to Action is designed to serve as a bulletin insert congregants are encouraged to take home and engage throughout the week. Each week includes a prayer and/or journal prompt to encourage further reflection. Most weeks also include an invitation to find and connect with local organizations who are already doing work around the themes of that week's sermon. Feel free to add specific organizations for congregants to connect with in your community. Underlying these invitations is research that shows that bringing together various community entities to address a problem results in more effective and sustainable solutions. Your church can play a vital role in community partnerships without having to start your own program! Finally, beginning in the second week, congregants are invited to listen to an episode of *The Neighbor Next Door* related to the content of the sermon. *The Neighbor Next Door* is a podcast from The Neighboring Movement, a non-profit based in Wichita, Kansas that participates in, and teaches about, enhancing community through the practice of neighboring.

Finally, we encourage you to be prepared for members of your congregation and community to reach out as they recognize a need to have formal and informal conversations regarding their journey with trauma. Remember that you need not be their only resource. Ministerial organizations, schools or other local organizations may already have a list of local resources. Prepare a list of therapists and other mental health professionals in your area to whom you can refer those who might benefit from their services. If you do not know any local therapists, take this opportunity to reach out, let them know your plan to engage this sermon guide with your congregation, and ask them if they or others they know have experience with trauma-informed care. This is an excellent opportunity to strengthen connections between the church and local mental health providers.

Table of contents

NAMING TRAUMA AND PRACTICING RESILIENT LOVE TOOLKIT	7
Resources for Talking to Your Congregation	8
SERMON GUIDE LENT WEEK 1	9
Call to Worship	10
Hymns	10
Children’s Sermon	11
Scripture – Mark 1:9-15	12
Exegesis	13
Sermon Notes	14
Benediction	16
SERMON GUIDE LENT WEEK 2	17
Call to Worship	18
Hymns	18
Children’s Sermon	19
Scripture – Mark 8:31-38	20
Exegesis	21
Sermon Notes	22
Benediction	25
SERMON GUIDE LENT WEEK 3	26
Call to Worship	27
Hymns	27
Children’s Sermon	28
Scripture – John 2:13-22	29
Exegesis	30
Sermon Notes	31
Benediction	33
SERMON GUIDE LENT WEEK 4	34
Call to Worship	35
Hymns	35
Children’s Sermon	36
Scripture – John 3:14-21	37
Exegesis	38
Sermon Notes	39
Benediction	42

Table of contents continued

SERMON GUIDE LENT WEEK 5	43
Call to Worship	44
Hymns	44
Children's Sermon	45
Scripture – Luke 13:1-9	46
Exegesis	47
Sermon Notes	48
Benediction	50
SERMON GUIDE LENT WEEK 6	51
Call to Worship	52
Hymns	52
Children's Sermon	53
Scripture – Luke 19:28-42	54
Exegesis	55
Sermon Notes	56
Benediction	58
A SERVICE OF TENEBRAE	59
SERMON GUIDE EASTER	64
Call to Worship	65
Hymns	65
Children's Sermon	66
Scripture – Luke 24:1-12	67
Exegesis	67
Sermon Notes	69
Benediction	71

Naming Trauma and Practicing Resilient Love

Toolkit

Resources for Talking to Your Congregation



Naming Trauma and Practicing Resilient Love Toolkit:

Tips and Resources for Talking to Your Congregation About Trauma

RESOURCES TO ADDRESS TRAUMA IN YOUR COMMUNITY

- Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) assessment | <https://www.traumainformedcare.chcs.org/resource/original-ace-questionnaire/>
- “What is Trauma?”: <https://www.traumainformedcare.chcs.org/what-is-trauma/>
- Perceived Stress Scale | <https://das.nh.gov/wellness/docs/percieved%20stress%20scale.pdf>
- National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) | <https://nami.org/>
- NAMI Kansas | <https://namikansas.org/>
- NAMI Nebraska | <https://naminebraska.org/>
- “Supportive Relationships and Active Skill-Building Strengthen the Foundations of Resilience” | <https://developingchild.harvard.edu/resources/supportive-relationships-and-active-skill-building-strengthen-the-foundations-of-resilience>
- “Understanding the Impact of Trauma and Urban Poverty on Family Systems: Risks, Resilience and Interventions” | https://www.nctsn.org/sites/default/files/resources/resource-guide/understanding_impact_trauma_urban_poverty_family_systems.pdf
- The United Methodist Church Global Ministries | <https://umcmmission.org/umcor/>
- Living Room Conversations | <https://livingroomconversations.org>
- Center on the Developing Child | <https://developingchild.harvard.edu/>
- *When Helping Hurts* | <https://chalmers.org/resources/books/when-helping-hurts/>

OTHER RESOURCES INCLUDED IN THIS GUIDE

- *The Neighbor Next Door* podcast episode “Relationship: Re-Examined” | <https://www.stitcher.com/show/the-neighbor-next-door/episode/relationship-re-examined-86780277>
- *The Neighbor Next Door* podcast episode “Cormac Russell: Part 4” | <https://www.stitcher.com/show/the-neighbor-next-door/episode/cormac-russell-part-4-82059846>
- Alliance for a Healthy Kansas, “Why Expansion Matters” | <https://www.expandkancare.com/why-expansion-matters/>
- “Poverty Fact Sheet: Poor and In Poor Health” | <https://www.irp.wisc.edu/publications/factsheets/pdfs/PoorInPoorHealth.pdf>
- Indian Health Services, “Disparities” | <https://www.ihs.gov/newsroom/factsheets/disparities/>
- *The Neighbor Next Door* podcast episode “Lora Andrews—Hopeful Neighboring” | <https://www.stitcher.com/show/the-neighbor-next-door/episode/re-cast-lora-andrews-hopeful-neighboring-80616564>
- *The Neighbor Next Door* podcast episode “Neighboring Tip: Emergency Preparedness” | <https://www.stitcher.com/show/the-neighbor-next-door/episode/neighboring-tip-emergency-preparedness-67416333>
- National Association of Conservation Districts directory | <https://www.nacdnet.org/general-resources/conservation-district-directory/>
- “5 Soil Health Principles” | <https://menokenfarm.com/5-soil-health-principles/>
- *The Neighbor Next Door* podcast episode “Justin Moore: Neighboring for Health” | <https://www.stitcher.com/show/the-neighbor-next-door/episode/justin-moore-neighboring-for-health-68083699>
- *The Neighbor Next Door* podcast episode “Midland, Michigan Interview: Part 1” | <https://www.stitcher.com/show/the-neighbor-next-door/episode/midland-michigan-interview-part-1-81108744>

Sermon Guide

Lent 1





Call to Worship

Welcome you who suffer pains known and unknown, named, and unnamed.

Jesus Christ, draw near to us.

Welcome you who come alongside friends, family, and neighbors who struggle.

Jesus Christ, draw near to us.

Welcome you who fear the wilderness and you who find the wilderness a familiar place.

Jesus Christ, draw near to us.

As we enter this season of Lent, may God comfort us, guide us, and draw near to us as we learn to name our trauma and practice resilient love together.

Jesus Christ, draw near to us as we draw near to you. Amen.



Hymn Selections:

- **“Lord, Who throughout These Forty Days”**
United Methodist Hymnal #269
- **“When Jesus Came to Jordan”**
United Methodist Hymnal #252
- **“We Meet You, O Christ”**
United Methodist Hymnal #257



Children's Sermon

MATERIALS: Medium flowerpot filled with 4 different colors of pom-poms (cotton balls); a kitchen towel to cover the top of the flowerpot; a small scoop or trowel

As the children gather, place the flowerpot filled with pom-poms and covered with the kitchen towel in front of you where the children can see it. Depending on your setup, you might want to set it on a low table. Make sure the children will eventually be able to see inside the flowerpot.

Say: Good morning! Since Spring is just around the corner, I decided that we should plant some flowers today! I brought this flowerpot with me that I thought would be perfect, but every time I try to get it ready for us to plant our flowers, I can't seem to get inside the pot! Watch. *(Play at trying to dig into the pot with the scoop/trowel but you're stopped by the towel and whatever is underneath it. It is very important to make sure the towel continues to cover the pot.)* I don't know. It seems like there's something inside, but I'm not sure what. What do you think we should do? *(Wait for answers.)* Do you think we should take the towel off and see what's underneath? *(Wait for answers.)* I'm not sure. What if what's under there is scary? I really want to plant flowers, but I also don't know what we'll find under the towel. But I think maybe I wouldn't be as scared if some of you would help me. Could I have a couple volunteers hold a corner of the towel and help me lift it off? *(Get a couple of kids to help and pull the towel off.)* Oh my! What do you see? *(Wait for answers.)* Well, these certainly aren't as scary as I thought, but they do make it hard to plant something in this pot, don't they?

Today we are beginning a series on trauma and resilience. Can you say "trauma" *(wait for answer)* and "resilience" *(wait for answer)*? Traumas are things that we experience that are really, really hard for a very long time, like losing a family member or being in a car accident. Resilience is the strength we build inside of us as we live through these hard experiences. In the next several weeks, we will keep talking about what trauma and resilience mean, and how we can love each other through trauma as we build resilience.

In today's story, Jesus shows us that the first thing we need to do to build resilience is being honest about traumas that we experience. If we pretend that we don't experience hard things, then we are kind of like this flowerpot full of pom-poms and covered up with a towel. We have so much capacity to grow and do good things, but we don't realize that our insides are so full there's nowhere to put the soil and the flowers we want to grow. But when we work together to take the towel off and notice what's really inside, then we can help each other start making room for the good things Jesus wants to do in us and through us. And remember, you are never alone taking that towel off. You have friends, family, neighbors, and, most importantly, God who love you and can help you. Let's pray.

God, thank you that even when we face really hard things, you are always with us. Help us be honest about when life is hard and help us share your love with others who are also having a difficult time. Amen.



Scripture • Mark 1:9-15

In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. And a voice came from heaven, “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.”

And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. He was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him.

Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.”



Exegesis

A central theme in the Gospel of Mark is the nature of the good news *about* Jesus *by* Jesus. While the cross looms over Mark, the whole of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection makes up the good news. Thus, for Mark, Jesus' work of Good News begins with Jesus' baptism, immediately followed by the temptation in the wilderness. A ritual of repentance from sin, questions often arise regarding why the sinless Jesus would seek to be baptized. By recognizing Jesus' baptism as an act of solidarity with sinful humanity, the divine response following Jesus' baptism takes on deeper meaning. In the Spirit's descent like a dove, we witness the consecration of Jesus as the Messiah and his empowerment with the Spirit to do the work of God's good news in the world. Then, as the heavenly voice speaks, we witness Jesus going public in his role as the divine-human Messiah. Notably, the divine words allude to both Psalm 2 and Isaiah 42, lending distinctively prophetic overtones to Christ's messiahship. Thus, Jesus is consecrated, empowered, and announced as the Messiah in response to this profound act of solidarity and relationship with humanity's sinful condition.

Then, the same Spirit who consecrates and empowers Jesus drives him to the wilderness. The wilderness carries complex meanings in the biblical text. The wilderness recalls both the Israelites' forty years of wandering in Exodus and also the place God would deliver the people from exile in Isaiah 40. Thus, the wilderness can be both a negative place of testing and rebellion and a positive place of revelation and God's saving acts. Jesus' experience in the wilderness certainly encompasses both the aspects of revelation and testing. While the Greek *peirazomenos* is often translated as "tempted" in verse 13, given the contemporary connotation of temptation as inducement to sin, a better translation is "tested." Rather than thinking of the wilderness as a place where Jesus is tempted to sin, the wilderness is a place that tests Jesus' faithfulness to the divine mission he has just been consecrated and empowered to perform. In this vein, Satan—literally, "the adversary"—and the wild animals, which often represent evil powers, embody the opposition Jesus will encounter in his mission. Yet, Jesus does not endure this testing alone. When the text says, "the angels waited on him," the Greek for "wait on" is *diakoneo*, the verb form of the Greek word translated "deacon." As Jesus faced the testing of Satan and the wild animals, he had the support of divine messengers that looked after his basic needs.

While the divine voice made Jesus' ministry public at his baptism, the true work begins only after Jesus' time in the wilderness. Notably, the testing in the wilderness is not the end but the beginning of the opposition to Jesus' mission. Thus, the wilderness serves as preparation for the work, not as a test that must be passed in order for Jesus' ministry to be successful. Mark's Gospel describes the beginning of Jesus' ministry as the proclamation of God's good news coupled with a call to repent and believe. Note that the repentance referenced in verse 15 is not a penitential in the sense of acknowledging sin and turning away from it. Rather, this repentance indicates a turning away from one way of life and a turning toward the good news of God that Jesus proclaims and embodies. This kind of repentance leads to a belief that is not merely intellectual but lived—a whole reframing of one's way of life in alignment with the Kingdom of God to the exclusion of all that does not fit with the new creation that God is bringing forth.

Significantly, these seven verses in Mark 1 hint at significant stress and trauma events for Jesus. Jesus moves from the emotional high of divine consecration at his baptism to the low of the wilderness where, despite being attended by angels, there is a certain sense of isolation in addition to encountering adversarial and evil powers. The solidarity with the human condition that Jesus demonstrates in baptism continues into the wilderness where he too faces the trauma that results from sin and evil in the world. Thus, when Jesus begins the proclamation of God's good news, he preaches a way of hope and life and resilience to those who, like him, are living through trauma.



Sermon Notes

INTRODUCTION

Today we begin Lent, a season of preparation, fasting, and repentance leading up to Good Friday and Easter. If, after that introduction, you feel like you would rather skip over Lent and jump straight to Easter, you are not alone. It is only human to wish to avoid the difficult emotions that come from self-reflection and the challenging aspects of Jesus' story ahead of Easter. For the next six weeks, though, we will face these hard emotions head-on by drawing close to Christ on the way to the cross and learning how to recognize trauma and practice resilient love together. While this series will not allow us to avoid hard emotions and difficult stories, it does offer us opportunities to be honest about our individual and collective experiences and to find companions through life's hard places in Christ and in one another. Throughout this series, we will focus on recognizing trauma and practicing resilient love so that we can turn away from shame and turn toward the love of God, self, and neighbor—be it the neighbors that live next door or the neighbors you meet out in the community. But first, we must learn how to recognize and name trauma. So today, we begin by drawing close to Christ to answer the question: what is trauma?

SERMON NOTES

1. Today's passage touches on three critical points at the beginning of Jesus' ministry—his baptism, his testing in the wilderness, and the beginning of his public ministry. The opening verse of the Gospel of Mark sets up what an English teacher would call the thesis of the book of Mark: the good news about Jesus the Messiah. For Mark, the key purpose for writing down these stories and teachings of Jesus is to communicate and distribute the good news proclaimed and embodied by Jesus. Thus, these three critical points in the beginning of Jesus' ministry, though only taking up a few verses, deserve our attention.
2. The first action Jesus takes in Mark's Gospel is going to be baptized by John the Baptist. At this time, baptism was a ritual action that represented repentance from sin in the Jewish community. However, considering that Jesus was sinless, questions arise as to why Jesus would seek to be baptized in the first place. Mark gives us no details about Jesus' baptism itself, focusing instead on God's response to Jesus' baptism. Yet in this divine response, Jesus' baptism takes on new meaning beyond repentance, one of consecration and solidarity. First, the descent of the Spirit and God's words "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased" represent Jesus' empowerment to do God's work in the world and God's public announcement of Jesus' ministry. Notably, God does not publicly announce and empower Jesus to do God's work in the world at the Temple or in a royal ceremony, but in a humble, everyday act of repentance. Only in solidarity with sinful humanity does Jesus receive his consecration to proclaim and embody God's good news in the world.
3. The second critical point in the beginning of Jesus' ministry occurs when the Spirit drives Jesus into the wilderness to be tested immediately after his baptism. While many translations say "tempted," the purpose of the wilderness was not to entice Jesus to sin but to test Jesus' faithfulness to God's mission. Facing Satan, the Adversary, and wild animals, who were representations of evil spirits during this time, the wilderness was a place where Jesus encountered opposition to his mission. Yet it was also a place where Jesus encountered trauma. The title of today's sermon is "What is trauma?" From a clinical perspective, trauma "results from exposure to an incident or series of events that are emotionally disturbing or life-threatening with lasting adverse effects on the individual's functioning and mental, physical, social, emotional, and/or spiritual well-being." (<https://www.traumainformedcare.chcs.org/what-is-trauma/>). As this definition indicates, trauma can take on two distinct forms: 1. a traumatic event and 2. chronic, long-term stress. Consider for a moment whether you or someone you love has faced either a traumatic event or a situation of chronic stress. This might look like an unexpected loss, a natural disaster, or even a dysfunctional work or home environment. Whatever form it

takes, trauma is irreversible. Trauma is also a way of understanding forms of suffering that do not follow a straightforward timeline for healing. For instance, when someone breaks a leg, they seek treatment, perhaps undergo surgery, then over the course of several weeks, the bones knit back together such that a few months later the person is walking as they once did. While breaking a leg certainly causes suffering, there is a beginning, middle, and end to the healing process. However, if that person broke their leg as a result of abuse by a parent or trusted caregiver, the impact of the emotional and mental suffering of breaking their leg does not follow the same timeline of healing. The insecurity, lack of self-worth, and fear of trusting others will flow in and out of this person's life again and again. Thus, the suffering associated with trauma has a lasting impact on a person's spiritual, physical, emotional, and/or social wellbeing that cannot be erased or forgotten.

4. Have you ever considered that Jesus also experienced trauma? From the very little bit that Mark tells us, he almost certainly encountered traumatic situations in the wilderness. For forty days, he faced a constant adversary seeking to derail him from his mission. He lived among wild beasts that represented evil forces in the world. He was definitely exposed to threats to his emotional and spiritual health, if not also his physical health. If you have ever experienced constant opposition or evil in the world, you can begin to imagine what Jesus must have experienced in the wilderness. On top of that, he had just experienced God's very public consecration of his mission to go out and proclaim God's good news to the world. One might think that this would be a time to build a following and start moving and shaking. And instead, Jesus is in the wilderness with Satan and wild animals for forty days. Talk about long-term stress!

5. Throughout this sermon series, we want to resist the temptation to make Jesus into a mere object lesson. Instead, the Scriptures invite us to draw close to Christ, to relate to Jesus as our Messiah, yes, but also our friend and guide. When we encounter Jesus in this way, we not only recognize the trauma that Jesus suffered lurking in between the lines of this passage; we also become intimately aware of what—or really who—helped Jesus endure and build resilience in and through this testing. Jesus was not alone in the wilderness! He was joined by angels who tended to his basic needs, enabling him to come out of the wilderness with the resilient love to fulfill God's mission in the world.

6. Finally, the third critical point in the beginning of Jesus' ministry comes in verses 14 and 15 when Jesus begins to proclaim the good news. In verse 15, Jesus' call to repentance must be understood as distinct from the repentance proclaimed by John the Baptist a few verses earlier in Mark 1. Where John called for a repentance for the forgiveness of sins, Jesus calls for a repentance that is a complete change in perspective. Jesus calls for a repentance that turns away from the old way of life and toward a new way of life shaped by God's good news. Significantly, Jesus proclaims this new way of life after committing to solidarity with human sinfulness in his baptism and experiencing trauma in the wilderness. The good news that Jesus proclaims does not pretend that evil and sin—and the trauma they cause—do not exist. In addition, Jesus does not shame humanity for experiencing trauma and the adverse effects trauma can have on our physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual health. Rather, Jesus declares that God's kingdom has come near to humanity! Thus, God's good news requires honest recognition of trauma in the world while also calling us to turn toward the good news and away from anything that would perpetuate suffering and trauma for ourselves or others.

7. As we enter this Lenten season, Jesus' good news is for us, too. Jesus calls us to live into the good news by first learning to honestly name trauma. Several resources exist that can help us recognize and name trauma in our own lives. One such tool is the Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) assessment. You can find this assessment in your bulletin insert (or wherever you make this available to your congregation). The ACEs assessment is a ten-question tool to assess sources of trauma that a person experienced during childhood. After you answer the questions, add up the number of "yes" answers, and this is your ACEs score. This score offers a helpful beginning to assessing what level of trauma a person experienced in childhood and how that might affect them now. To be clear, if you have a high ACEs score, this does not mean you are damaged. Also, if you have a low ACEs score, that does not mean you did not experience any trauma as a child, and it certainly does not mean that you have not experienced trauma as an adult. The ACEs assessment is simply a tool that helps us start thinking about how difficult experiences early in our lives might be

impacting us now, and whether that trauma comes from several sources or only one or two. In other words, the ACEs assessment gets our wheels turning to help us start naming potential sources of trauma in our own lives and the lives of others. If you are interested in diving deeper, you might also consider taking a stress assessment like the one found in the “Call to Action” insert. This kind of stress assessment can help a person recognize whether and how chronic stress is negatively impacting their overall health.

8. Whether you fill out the ACEs assessment, a stress assessment, or simply sit for a few minutes this week and consider possible sources of trauma in your life, remember this—you are not alone. Next week, we will explore resilience more deeply, but notice that in today’s Scripture, Jesus did not experience the trauma of the wilderness alone. He had angels to tend him. As you start to become aware of sources of trauma in your own life and in your neighbors’ lives, think too about those relationships that have helped you move through these difficult times. Resilience comes through responsive relationships with one another and with Christ in the midst of trauma. As you draw close to Christ in this Lenten season, receive the invitation to practice responsive relationship and resilient love with one another. In this way, we respond to Jesus’ call to repent and believe, to choose God’s good news with and for one another and resist any word or action that would shame, blame, or perpetuate trauma for ourselves or our neighbors.



Benediction

Now go forth with the comfort and courage that comes from Christ, who knows what it means to suffer and invites us to name the trauma all around us that we might seek life together.

Amen.

For a printable bulletin insert - [click here](#)

Sermon Guide

Lent 2





Call to Worship

Welcome you who are learning to name your suffering.

Jesus Christ, draw near to us.

Welcome you who are not quite ready to name the pain you see around you.

Jesus Christ, draw near to us.

Welcome you who are taking wobbly steps toward resilience and you who have had much practice in building strength through adversity.

Jesus Christ, draw near to us.

As we continue in this season of Lent, may God comfort us, guide us, and draw near to us as we name trauma and practice resilient love together.

Jesus Christ, draw near to us as we draw near to you. Amen.



Hymn Selections:

- **“Where He Leads Me”**
United Methodist Hymnal #338
- **“Take Up Thy Cross”**
United Methodist Hymnal #415
- **“Nearer, My God, to Thee”**
United Methodist Hymnal #528



Children's Sermon

MATERIALS: Medium flowerpot filled with 4 different colors of pom-poms (cotton balls); 2-3 pairs of gloves in increasing sizes, such as gardening gloves and/or winter gloves and/or oven mitts

Place the flowerpot where the children can see the pot and the pom-poms inside it. Bring the gloves with you but don't put them on yet. Feel free to fill in your own stressful situations (kept simple enough that children can understand them) as you wish when putting on the gloves during the children's sermon.

Say: Good morning! If you were here last week, you might remember that I wanted to plant some flowers last week and couldn't figure out why this pot was so full. Some of you helped me remove the towel, and we found these pom-poms in here! Then we talked about how traumas, those really difficult experiences that we feel for a long time, can be like these pom-poms—they can fill us up without us knowing and keep us from doing the good things we want to do until we pull the towel off and see what's inside. I've been meaning all week to get these pom-poms out, but then my week got so busy and stressful. On Monday morning, I couldn't find my keys which got the whole day started late (*put on a glove*). Then on Tuesday, I went to the grocery store and realized when I got home that I left all the stuff for dinner at the store (*put on a glove*). On Thursday, I forgot my lunch *and* snack at home, so I spent all afternoon hungry (*put on two gloves*). And then yesterday, I burned a whole batch of cookies while I was trying to figure out why my washing machine wasn't working! (*Put on final two gloves—oven mitts.*)

But here I am, ready now to clean this out. (*Play at trying to reach hands into the pot with all those gloves on.*) Oh wait. It's really hard to move my hands. How am I supposed to do anything with all these things on my hands? What do you think I should do? (*Wait for answers.*) I'm not sure I can get these off my hands by myself. Do you think some of you could help me? (*Let a couple of kids help take all of the gloves off.*) That feels so much better! Thank you!

You know, I'm realizing that even when we name the hard things we've gone through and how they make us feel inside, little things happen every day that can make it hard to pay attention to what's going on inside. Just like my gloves, all those little things pile up, which makes it hard to work through all the hard things we are feeling. But just like some of you helped me take my gloves off, we can help each other build resilience. Remember, resilience is strength we build inside as we live through hard experiences. We can help each other build resilience by being present to each other during difficult situations. In fact, in today's scripture, Jesus teaches his followers that he wants them to choose to serve one another instead of just serving themselves. You did that for me today. You listened to me as I talked about the hard things that happened to me this week, and then you helped me take off all the gloves that had piled up on my hands when I couldn't do it myself. Those simple actions—listening and doing something to help—are ways that we can serve one another and love one another just like Jesus teaches us to do, *and* they help the other person build the strength that they need as they go through hard times. Let's pray:

God, teach us to love one another by being present and helping our family, friends, and neighbors when they are struggling. Help us as we work together to build the resilience we need when life is hard and thank you for always being with us. Amen.

**Scripture • Mark 8:31-38**

Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, “Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.”

He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? Indeed, what can they give in return for their life? Those who are ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.”



Exegesis

The opening verse of this passage immediately signals that Jesus likely has different expectations for his role as Messiah than his disciples. In fact, despite the relentless march toward the cross in the Gospel of Mark, Mark 8:31 contains Jesus' first prediction of his Passion. With characteristic openness and directness, Jesus predicts not just general suffering, but specific circumstances surrounding his suffering, including rejection from many if not all Jewish religious leaders and scholars, his death at the hands of others, and then, perhaps most shockingly, his return from the dead. In the context of Mark, such statements are not just proof for the reader that Jesus was/is, in fact, the Messiah since all he said came true. If a central theme in the Gospel of Mark is the declaration of the good news of God through and about Jesus, then Jesus' statements in verse 31 must be read in that context. Ultimately, Jesus' suffering is part of how God brings about the fulfillment of God's good news, which is made even clearer when Jesus rebukes Peter in verse 33. Note, however, that Jesus' suffering is not *the means by which* God saves humanity and all creation. Rather, Jesus suffers because of the world's response to God's good news enacted in Jesus. For Jesus to be faithful to his mission, he must be prepared to suffer because the world does not recognize or understand God's love in their midst.

In response to Peter's rebuke, Jesus makes plain not just for Peter but for all of his disciples that Peter's attempt to censure talk of Jesus' impending suffering was not the behavior of a disciple. Peter was likely not alone in his expectations of Jesus' Messiahship. At this time, some Jews expectantly awaited the arrival of a Davidic messiah who would defeat the occupying Roman forces and reestablish the kingdom of Israel. Such a messiah comes in strength and victory, not in suffering that results in a state execution. Yet Jesus rebukes Peter's attempts to make him conform to Peter's expectation. In saying "get behind me," Jesus is both rejecting Peter's attempts to sway him and admonishing Peter to return to his role as a disciple, that is to get behind Jesus and follow.

Verse 34-38, then, expound on what following Christ looks like. In sum, following Jesus means a complete reversal of worldly understandings of honor and power. To deny oneself and take up one's cross indicates that following Jesus means to act as servants to one another and be prepared to die a servant's dishonorable death if that is where following Christ takes you. Rather than vying for the high regard of others, Christ followers embody a new kind of honor, one based on humility, service, suffering, and what the world calls disgrace. As verse 35 indicates, denying oneself also means not wishing to save one's physical life if it means veering off the path set by Christ. As verse 36 elaborates, physical death in the name of Christ is far better than remaining physically alive but forfeiting your soul. Notably, the Greek word *zemioo*, translated as forfeit in verse 36, means "to do damage to." So, to choose one's physical life over following the way of Christ does damage to the soul.

Jesus then drives the point home in verse 38, again reversing notions of honor and shame by teaching that those who treat the way of Christ with shame will receive the same treatment when Christ comes in glory. What the world shames—serving one another, humility, and suffering—Christ honors, and vice versa. In this teaching, Jesus offers a lesson in the proper way to approach suffering. Suffering is not a mark of shame but an opportunity to follow to Christ. Note, however, that suffering itself is not salvific. Called to serve one another, Christians must tend both the causes and the aftermath of trauma and suffering as we work to love God and neighbor well. Instead, following in the way of Christ means removing shame and finding connection, honor, and life in the midst of shame through the practice of resilient love.



Sermon Notes

INTRODUCTION

Last week, we followed Jesus through three critical events at the beginning of his ministry: his baptism, his testing in the wilderness, and the beginning of his public ministry. By entering into these early days of his ministry, we witnessed Jesus fully engage with the human condition and the suffering and trauma we experience. Further, in recognizing Jesus' experiences of trauma, we received an invitation to begin recognizing and naming trauma in our own lives. However, seeking health for ourselves, our families, and our neighbors—and remember, Jesus teaches that every person you meet is your neighbor—requires more than just naming trauma. After we name trauma, we can learn to practice resilience. Thus, as we draw close to Christ in today's passage, we begin to find answers to the question: what is resilience?

SERMON NOTES

This week, we encounter a different kind of psalm on our journey toward mental wellness. Whereas our text last week was a psalm of lament, today's reading is a psalm of ascent. But don't worry—there are still plenty of hard emotions and difficult circumstances for us to unpack! As we discussed last week, our first step on the journey toward mental wellness is openly and honestly naming our emotions and stressors. Whether you found that task easy or difficult, I hope you took at least a moment this last week to check in with yourself and name how you were feeling in that moment. Recognizing and naming how you feel is a skill, and like any skill, it requires practice to maintain. Today, we will move further on our journey with the assistance of Psalm 126. Psalm 126 is part of a collection of psalms encompassing Psalm 120-134 that each include the heading "psalm of ascent." Whereas scholars identified the structure of the psalm of lament centuries later, the original author or compiler of the book of Psalms lets us know that this collection served a particular function related to "ascent." Scholars have come up with various possible functions for these psalms. Some think that they were sung by worshippers as they ascended the hill to enter the Temple in Jerusalem. Others think they were traveling songs sung by pilgrims who were journeying to Jerusalem to worship at the Temple. Either way, Psalm 126 serves as a fitting traveling companion as we take this journey together.

CONTENT

1. Our passage opens with Jesus' first prediction of his suffering, death, and resurrection in the Gospel of Mark. The Gospel tells us that this prediction comes while Jesus is teaching his disciples, which means there is something to learn in the midst of this prediction. We begin to understand what Jesus might be trying to teach the disciples in Jesus' response to Peter's rebuke. During this time, there were those who waited and watched for the arrival of a Davidic messiah who would defeat the occupying Roman forces and reestablish the kingdom of Israel. This Davidic messiah would come in strength and victory, embodying divine honor and power and raising the Jews up from their oppression under the Romans. So, when Jesus says that he will be rejected, put to death, and then rise again in three days, Peter sees his vision of messianic victory crumbling before him and rebukes Jesus. In response, Jesus says "get behind me, Satan" or probably more accurately, "get behind me, adversary." In this statement, Jesus identifies Peter's rebuke as opposition to God's good news, but also tells Peter to return to his role as a disciple—Peter needs to get behind Jesus and *follow*. Ultimately, Jesus' prediction of his suffering, death, and resurrection is about teaching his disciples to reverse their understanding of the work of the Messiah and what it means to follow Jesus as their Messiah, to think on divine things instead of human things.

2. Jesus then expounds on this reversal in his teaching beginning in verse 34 by identifying his followers as those who deny themselves and take up their cross. With this statement, Jesus completely flips notions of honor and shame. During

this time, honor was found in having power, control, and the esteem of others, whereas being a servant, submitting to others, and being put to death—especially being crucified—were all sources of shame. Yet Jesus reverses these entirely. Rather than vying for the high regard of others, Christ calls his followers to embody a new kind of honor based on humility, service, and even suffering—everything the world calls disgraceful.

3. For those who do not follow Jesus, who reject Jesus’ new system of honor and shame, the consequences impact the health of their souls and thus their very lives. This may seem counter to Jesus’ teaching in verse 35 when he says, “For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it.” However, in verse 36, Jesus asks his listeners to consider whether gaining the whole world, that is gaining the world’s honor and favor, is worth forfeiting his soul. The Greek word translated as “forfeit” here is *zemioo*, which does not just mean give up but actually means to do damage to. In other words, seeking the approval of the world, rejecting the way of Christ to save one’s physical life and/or status in the world does damage to the very seat of life, the soul. Even when following Jesus means there will be suffering, to reject Jesus’ new system of honor and shame does far worse damage.

4. Note that in this passage, Jesus is not teaching that suffering is *necessary* for following Christ. Instead, Jesus is honestly naming that suffering *will happen*. To not be honest about suffering and trauma only creates more suffering and trauma. In the same breath, Jesus points his followers toward two necessary tools that we need to build resilience in response to trauma—connection and the reversal of shame toward love. By teaching his followers to deny themselves, Jesus actually connects us to one another. Jesus does not expect us to exist as islands that deal with our own hardships in isolation. Jesus calls us to serve one another, to be connected in the midst of our trauma, to help one another when we are suffering. When we are connected, we can begin to reverse the shame our society puts on our trauma, rewriting our experiences in light of the love and good news of Christ.

5. Connection and the reversal of shame are two key elements to building resilience. Simply put, resilience is strength forged through adversity. Resilience comes through our attempts to build a life in the aftermath of trauma. Remember that trauma is not only irreversible but is also never forgotten or erased from our experiences. The aftermath of trauma follows us wherever we go. Resilience is the strength and skills we build that keep our traumas out of the driver’s seat of our lives. Isolation and shame around our traumas keep us from building resilience.

6. Throughout this sermon series, you will hear the phrase “resilient love.” Resilient love brings forth life in the face of adversity, life for you and life for your community. If resilience is strength forged through adversity, resilient love makes resilience possible. Resilient love is a particular kind of love, a love that helps us continue living without forgetting. There are so many kinds of love and so many things our society calls love that are really ways of ignoring suffering or enabling trauma to continue. Resilient love meets suffering and trauma head-on and insists on reminding us that God continues to desire and work for our wellbeing. Resilient love helps us continue building life together as we bear the weight of trauma, and it helps us recognize that we need each other not only to carry our pain but to develop the strength to keep living through trauma. This is the love that Christ shows us—a resilient love that teaches us to carry our trauma without becoming our trauma, that always seeks after our wellbeing as individuals and as a community.

Possible Examples

- **Early Childhood Trauma:** Last week, you were invited to take the ACEs assessment which assesses ten key factors that produce adversity and trauma during childhood. Scientists who study childhood trauma have identified these factors as indicative of a child’s exposure to trauma and have developed studies to examine which factors increase a child’s ability to build resilience, particularly if they have a higher ACEs score. A working paper from the Harvard Center for the Developing Child summarizes many of these studies and identifies the key factors in building childhood resilience. Chief among these factors is the availability of at least one stable, caring, and supportive

relationship between a child and the important adults in his or her life, and the supportive context of affirming faith or cultural traditions. Connection and support—in other words, through love and compassion—help children who have experienced traumatic events and/or chronic stress build critical skills for enduring difficulties and eventually thriving. (For more information, this paper is available at: <https://developingchild.harvard.edu/resources/supportive-relationships-and-active-skill-building-strengthen-the-foundations-of-resilience>.)

- COVID-19 Pandemic: The trauma of the COVID-19 pandemic was, and perhaps still is for some of us, significantly magnified by increased isolation. Even as quarantining and physical distancing were meant to keep our bodies healthy—which in any crisis is the first order of business—we also cannot deny the negative mental, emotional, and spiritual health impacts of isolation on ourselves and in our relationships. Even as we sought ways to connect with one another, the removal of our normal ways of relating have taken a toll. Despite many areas of our lives opening back up, we cannot erase the impact of the pandemic’s collective trauma in our society. Yet when we honestly name this trauma, we open up avenues to explore how we’ve already built resilience and how we can continue to practice resilience together in response to the pandemic. We have the opportunity to reverse the shame narratives that come with the lack of control so many of us felt and the weight of caring for our families in isolation, and instead live into love. To choose support and caring, to offer listening ears to one another when the impacts of the trauma resurface, to acknowledge where we and our neighbors are still living in isolation and choose to enter those gaps with one another, replacing isolation with resilient love.

7. A final aspect of resilience worth noting is that we can only build resilience and practice resilient love when we let go of comparative suffering. Comparative suffering is the impulse to either diminish or amplify your own experiences of suffering by comparing them to others. For instance, saying, “Well, Sally does not know what real pain is because she was only in labor 5 hours, and I was in labor 48 hours.” Or, perhaps thinking, “My loss of a job is nothing compared to Mrs. Smith’s loss of her husband and sister in the same month, so I shouldn’t feel bad.” These statements highlight distinctions between instead of connections with your neighbors, friends, and family. Using comparative suffering to validate or invalidate your own experiences of suffering and trauma stops the flow of love and relationship that we all need to build resilience. When we let go of comparative suffering, we first show love to ourselves, allowing ourselves to feel what we feel in response to trauma and in so doing also allow that others need to feel their suffering and trauma for what it is, not in comparison to anyone else. Jesus did not say deny yourself and take up *my* cross. Jesus said deny yourself—choose connection with others instead of power over others—and take up *your* cross. But note that he does not stop there. Because after we choose relationship with one another and acknowledge our own suffering, we are called to follow Jesus, which means that we are never alone. Christ is with us in all things, leading us together as we participate in God’s resilient love with ourselves and with our neighbors.



Benediction

May you go forth today as followers of the One who leads us into the resilience that comes from connection with God and neighbor as we practice love with instead of power over one another.

Amen.

For a printable bulletin insert - [click here](#)

Sermon Guide

Lent 3





Call to Worship

Welcome, you whose wages do not meet your needs.

Jesus Christ, draw near to us.

Welcome, you who do not even know where to start finding solutions to the complicated problems of poverty.

Jesus Christ, draw near to us.

Welcome, you who fear losing a job and you who know the consequences of being laid off all too well.

Jesus Christ, draw near to us.

As we continue in this season of Lent, may God comfort us, guide us, and draw near to us as we name the trauma of economic insecurity and practice resilient love together.

Jesus Christ, draw near to us as we draw near to you. Amen.



Hymn Selections:

- **“God, Who Stretched the Spangled Heavens”**
United Methodist Hymnal #150
- **“Christ for the World We Sing”**
United Methodist Hymnal #568
- **“Lord, Whose Love Through Humble Service”**
United Methodist Hymnal #581



Children's Sermon

MATERIALS: Flowerpot full of 4 colors of pom-poms; a separate small container

Place the flowerpot where the children can see the pot and the pom-poms inside it. Have the smaller container close at hand.

Say: Good morning! I brought our flowerpot back with me this week, and you may notice I don't have any gloves with me either. This week, we are finally going to start the process of cleaning out our flowerpot! Now, what colors do you notice in here? (*Wait for answers.*) That's right! We have four different colors. Today we are going to clean out [Color 1]. We said the first week that these pom-poms represent traumas that we experience. When we think about our families, our neighborhoods, and our world, there are many difficult and challenging experiences that people go through. Today, we are going to talk about one source of those experiences: poverty. Poverty is a word that means that a person does not have a lot of money, and likely does not have enough money to pay for everything they need—like food, shelter, clothes, and health care. In our scripture today, Jesus shows his followers that God is more important than anyone or anything else in their lives, including money. And when we put God first, God shows us that people who do not have enough money or resources face a lot of constant challenges. They worry about where their families are going to live. They have to make hard choices about whether to pay for food or medicine. They may not have a good coat when it gets cold in the winter or enough money to keep the air conditioner on when it gets hot in the summer. They may worry about how they will find another job if their company cuts the job they have. All of these challenges are hard on our neighbors' bodies *and* their emotions, especially when other people tell them they deserve these challenges because they do not work hard enough.

But, when we put God first, God also shows us how to love like God loves, which includes helping our neighbors build resilience. Remember, resilience is strength we build inside while we live through hard experiences. So, I want us to think about ways we could listen to and help our neighbors who do not have enough money or resources. What are some ideas you have? (*Wait for answers. For every idea that is a way the children/church could listen to and help neighbors living in poverty, place one of the [Color 1] pom-poms in the smaller container.*) These are wonderful ideas. Maybe we could also help our local Food Bank [or other feeding ministry as may be the case in your community] collect and give away food? (*Place another [Color 1] pom-pom in the small container.*) Or you could be a good friend to a classmate whose family does not seem to have a lot of money. (*Place another [Color 1] pom-pom in the small container.*) No matter what else we do, we can always pray for God to help our neighbors who live in poverty and ask God to show us how we can love and care for them, too. (*Place the final [Color 1] pom-pom(s) in the small container.*)

Look, now we have cleaned all of our [Color 1] pom-poms out of the flowerpot! We worked together to imagine ways that we could help people who live in poverty build resilience as they live through so many challenges. I want you to keep thinking and praying about ways that God might be showing you and showing us as a church how we can be good neighbors to people experiencing trauma. An important thing about resilience, though, is that even as we find ways to clean out the flowerpot inside us, we do not ever forget the hard things we have been through. So next week, I want you to come back and see what happens to these pom-poms, and we'll work on cleaning the next color out, too. Let's pray:

God, you created the earth to provide all that we need. Be with our friends, family, and neighbors who struggle to have enough food, clothing, shelter, medicine, and work. Show us how to be good neighbors who share your love and resources with those who need them. Amen.

NOTE: *Before the next week, use a hot glue gun to glue the [Color 1] pom-poms to the outside of the flowerpot. You can do it randomly, in a pattern, all on one side or the other—however you want! The goal is just to demonstrate to the children over the next several weeks that we do not ever forget trauma, but as we build resilience, trauma no longer keeps us from growing inside and in our relationships with others.*

**Scripture** • John 2:13-22

The Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. In the temple he found people selling cattle, sheep, and doves, and the money changers seated at their tables. Making a whip of cords, he drove all of them out of the temple, both the sheep and the cattle. He also poured out the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. He told those who were selling the doves, “Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father’s house a marketplace!” His disciples remembered that it was written, “Zeal for your house will consume me.” The Jews then said to him, “What sign can you show us for doing this?” Jesus answered them, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.” The Jews then said, “This temple has been under construction for forty-six years, and will you raise it up in three days?” But he was speaking of the temple of his body. After he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this; and they believed the scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken.



Exegesis

A close reading of any passage in the Gospel of John requires going back to the Prologue in John 1:1-18. One of the major themes that arises in the Prologue appears in John 1:10-11— “He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him.” Throughout John’s Gospel, the motif of the world not recognizing Jesus as God Incarnate arises again and again, including in the cleansing of the Temple in John 2. Along with this theme comes the invitation for the reader to respond differently, to recognize, receive, and be transformed by Jesus as God Incarnate.

While John paints a vivid picture of Jesus’ actions in this story, the motivations behind those actions may seem a bit obtuse. While it might be tempting for modern-day readers, particularly Protestant readers, to assume that the problem was the selling of animals for sacrifices and money changing at the Temple, in Jesus’ day these activities were not unlawful in and of themselves. Verse 13 indicates that Jesus himself traveled to Jerusalem for the feast of Passover, just as many pilgrims did every year. In order to participate in the rituals of Passover, these pilgrims would need access to animals for sacrifice and the appropriate currency to pay the Temple tax since they could not bring animals or appropriate coinage with them on the journey from their homes, especially since Roman coins contained graven images that the Law forbade them to use for the Temple tax. So, when Jesus drove out the animals and poured out the coins, he was interrupting practices allowed under the Law that enabled Jewish pilgrims to participate in Passover rituals at the Temple. Notably, scholars tend to agree that Jesus driving out the animals and dumping out the money, while disruptive, was not physically violent toward any animal or person. Rather, the language used for “a whip of cords” indicates that Jesus formed a kind of rope commonly used to herd animals, and there is no indication that Jesus used the rope to do harm to another person.

While buying, selling, and money changing at the Temple was *allowed* under Jewish Law, that does not mean these actions were *sacred*. In these few verses, Jesus demonstrates a reorientation of the Temple as the house of God that “the Jews”—John’s phrase for those who do not recognize Jesus—do not understand. In verses 14 and 15, the word translated as Temple is *hieron*, meaning “a place to worship God.” But in verse 16, Jesus refers to the Temple as his Father’s house, or in Greek, *oikos*, which indicates a home or dwelling place. In fact, verse 16 features a striking play on words as Jesus tells those selling doves to “Stop making my Father’s *oikos* an *oikos emporion*,” that is, a house of trade. Jesus is calling forth a reframing of priorities and a more intimate encounter with God that does not require the exchange of goods and money. Jesus is not rejecting trade—Jesus is re-centering God and putting trade in its proper relationship to God.

Notably, when “the Jews” ask Jesus to prove his authority to thwart the ability of pilgrims to access the animals and money they needed to observe Passover at the Temple, Jesus rejects their call for a miraculous sign and instead predicts his resurrection. Writing for the benefit of Christ’s followers who already know of his resurrection, John helps the reader understand the resurrection as the source of his authority to turn established systems on their heads when those systems thwart the work of God in the world. While “the Jews” in this story do not recognize Jesus, the reader is invited to do just the opposite—to recognize Jesus’ authority to re-order the world and act accordingly.



Sermon Notes

INTRODUCTION

In the first two weeks of this series, we drew close to Christ to uncover what Jesus shows us about trauma and resilience. We learned that trauma is suffering with long-lasting effects that we must honestly name in order to move toward health. We also learned that resilience is strength forged in adversity, and loving, responsive relationships help us build and practice resilient love. This week, we turn to examples of trauma that can impact us as individuals and as a community. Today, we enter into the story of Jesus cleansing the Temple in John 2 to learn how Jesus calls us to recognize and respond to the trauma of economic hardship in our communities. Central to addressing economic hardship is dismantling the idea that we must pull ourselves up by our bootstraps and the shame this narrative produces so that we can practice resilient love that values stability and connected relationship with and for every person in our community.

SERMON NOTES

1. Jesus' cleansing of the Temple is one of the few stories that appears in all four of the Gospels. While the other three Gospels place this story near the end of Jesus' ministry, John places it near the beginning. For John, this episode sets the stage for critical aspects of Jesus' work in the world. To set the scene, John establishes that the feast of Passover is approaching, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem, presumably to celebrate Passover with the many Jewish pilgrims who flocked to Jerusalem every year for Passover. Two key rituals that Jews participated in during Passover were the paying of the Temple tax and the offering of sacrifices. Notably, the Temple would not accept Roman coins for the Temple tax because they were marked with graven images. So, in order to pay the Temple tax, Jews had to exchange their Roman coins for an accepted currency. As Jesus approaches the Temple, Jesus encounters people selling animals for use in sacrifices and moneychangers who exchanged Roman currency for coins accepted by the Temple authorities. These sellers and moneychangers were performing a service for the Jewish pilgrims, making it possible for them to have the currency and the animals they needed to perform the proper rituals at Passover. There was nothing about these sellers and moneychangers doing their business in the Temple that was against Jewish Law, which makes Jesus' response more shocking.
2. Despite the clear description of Jesus' actions, it is difficult to understand his motive for driving away the animals and emptying the purses of the moneychangers given this context. Clues to Jesus' purposes do not emerge until verse 16. Up to this point, the Greek word translated as "temple" is *hieron*, which means "a place to worship God." In verse 16, though, Jesus shifts away from *hieron*, using the word *oikos* instead, which carries the more intimate meaning of "a home or dwelling place" when he references his "Father's house." In fact, verse 16 features a play on words as Jesus says, "Stop making my Father's *oikos* an *oikos emporion*," that is, a house of trade, which the NRSV translates as marketplace. In this singular statement, we begin to understand just why Jesus would take such demonstrable action against the animal sellers and moneychangers. Jesus came to guide humanity toward intimate relationship with God, to help humanity come home to God. Yet in God's house, business had taken over the seat at the head of the table—trade had become necessary to access God rather than intimate relationship with God directing and influencing the work of business toward justice and access for all.
3. Witnessing Jesus' destructive protest, "the Jews," a phrase John uses for those who do not recognize Jesus as God Incarnate—despite the fact that many Jews obviously did recognize the truth of Jesus' divinity—ask Jesus to prove his authority to do and say these things. Where they ask for a miraculous sign, Jesus answers with a veiled prediction of his Passion and resurrection. Writing for those who already know of Jesus' resurrection, John centers Jesus' authority in his resurrection, God's loving and resilient answer of life in response to the crucifixion. Jesus' authority to turn the world upside down, to shift perspectives about how we prioritize the relationship between God and trade, rests in God's resilient love that brought Jesus back to life when the world put him to death.

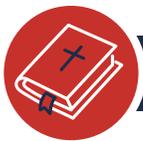
4. As we pay attention to Christ’s words and actions in this passage, the questions arise: who sits at the head of our table? Who occupies our house and sets our priorities—God or business? Who drives our approach to making and spending money—God or the bottom line? In today’s culture, living into the priorities of trade and business means living into the narrative that we are all self-sufficient individuals whose success or failure is solely the consequence of our own actions. In other words, to be economically successful and secure, a person must “pull oneself up by the bootstraps.” Yet, if you have ever tried to pull yourself up by your own bootstraps, you know that it is impossible. In fact, the first recorded use of this phrase in the 1800s was a mocking reference to an impossible act. Over time, this phrase came to have a positive connotation in the U.S., describing the pioneer spirit that built the U.S. into what it is today. However, on the other side of the “bootstraps coin” is the shame-filled narrative that a person experiencing economic hardship—whether from job loss, lack of education, cyclical poverty, etc.—deserves their suffering because they did not work hard enough to get out of it.

5. In addition to being physically and economically impossible, the bootstraps narrative ignores that poverty and economic hardship are sources of trauma. A review of multiple studies put together by the Family-Informed Trauma Treatment Center found that “families living in urban poverty often encounter multiple traumas over many years” while also having less access to the resources that can help them negotiate traumatic experiences than families in more affluent neighborhoods (https://www.nctsn.org/sites/default/files/resources/resource-guide/understanding_impact_trauma_urban_poverty_family_systems.pdf). As traumas like low neighborhood safety, daily hassles, and anxiety about the future pile on while access to helpful resources remains difficult, families living in poverty have difficulty adapting, which snowballs into more and more negative physical, mental, emotional, and/or spiritual health impacts that ripple through the family and society. Think, for instance, about research on intergenerational trauma that shows that adults with histories of trauma have problems with emotional regulation, aggression, social competence, and interpersonal relationship which can then be passed on to the next generation. Further, these mental and emotional difficulties stemming from trauma can make finding and keeping a good paying job and/or navigating the social services system almost impossible. Yet, without bringing in a living wage or having the capacity to receive support from social services, individuals and families living in poverty remain vulnerable to continued cycles of trauma that get passed on to future generations and impact the wellbeing of neighborhoods and communities well into the future.

- *Potential Example:* An example of these cycles of poverty can be seen in health care. Where some assume that individuals and families who receive health care coverage through Medicaid are not employed, in Kansas 63% of adults enrolled in Medicaid are employed. However, to remain eligible for Medicaid, a family of 3 in Kansas can only make \$8,344 per year (\$695 per month). If a parent receives a raise or seeks a higher paying job, they can easily fall into a coverage gap where they make too much to remain on Medicaid but too little to purchase private insurance. In this situation, parents must choose whether to risk overwhelming medical debt in order to have a higher paying job or try to live off of \$695 per month to maintain their medical coverage through Medicaid. This is but one example of how the trauma of economic hardship includes the constant dilemmas of having to choose between basic human needs, like medical care, affording rent in a safe neighborhood, and keeping food on the table. These three essentials for stability and wellbeing are not all possible if a person only makes \$8,344 a year, but they are also not possible at \$10,000, \$15,000, or \$25,000 a year for a family of three. Yet without changes in policy and support from the wider community, people currently experiencing trauma due to poverty will almost inevitably remain in cycles of trauma, the effects of which ripple out into the economic and social wellbeing of the whole community.

6. In light of the impossibility and shame of the bootstraps myth and the reality of the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual traumas that come out of economic hardship, how does Jesus call us to respond? The Jesus of John 2 would begin by asking, who dwells in your house—God or business? As we draw close to Christ, we discover that when God lives in our house, narratives that perpetuate shame have no room to flourish. In other words, the bootstraps are out! God replaces shame with love. Every time. If you have lost a job, God loves you. If you are drowning under medical bills, God loves you. If you are living paycheck to paycheck, God loves you. If you do not know how you will feed your family this week, God loves you. And God’s love is not a passive love. God loves with an active love that seeks the wellbeing of every part of creation. When God dwells with us and we dwell with God, we are called to love the same way. God asks us to set

aside the assumptions of individual responsibility and deserved suffering and instead work with God to respond to our neighbors' economic hardship with resilient love, that love that brings forth life in the midst of trauma. Sometimes that might require us to do something as shocking as driving out animals and dumping out moneybags. But more often than not, working with God is a lot simpler, though no less impactful. It is listening to those who are suffering to find out what basic needs they have and then asking how your community can help meet those needs. It is helping someone fill out paperwork for food stamps, health insurance, or subsidized childcare because doing the paperwork alone is daunting and not doing it right can have terrible consequences. It is imagining how the church can become a connector of resources in your community, and then starting the conversations to make that happen. What would it look like for the church to partner with other local businesses, non-profits, civic leaders, and religious leaders to develop solutions that improve the lives of people experiencing economic hardship in your community? Because supporting the economic wellbeing of others is a practice of God's resilient love that prioritizes the wellbeing of the whole community.



Benediction

May you leave today with the strength to let go of those bootstraps, the courage to meet others with compassion instead of shame, and the love that comes from choosing to dwell with God.

Amen.

For a printable bulletin insert - [click here](#)

Sermon Guide

Lent 4





Call to Worship

Welcome, you who are estranged from family, friends, or community.

Jesus Christ, draw near to us.

Welcome, you who have found safety and belonging in family, whether family of origin or found family.

Jesus Christ, draw near to us.

Welcome, you who do not know how to get to know your neighbors, and you who have worked to make your neighborhood a hospitable place for everyone.

Jesus Christ, draw near to us.

As we continue in this season of Lent, may God comfort us, guide us, and draw near to us as we name the trauma of relational wounds and practice resilient love together.

Jesus Christ, draw near to us as we draw near to you. Amen.



Hymn Selections:

- **“For the Healing of the Nations”**
United Methodist Hymnal #428
- **“Great Is Thy Faithfulness”**
United Methodist Hymnal #140
- **“Blest Be the Tie That Binds”**
United Methodist Hymnal #557



Children's Sermon

MATERIALS: Flowerpot with 3 colors of pom-poms inside, and [Color 1] glued to the outside; a separate small container

Place the flowerpot where the children can see the pot and the pom-poms inside it. Have the smaller container close at hand.

Say: Good morning! Look at our flowerpot! Do you notice anything different? (*Wait for answers.*) That's right! The [Color 1] pom-poms we took out last week are now on the outside instead of the inside of the flowerpot! Doesn't it look nice? Today, we are going to keep working on cleaning out our flowerpot as we talk about trauma that happens in our relationships with each other. Remember, trauma is a really, really hard experience that is hard for a very long time. So, when we talk about trauma in our relationships with other people, we are not talking about the arguments you might get in with your sister, or those times you really wish your parents wouldn't make you go to bed so early, or that it is sometimes hard to share your toys with your friends. Relational trauma causes a wound in a person's heart. Whether the other person hurts them physically or emotionally, this kind of wound goes deep and makes a person feel like they don't deserve to be loved. But in today's scripture, we hear that God loves *everybody* and that's why God sent us Jesus. God wants us to all know how loved we are, which also means that God wants us to love everyone around us the way God does.

So, when we think about how to help one another build resilience or build strength as we go through difficult situations, what are ways that we can love someone else the way God loves them? How can we show someone they deserve to be loved? (*Wait for answers. For every idea that is a way the children/church can show God's love to people who need it, place one of the [Color 2] pom-poms in the small container.*) These are wonderful ideas. Another way to show love is by listening to and learning from people who are different than you. Maybe you could learn about and try a new food that you've never had before at a friend's house (*place a [Color 2] pom-pom in the small container*), or have your neighbor teach you how to say "Hello!" and "How are you?" in the language they speak at home (*place a [Color 2] pom-pom in the small container*), or even learn how to play a new game from some kids down the street (*place a [Color 2] pom-pom in the small container*). Sometimes we wound each other by not understanding or loving all the things that make us different from one another. We can never go wrong with being curious and loving our differences (*place the final [Color 2] pom-pom in the small container*).

And look, now we have cleaned another color of pom-poms out of the flowerpot! We worked together to imagine ways that we could support and love people who feel as though they are not loved and don't deserve to be loved. I want you to keep thinking and praying about ways that God might be showing you and showing us as a church how we can be good neighbors to people who have been wounded by their relationships with others. Next week, we'll work on cleaning out another color, and who knows, the outside of the flowerpot might change again too! Let's pray:

God, thank you for loving every single one of us with so much love that you sent us Jesus to show us how to love like you do. Help us show that love to our neighbors who need it so desperately. Amen.

NOTE: Before the next week, use a hot glue gun to glue the [Color 2] pom-poms to the outside of the flowerpot. You can do it randomly, in a pattern, all on one side or the other—however you want! The goal is just to demonstrate to the children over the next several weeks that we do not ever forget trauma, but as we build resilience, trauma no longer keeps us from growing inside and in our relationships with others.



Scripture • John 3:14-21

“And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. Those who believe in him are not condemned; but those who do not believe are condemned already, because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God. And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed. But those who do what is true come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God.”



Exegesis

Today's Scripture passage begins in the middle of Jesus' now famous nighttime conversation with Nicodemus, a Pharisee. It was common in Jesus' day for rabbis to teach their students and followers well into the night, so Nicodemus coming at night is less about secrecy and more about his recognition of Jesus as an inspired teacher. Yet, we cannot ignore the nighttime context of this conversation as it sets the backdrop for Nicodemus' journey from the darkness of misunderstanding into the light of belief.

Our passage begins with Jesus comparing himself to the serpent that Moses lifted up in the wilderness, which serves as a veiled reference to his own crucifixion, as Jesus too would be placed on a wooden pole in order to heal others. Note that Jesus does not compare himself or his crucifixion to a sacrifice, but to a serpent that saved the lives of the Israelites bitten by poisonous snakes. Yet where Moses' serpent saved the Israelites from physical death, Jesus promises not the mere restoration of physical life but the gift of eternal life. In the Prologue, John indicates that Jesus, the Word, makes God known to the world (1:18). In this light, John 3:14-15 begins to explain how Jesus makes God known to the world—through his crucifixion, which is an act of love for the healing of the world.

Jesus follows this up by quelling any further assumptions that he reveals God to the world through judgment. In verse 17, the Greek word *krino* is translated "condemn," but carries with it the nuance of judging right and wrong. So, essentially, God did not send Jesus to judge the world as right or wrong, but instead to *sozo* the world, to rescue the world from danger and destruction. Rather than showing up to determine if the world deserves saving, Jesus first extends salvation to the world. Thus, what determines whether we are judged or not is our belief in Jesus as God's Son. In other words, judgment is secondary to belief. The character and worthiness of a person is determined by their belief in Christ as the revelation of God in spite of their past, present, or future sinful deeds. Only the person who does not believe in Christ is subject to being judged right or wrong. Ultimately, this produces self-judgment, a condemnation of the self through the refusal to choose Christ over and against the sinful world.

Notably, the belief in Christ that results in eternal life is not a passive, intellectual acceptance of the reality of Jesus as God's Son. The Greek *pisteuo*, the word translated as "belief" throughout this passage, indicates a conviction and trust in God. When we believe by trusting God's revelation of love in our midst, we do not come away unchanged. This kind of belief in Christ does not mean believers can continue to sin in secret. Believing in Christ means choosing the light, allowing our actions to come into view so that we can learn to labor in God rather than labor in darkness. In verse 20, Jesus says that those who do evil do not want their deeds to be exposed. The Greek word *elegcho*, translated here as exposed, means not just to make something known but also to convict or to prove to be wrong. Those who choose self-condemnation do not wish to know the wrongness of their deeds. But those who choose to believe in Christ welcome the Light, not because they do no wrong but because shining the light of Christ on their actions helps them align more and more with God's work of love in the world.



Sermon Notes

INTRODUCTION

After following Jesus through baptism, testing in the wilderness, a contentious exchange with Peter, and driving out animals at the Temple, today we get to take a load off, sit down, and eavesdrop on the end of a nighttime conversation between Jesus and the Pharisee Nicodemus. While not as drama-filled or action-packed as previous weeks, John 3:14-21 invites us to do some spiritual heavy lifting as we consider what it means to truly believe in Jesus as God's son and what kind of life we are called to live in response to our belief. This passage also helps us bring into the light a source of trauma that often remains hidden—the trauma of relational wounds. Whether these wounds are inflicted inside the family or out in the world, relational forms of trauma can often be difficult to name, and therefore difficult to reframe toward love and away from shame. Thus, today as we draw close to Christ, we witness that when shame tells us “Something is wrong with me,” God tells us, “You are a beloved child of God.”

SERMON NOTES

1. Our passage today begins near the end of a conversation between Nicodemus and Jesus that takes up the whole of John 3, though Jesus is in teaching mode for most of the chapter. While it was common for rabbis to teach well into the night, the time of day that Nicodemus approaches Jesus underscores that Nicodemus comes to Jesus with a darkness of understanding and, hopefully, leaves having entered into the Light of God's revelation in Jesus. In fact, where we pick up the conversation, Jesus makes a comparison between himself and the serpent that Moses puts on a pole in order to save the Israelites from poisonous snake bites in Number 21. Through this comparison, Jesus makes a veiled reference to his own crucifixion as the means by which Jesus makes God known in the world. Importantly, Jesus does not compare himself to a sacrifice, but to a serpent that healed and saved the lives of the Israelites bitten by poisonous snakes, indicating that his crucifixion is about healing and bringing eternal life to all who look and believe.
2. In verse 17, Jesus clarifies the nature of the salvation that he brings to the world. If anyone assumes that God sent the Son to judge the world and condemn it for its sinful state, Jesus refutes these assumptions. Jesus did not come to condemn or judge, but to save. In fact, the Greek word *sozo*, translated as “save” in verse 17, means “to rescue from danger and destruction.” Witnessing the world drowning in its sin, Jesus comes as a rescue party, offering salvation to all regardless of their sinful state if only they believe in Christ as the revelation of God on earth. Judgment is secondary to belief. The character and worthiness of a person is determined by their belief in Christ as the revelation of God in spite of their past, present, or future sinful acts. Only people who do not believe in Christ receive judgment and condemnation, though it is a self-condemnation brought about by their own refusal to choose Christ over and against the sinful world.
3. The belief that results in eternal life, the belief that brings us out of sin and into life with God, is not a passive, intellectual acceptance of Jesus' identity as God's Son. Every instance of the word “belief” in this passage is a translation of the Greek word *pisteuo*, which indicates a conviction and trust in God. When we place our trust in God's revelation in Christ, we are transformed away from sinning in secret and toward enacting God's love out in the open. Believing in Christ means choosing the Light, allowing our actions to come into view so that we can learn to labor in God rather than labor in darkness. Those who choose to believe in Christ welcome the Light, not because they do no wrong but because shining the light of Christ on their words and actions helps them align more and more with God's work of love in the world.
4. An area of trauma that remains in darkness and needs the loving Light of Christ is relational trauma. Relational trauma comes in many forms, but often includes long-term, chronic stress caused by repeated violations of personal boundaries,

betrayal, rejection, and confusion that produces a sense of a lack of control and/or helplessness. In families, relational trauma looks like a lack of boundaries, constantly shifting rules and expectations, physical or emotional neglect, physical or emotional abuse—any dynamic that makes a family member feel unsafe and disconnected within the family. In these cases, whether a child, teen, or adult, the relational wounding leaves the individual with the shame narrative “something is wrong with me.” In society, relational trauma can look like racism, misogyny, bigotry, and other forms of discrimination. Physical or verbal violence, violated boundaries, disrespect, and threats on the basis of race, ethnicity, gender, disability, or any other form of difference results in relational wounds and trauma. For instance, following the COVID-19 outbreak in the U.S., there were nearly 1,500 reported incidents of anti-Asian racism in just one month. Reports included incidents of physical and verbal attacks as well as reports of anti-Asian discrimination in private businesses. This kind of relational wounding causes trauma for both the direct victims of violence and for those who identify as Asian who fear violence against their bodies or properties simply because of their race and ethnicity. [Alternative example of racism: As of 2019, the Indian Health Service: The Federal Health Program for American Indians and Alaskan Natives reported that American Indian and Alaskan Native peoples had lower life expectancy and disproportionate disease burden compared to other Americans. Conditions including inadequate education, disproportionate poverty, discrimination in the delivery of health services, and cultural differences play a significant role in these detrimental health outcomes. Such conditions are the result of generations of discrimination, displacement, and land theft rooted in discrimination based on Indigenous peoples’ racial, ethnic, and cultural differences. This kind of relational wounding has caused and continues to cause trauma for both direct victims of discrimination and for those who identify as Indigenous who have learned over the course of centuries to fear discrimination and violence against their bodies or properties simply because of their racial and ethnic identity. (<https://www.ihs.gov/newsroom/factsheets/disparities/>)] When a person is wounded because of the color of their skin, their gender, or anything that makes them “different,” that trauma increases stress, reduces trust and confidence in one’s neighbors, increases isolation, and feeds the shame narrative, “something is wrong with me.”

5. As these experiences of relational trauma in families, neighborhoods, and communities come into the Light of Christ, Jesus gives us an invitation—will we choose to allow these traumas to remain in the dark or will we support ourselves and others in building resilience? The first step in practicing God’s resilient love, that love that brings forth life in the midst of trauma, is rewriting the shame narrative that “something is wrong with me” or “something is wrong with them.” This shame narrative tells people that their faults are the reasons they are mistreated and experience trauma. But when we bring relational trauma into the Light, Jesus tells a new story, a story in which every human being is a beloved child of God. When we live into Christ’s story instead of shame’s story for ourselves and others, we can begin to look for the ways we practice resilient love in our families and our neighborhoods. When we stop and witness how Jesus relates to his family, friends, and neighbors—literally, every person he meets—we discover that he modeled the kind of secure, healthy relationships that build resilience in ourselves and others in response to relational trauma. Jesus starts by telling the truth without judgment—by bringing reality into the light without condemning those who have done harm or those who have been harmed. Everyone has access to the divine grace that helps us turn away from doing harm and toward doing good. Jesus also believes people’s stories. When people seek healing, Jesus believes them. When people have been shunned or shamed by society, Jesus believes them. He hears their pain and responds with acceptance. Jesus also loves each person into who they can become. Think of the woman caught in adultery who the crowd was preparing to stone. Jesus recognizes how the crowd has turned against the woman, threatening her very life because of her sin. Jesus responds by bringing the truth into the light—every person in the crowd has sinned. Jesus asks them to consider that before taking the woman’s life. As the crowd disbands, Jesus talks directly to the woman, listens to her, and tells her he will not condemn her. Then, Jesus tells her to go and sin no more. Jesus calls the woman to live into the love Jesus has shown instead of the trauma inflicted on her by others. Like this woman, Jesus accepts us as we are right now, while also calling us to live out Jesus’ love in the world, a love that brings healing instead of inflicting suffering. Note that such love requires us to set boundaries that prioritize our wellbeing as individuals and as a community to protect ourselves from those who refuse to prioritize our wellbeing.

Potential Examples

- Relational Trauma of Racism:* When we consider the relational trauma of racism, a key aspect of helping individuals and communities build resilience is advocating for and supporting the removal of sources of racial stress and the building of responsive relationships. One example of what this can look like is the work of the Kansas Black Farmers Association in Nicodemus, Kansas. Notably, Nicodemus, KS, is the only remaining western town established by African Americans during the Reconstruction period following the Civil War. Founded in 1999, the Kansas Black Farmers Association emerged out of the community's efforts to come together to remove sources of discrimination that affected minority farmers financially, physically, and emotionally. Today, the KBFA continues this work by preserving the legacy of minority farmers in Kansas, advocating for land ownership among minority farmers, and educating children about agriculture and all that agriculture touches in our lives. For instance, every summer the KBFA hosts an agriculture camp in partnership with the Kansas State University College of Agriculture. The camp brings underrepresented and low-income youth to Kansas for five days—a two-day pre-college experience on the K-State campus and three days of experiential learning in Nicodemus where attendees learn firsthand about farming, horseback riding, fishing, hiking, and more. These preservation and education efforts work to, first, reduce long-term stress by promoting futures of economic stability for Black persons and, second, build responsive relationships among adults and children to raise up new generations of farmers. Both the reduction of long-term stress and the building of responsive relationships are critical to building resilience in response to the relational trauma of racism. The KBFA's work also helps those outside the Black community recognize the barriers to farming and agricultural employment caused by racial discrimination, while also offering ways to tear down those barriers and reduce experiences of relational trauma that our Black and minority neighbors experience in our communities. In this way, the work of KBFA demonstrates how we can address the trauma of racism by bringing discrimination into the light—being honest about what racism is and the harm it has done—while also modeling good, healing work that others can come alongside and support.
- Relational Trauma in Families:* Relational trauma in families can be very difficult to identify. Not only does it occur within a smaller unit, but our families are also our lifeline to the world, the group that prepares us to go into the world, and the people we return to at the end of each day. To admit that one or more family relationships have done harm to us threatens to unravel the whole family. Oftentimes, it may be safer to hide the trauma than to risk losing the perceived safety of the family unit. Yet hiding trauma does not make it go away. In fact, keeping trauma a secret actually impairs our ability to build resilience. If you are a person who has experienced relational trauma in your family—you are a beloved child of God and you are not alone. Whether you have experienced the relational trauma or you are the friend, family member, or neighbor of someone who has, we can practice resilient love with ourselves and our neighbors by looking for ways to reduce stress and build responsive relationships for those who are addressing relational trauma in their lives. To reduce stress, ask if there are any basic needs you could help with like bringing over a meal, mowing their lawn, or even offering to babysit so they don't have to worry about childcare during their therapy sessions. Building responsive relationships is as simple as showing up and being present. Believe the person when they tell you stories of their trauma. Reinforce that they are a child of God, and they are not alone. Or if they don't want to talk about their trauma, that's ok too. The simple offering of a kind and loving human presence in the midst of crisis makes a world of difference in promoting resilience.

6. As you become more and more aware of relational wounds and trauma, whether in your own life or in your surrounding community, honestly naming and addressing those traumas may feel daunting and overwhelming. Yet we can only build resilience by bringing them into the light. When faced with the choice to hide or uncover relational trauma and the harm that it causes, remember that the Light of Christ does not condemn. When we believe in Christ as the revelation of God's love, Christ's Light shines into the relational trauma that surrounds us and guides us toward practicing God's resilient love together.



Benediction

Go forth today in the Good News that you are a beloved child of God—and your neighbor is, too! May that Good News light our way into beautiful, healthy relationships with family, friends, and neighbors local and global.

Amen.

For a printable bulletin insert - [click here](#)

Sermon Guide

Lent 5





Call to Worship

Welcome, you who have endured the devastation of fire, wind, or flood.

Jesus Christ, draw near to us.

Welcome, you who worry that the next drought, the next tornado, the next storm will be your undoing.

Jesus Christ, draw near to us.

Welcome, you who tend the soil day in and day out and you who are just beginning to learn how to be good stewards of creation.

Jesus Christ, draw near to us.

As we continue in this season of Lent, may God comfort us, guide us, and draw near to us as we name the trauma of environmental insecurity and practice resilient love together.

Jesus Christ, draw near to us as we draw near to you. Amen.



Hymn Selections:

- **“How Can We Name a Love”**
United Methodist Hymnal #111
- **“I Sing the Almighty Power of God”**
United Methodist Hymnal #152
- **“God of the Sparrow God of the Whale”**
United Methodist Hymnal #122



Children's Sermon

MATERIALS: Flowerpot with 2 colors of pom-poms inside, and [Color 2] glued to the outside; a separate small container

Place the flowerpot where the children can see the pot and the pom-poms inside it. Have the smaller container close at hand.

Say: Good morning! We have our flowerpot here again today. Do you notice anything different? (*Wait for answers.*) Yes! We have a new color of pom-poms on the outside of our flowerpot! Every week, as we clean out a color of pom-poms that represents traumas that people in our community experience, we are adding them to the outside of our flowerpot. Building strength during difficult experiences does not mean that those difficult experiences go away—it means that God, friends, family, and neighbors help us find ways to keep growing and creating beautiful things anyway. Like how our flowerpot keeps getting more and more beautiful the more we clean out of it! Today, we are going to clean out the [Color 3] pom-poms, which represent the traumas of environmental insecurity. When we think of really, really hard things related to our environment, we might think of a tornado, a really scary storm with really high winds or heavy hail, or a drought that leaves us without rain for a really long time. But we can also think about how hotter summers and less rain mean that some of our communities don't have enough water to drink or that some farmers can't grow their crops the way they used to. When that happens, farmers often have to change what they grow, which can cost a lot of money and cause a lot of stress.

These kinds of difficulties related to the weather or the soil can feel really big and out of our control, which only makes the challenges worse. In our scripture today, Jesus talks with some people who also feel like life is out of control and they don't know what to do or if they can do anything at all. In response, Jesus tells a story about a landowner who wants to cut down a tree that isn't producing any fruit. In response, one of the farmers who works his land says to give him one year to take care of the tree, to water it and take care of the soil around it and see if that helps the tree produce fruit. In this story, Jesus teaches us that when things feel so big that they are out of our control, our job is to focus on what we *can* do to help those who are immediately around us, whether it's a plot of soil, our family, or our community.

So, let's think. What are things we could do to help our families or communities be prepared for a natural disaster like a tornado or a flood? (*Wait for answers. For every idea that is a way the children/church can help their community get ready for a natural disaster, place one of the [Color 3] pom-poms in the small container.*) These are great ideas. We might also think about creating an emergency plan for our church or our families if we don't already have one (*Place a [Color 3] pom-pom in the small container.*) Now, what are things that we could do that help take care of the Earth around us? (*For every idea that is a way the children/church can help take care of the Earth, place one of the [Color 3] pom-poms in the small container.*) Excellent! We could also pick up trash lying on the ground (*place a [Color 3] pom-pom in the small container*), plant some edible flowers or cabbages in our garden (*place a [Color 3] pom-pom in the small container*), or learn ways to watch how much water we use to do our part to make sure everyone has access to water during a drought (*place the final [Color 3] pom-pom in the small container*). These are all excellent ways to help us build resilience by taking charge of what we can do to help our neighborhoods and community when we face environmental insecurity.

You have done an excellent job helping me clean out the [Color 3] pom-poms! We just have one color left, which we'll clean out next week. Thank you so much for your help! Let's pray:

God, you created the whole world and asked us to help take care of it. It is scary when water runs dry or natural disasters come. We know you are with us even when things are scary. Help us do what we can now to love ourselves and our neighbors well when the environment causes challenges to come our way. Amen.

NOTE: *Before the next week, use a hot glue gun to glue the [Color 3] pom-poms to the outside of the flowerpot. You can do it randomly, in a pattern, all on one side or the other—however you want! The goal is to demonstrate to the children over the next several weeks that we do not ever forget trauma, but as we build resilience, trauma no longer keeps us from growing inside and in our relationships with others.*



Scripture • Luke 13:1-9

At that very time there were some present who told him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. He asked them, “Do you think that because these Galileans suffered in this way they were worse sinners than all other Galileans? No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish as they did. Or those eighteen who were killed when the tower of Siloam fell on them—do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others living in Jerusalem? No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish just as they did.”

Then he told this parable: “A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came looking for fruit on it and found none. So he said to the gardener, ‘See here! For three years I have come looking for fruit on this fig tree, and still I find none. Cut it down! Why should it be wasting the soil?’ He replied, ‘Sir, let it alone for one more year, until I dig around it and put manure on it. If it bears fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.’”



Exegesis

Though seemingly disconnected, the conversation between Jesus and the newcomers in verses 1-6a and the parable of the fig tree in verses 6b-9 connect around the theme of conversion. The opening scene of Luke 13 introduces an urgency to repent from sin since one never knows when tragedy might strike. In the parable, the vineyard owner repents of his plan to cut down the fig tree after the winegrower (translated as gardener in the NRSV) intercedes on behalf of the fig tree. While the mentions of conversion seem quite different between these two scenes, note how conversion is an exercise of control in both of these episodes.

In the opening encounter with Jesus, some newcomers come reporting the terrible news of a massacre in the holy precinct of the Temple that resulted in the mixing of human blood with animal blood that had been offered as a sacrifice. This likely means that the massacre occurred during actual offering of sacrifices, perhaps as a response to unrest in Jerusalem during the feast of Passover. The trauma of this episode is twofold, then, encompassing both the violent loss of life and the contamination of the Temple sacrifices. Lest the crowd attempt to make sense of these events as a consequence of sin, Jesus directly responds to this misapprehension. No, Jesus says, these Galileans did not somehow deserve such a tragic death because they were worse sinners than anyone else. The proper response to such a tragedy, then, is not to blame but to repent. Jesus then references eighteen people who were killed when the tower of Siloam fell on them. The pool of Siloam in Jerusalem was located at the end of a canal built by King Hezekiah on the southeast side of Jerusalem. During New Testament times, it was surrounded by a portico with colonnades built by Herod the Great. The tower that fell was likely among these colonnades, though we have no separate historical record of this event. Nevertheless, Jesus again uses this unexpected event to emphasize how tragedy and death can come at any time. Rather than focusing on blaming the victims, Jesus calls his listeners to repent, or they too will be unprepared for death.

A major theme in the Gospel of Luke, the Lukan understanding of conversion and repentance has received a great deal of attention among New Testament scholars. Conversion in Luke encompasses four distinct but interrelated facets. The first facet of repentance is simply becoming aware of a person's separation from God, which leads to the second facet, in which a person decides to renew their relationship with God, a decision facilitated by the Good News of Christ. The third facet of repentance is taking the decisive step to renew one's relationship with God in light of the individual's life and eventual death. Importantly, this third facet encompasses both decisive action and distinct motive for that action. The person actively repents not because of the imminence of the last judgment but because of their own recognition that they are currently separated from God and the recognition that they do not want to die without renewing relationship with God. The fourth facet of conversion is that it is a daily requirement of being in solidarity with others—conversion is not an individual's secret decision, but a constant, outward action in relationship to the world around them.

While the opening episode in this text certainly draws on the first three facets of Lukan conversion, the parable in verses 6b-9 provides an example of the fourth facet. The setting of the parable appears to be a type of plantation that one can still encounter around the Mediterranean Sea in which fig trees are grown in the same field as grapevines. In this story, the vineyard owner plants a fig tree and expects it to produce fruit within three years, and it does not. He goes to his winegrower and tells him to cut the tree down because the tree is not doing what it is supposed to do. Not only does it not produce fruit, but it also takes nutrients out of the soil that other plants could use if the tree is not going to be productive. From an agricultural perspective, the vineyard owner's desires are completely justified. In verse 8, though, the parable takes a surprising turn when the winegrower intercedes on behalf of the fig tree. Not only does the winegrower entreat the owner to wait one more year, but he also commits to doing all he can to save the fig tree. The winegrower professes a willingness to collaborate with the fig tree, to be in solidarity with it and give it food and drink, giving the fig tree every possibility of thriving. Thus, the winegrower demonstrates conversion that expresses renewed relationship with God through active hope and solidarity with and for the flourishing of the world around him.

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As we link these two episodes together, we see Jesus teaching on repentance and conversion in a way that grounds Christians in the present. Christians do not escape either unexpected tragedy or more mundane difficulties. Rather than attempting to ignore or remove themselves from world, Christians are called to respond to the ebbs and flows of life with renewed relationship with God, a rejection of any attempts to blame others for tragedies that befall them, and a commitment to the flourishing of their neighbors and neighborhoods.



Sermon Notes

INTRODUCTION

As we enter into today's passage, we see Jesus responding to something that should feel quite familiar to us today. As Jesus is teaching the crowd, some newcomers speak up and deliver a Breaking News Update. A massacre occurred at the Temple while the priests were offering animal sacrifices, likely during the feast of Passover, and several Galileans were killed. In addition, the blood of the Galileans was intermingled with the blood of the animal sacrifices. This unprecedented event would have shocked those gathered on several levels, both because of the violent deaths of those present and the tainting of the holy Temple sacrifices. This announcement sets up a new teaching on the role of repentance as a response to unexpected, tragic events. We, too, receive these kinds of news updates on our phones, our TVs, our social media feeds, and it can be difficult to know how to respond to events so outside of our control. Thus, as we draw close to Christ today, we explore how this passage can help us learn to name the trauma of environmental insecurity and build resilience in response to events so outside of our control, beginning with shifting from the shame of feeling powerless to the resilient love of acting in the power we do have.

SERMON NOTES

1. After receiving the news of the massacre at the Temple, Jesus steps in and preemptively addresses a common coping mechanism in response to tragic events—blaming the victims. In this instance, Jesus names what others might not be willing to say out loud—did these Galileans sin more than the average person and therefore deserved to die such a violent, senseless death? No, Jesus says, “but unless you repent, you will all perish as they did.” Then Jesus brings up another recent tragedy, the eighteen persons who died when a tower at the pool of Siloam in Jerusalem collapsed. Again, Jesus enjoins the crowd that these were not worse sinners, calling them to repent lest they die as those eighteen did. It is tempting to hear Jesus' words and assume that repentance might somehow save those in the crowd, and us today, from experiencing unexpected tragedy. But if we pay close attention to Jesus' words, that interpretation only leads to further blaming of those who are harmed or killed by such tragic events. When we take a deep breath, draw close, and listen, Jesus is actually saying if you do not repent, you too will die without renewing your relationship with God.
2. In the Gospel of Luke, repentance encompasses a journey that begins with recognizing the person's separation from God, followed by deciding to renew relationship with God and acting on that decision in light of the unknowns of life and death. Finally, Luke's understanding of repentance includes the daily requirement of being in solidarity with others, that is, choosing to be in relationship with and responsive to the needs of our neighbors, whether they live next door, across town, or around the world. Conversion is not only a person's internal decision, but a constant, outward action in relationship to the world around them. Thus, faced with the news of senseless, tragic death as the result of events outside of anyone's control, Jesus offers the crowd a lifeline by returning some control to them in the form of repentance. When we encounter events like natural disasters or harmful weather patterns, we are at the mercy of forces that feel far beyond what we can control. We often call these acts of God, not because we necessarily think God inflicts tornados, hurricanes, flooding,

or droughts on us, but because they are so outside of what we as humans can control. The level of instability, financial hardship, anxiety about the future, and worry for the present these events and patterns present can cause both event-specific and chronic stress characteristic of trauma. Wrapped up in this trauma is the shame of powerlessness or lacking control. In our culture, much of our worth is defined by being in control, by having the power to direct our lives toward what we need and want. When our power is seemingly taken away by larger forces, we can end up feeling hopeless and ashamed. And when we feel hopeless and ashamed, our capacity to act in a loving and kind way towards ourselves and our neighbors is greatly diminished.

3. Thus, when Jesus tells the shocked and worried crowd to repent, he is not feeding their anxiety. He is giving them a lifeline that empowers them to act in the midst of unprecedented and chaotic events. By pointing them toward repentance, Jesus guides them—and us—toward a daily practice of renewal and connection with God and one another. This kind of repentance is illustrated in the parable he tells beginning at the end of verse 6. Note how Jesus moves from the chaotic events of the massacre and the fall of the tower of Siloam to the agricultural imagery of a fig tree in a vineyard that is not producing fruit. These episodes can feel very disjointed until we recognize that all of these images are examples of forces that are outside of our control. Jesus' audience could no more influence Pilate's soldiers to stop their slaughter than they could command that a tree bear fruit that had not produced so much as one fig in three years. Yet, in the interaction between the vineyard owner and the winegrower (translated in the NRSV as gardener), Jesus illustrates how repentance empowers us when we face circumstances that seem to remove our power.

4. To set the stage, it was quite common at that time for fig trees to be planted in the midst of a vineyard. The fig tree, like the grapevines, was not merely ornamental. The vineyard owner would have depended on all the plants in his vineyard to produce fruit to provide for the living of his family and those in his employ. Thus, he is certainly within his rights to request that the fig tree be cut down if it was not going to produce fruit, because he could not afford for the tree to steal nutrients from plants that were producing. Up to that point in the parable, nothing seems amiss with the vineyard owner's behavior or request. The shocking part comes when the winegrower intercedes on behalf of the fig tree. The winegrower implores the owner to give the tree one more year of life to see if it will produce *and then* commits to helping the fig tree by tending the soil around it, effectively ensuring that the tree gets enough water and food to have the best chance at flourishing. The winegrower shows solidarity with the fig tree. He promises to show love to that small piece of soil in the hopes that it will help the tree produce, rather than allowing the tree to be cut down before being given every opportunity to thrive.

5. As we listen to Jesus' story, we are invited to imagine what being the winegrower might look like today. When faced with forces and events outside of our control, one of the first ways we can practice resilient love, that love that brings forth life in the midst of trauma, is by acting in the power we *do* have as individuals and as a community. We cannot stop natural disasters from happening, but we *can* put together a plastic tub with 3 days' worth of food, water, a first aid kit, and other necessities. We can also make an emergency plan with our families, our neighborhood, and even our church that helps everyone know what to do and who to check on first in their own families and then in the community. This kind of preparation keeps us grounded in anticipation of and in response to unexpected weather events, which keeps us aware and present to the needs of others, as well.

6. We also do not have the power to stop harmful weather patterns, like extreme and prolonged heat and lower rainfall amounts that cause water shortages, impact what crops can be grown, and make keeping our homes at a healthy temperature a greater financial burden for everyone, especially low-income families and people with disabilities and chronic health conditions. What we *can* do is take a page out of the winegrower's book and tend our plot of soil. Literally. Soil health is critical for helping communities live through changing weather patterns for a variety of reasons. Healthy soil holds moisture when it rains, decreasing the likelihood of floods and making the land more resilient to natural disasters and extreme weather conditions. Healthy soil also improves water quality by filtering out pollutants and, when used to

grow food, increases the nutrition of the food. You don't have to be a master gardener to tend your plot of soil. Just look around where you live and think about what it would take to make the ground you live on healthier. Some basic steps for increasing soil health are composting, plant diversity, and continually having live plants or roots in your soil. First, adding compost to soil directly and immediately increases the health of the soil. And, if you compost at home, you also reduce food waste in landfills by returning those nutrients to the soil. Second, planting a variety of seasonally appropriate plants throughout the year improves the nutrients in the soil and benefits the microbes in the soil, thus increasing soil health. Finally, having plants in the soil year-round has numerous benefits, including improving nutrients in the soil, covering the soil to prevent wind or rain erosion, and providing food and habitat for pollinators.

7. These are small things you can do that benefit the soil you live on while also benefiting the whole community. We may not be able to prevent heavy rainfalls when they come, but if we each tend the soil where we live, we can help the soil absorb that rainfall and reduce flooding. We may not be able to reduce food waste across the country, but we can compost in our homes, our neighborhoods, or even our church to reduce food waste and help take care of our soil in the process. The results of these small acts of resilient love right where we live can ripple into our community, helping us all be more resilient in the face of events and weather patterns that can cause so much trauma in our lives. While we do not have the power to keep these things from happening, we can repent—literally, turn toward—love of God and love of neighbor to do what we can to help all of us flourish no matter what comes our way.



Benediction

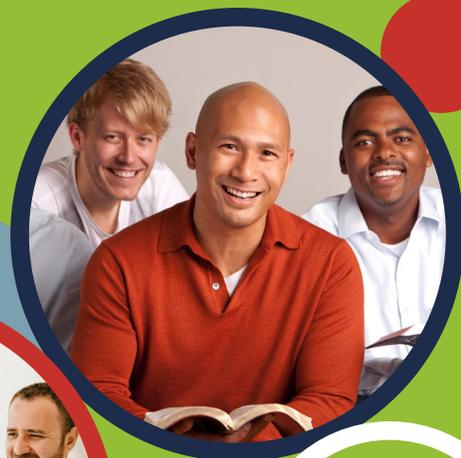
As you move through your week, whenever you start to feel like you are losing control, stop. Feel the soil beneath your feet, notice the trees and plants all around you, take a deep breath, and let God root you in what you can control: love of God and love of neighbor.

Amen.

For a printable bulletin insert - [click here](#)

Sermon Guide

Lent 6





Call to Worship

Welcome, you who have passionate opinions and enjoy a lively conversation.

Jesus Christ, draw near to us.

Welcome, you who wish to avoid conflict at all costs, even when saying nothing hurts you the most.

Jesus Christ, draw near to us.

Welcome, you who work for peace in your homes, workplaces, and neighborhoods, and you who struggle to know when to speak up and when to be silent.

Jesus Christ, draw near to us.

As we continue in this season of Lent, may God comfort us, guide us, and draw near to us as we name the trauma of communal divisiveness and practice resilient love together.

Jesus Christ, draw near to us as we draw near to you. Amen.



Hymn Selections:

- **“Hosanna, Loud Hosanna”**
United Methodist Hymnal #278
- **“Let There Be Peace on Earth”**
United Methodist Hymnal #431
- **“Help Us Accept Each Other”**
United Methodist Hymnal #560
- **“God of Grace and God of Glory”**
United Methodist Hymnal #577



Children's Sermon

MATERIALS: Flowerpot with 1 color of pom-poms inside, and [Color 3] glued to the outside; a separate small container

Place the flowerpot where the children can see the pot and the pom-poms inside it. Have the smaller container close at hand.

Say: Good morning! I have our flowerpot with us this morning—do you notice anything different? (*Wait for answers.*) That's right! The [Color 3] pom-poms are glued on the outside of the pot, and if you look inside, you'll notice we are almost done cleaning our pot out! That means we are almost ready to plant our flowers! Finally! You know, I was thinking this week, I think [Color 3] is the prettiest color ever, don't you? (*Wait for answers.*) Nope, all of you who disagree are just wrong. [Color 3] is the best color there is. I'm not sure we can be friends if you don't agree with me. (*Wait for responses.*)

Actually, I don't think that at all. You are welcome to like whatever color you want. But how did it make you feel when I said we couldn't be friends if you didn't like the same color as me? (*Wait for answers.*) It didn't feel good at all, did it? Well, today we are talking about the trauma of divisiveness. Can you say that word, "divisiveness"? (*Wait for them to say it.*) "Divisiveness" is a big word we use to indicate when someone has a lot of bad feelings toward someone they disagree with. It's okay for us to disagree with people, but when we act mean and unkind to someone because we disagree with them, that's divisiveness. For the last several weeks, we have been talking about trauma, which is a really, really hard experience that hurts for a very long time. Divisiveness causes hurt that lasts for a very long time when we are mean with our words or unkind with our bodies toward someone else. Divisiveness can also cause trauma when we choose not to help someone who needs help just because we disagree with them.

In today's Bible reading, Jesus is riding into Jerusalem surrounded by people who are so excited to see him. They are shouting with joy about all the blessings God has given them. They are excited that Jesus might be about to bring more of those blessings, to help make their lives better and to stop the people who were hurting them. As he rides through this joyful crowd, Jesus begins to cry. That's a strange thing to do when people are so happy to see you, isn't it? Jesus cries because he realizes that the people do not know how to make peace. They are happy that he is there, and they want him to help make their lives better, but Jesus knows that they do not know how to live in peace instead of the divisiveness that hurts them.

So today, to clean out the last of our pom-poms from the flowerpot, we are going to practice what it looks like to make peace instead of divisiveness. One of the best things we can do to make peace is to be curious. So, practice this with me: say, "Hmmm." (*As the children repeat, place a [Color 4] pom-pom in the small container.*) Good. "Hmmm" helps show that we are listening and curious about what someone else says. Another curious thing is to ask, "Why do you think that?" Can you say that for me? (*As the children repeat the question, place a [Color 4] pom-pom in the small container.*) Good. So, let's practice with a real-life example. What if I told you I don't like chocolate milk? You might disagree with me a lot about that, but what is the first thing you can say instead of "you're wrong"? (*Wait for answers.*) Good, we can say, "Hmmm" (*place a [Color 4] pom-pom in the small container as the kids repeat after you*) and then, "Why do you think that?" (*Place a [Color 4] pom-pom in the small container as the kids repeat after you.*) And then I might say, "oh what a great question! I don't like chocolate milk because I don't like many sweet things." By being curious, you now know something else about me—that I don't like sweet things. You wouldn't know that if you just told me I was wrong and walked away, would you? Now one other thing that we can do to make peace instead of divisiveness is to be kind and friendly when you disagree. One way to do that is to say, "I don't agree, but let's be friends." Can you say that with me? (*As they repeat after you, place a [Color 4] pom-pom in the small container.*) So, the three things we can say to build peace are: "Hmmm" (*have*

Continued on next page.

the kids repeat), “Why do you think that?” (have the kids repeat), and “I don’t agree, but let’s be friends.” (As the kids repeat, put the final [Color 4] pom-pom in the small container.)

You all did an excellent job helping me clean out the flowerpot today by practicing ways to make peace and build resilience instead of being unkind and divisive. I can’t wait to plant flowers with you in our flowerpot on Easter Sunday next week! Let’s pray:

God, help us to keep learning how to be good friends and neighbors, even when we disagree with one another. Your love is big enough for all of us. Help our love to be big enough for everyone we meet, too. Amen.

NOTE: Before the next week, use a hot glue gun to glue the [Color 4] pom-poms to the outside of the flowerpot. You can do it randomly, in a pattern, all on one side or the other—however you want! The goal is just to demonstrate to the children that we do not ever forget trauma, but as we build resilience, trauma no longer keeps us from growing inside and in our relationships with others.



Scripture • Luke 19:28-42

After Jesus had said this, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem. As he approached Bethphage and Bethany at the hill called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples, saying to them, “Go to the village ahead of you, and as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, which no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here. If anyone asks you, ‘Why are you untying it?’ say, ‘The Lord needs it.’”

Those who were sent ahead went and found it just as he had told them. As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them, “Why are you untying the colt?”

They replied, “The Lord needs it.”

They brought it to Jesus, threw their cloaks on the colt and put Jesus on it. As he went along, people spread their cloaks on the road.

When he came near the place where the road goes down the Mount of Olives, the whole crowd of disciples began joyfully to praise God in loud voices for all the miracles they had seen:

“Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!”

“Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!”

Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Jesus, “Teacher, rebuke your disciples!”

“I tell you,” he replied, “if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out.”

As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it and said, “If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace—but now it is hidden from your eyes.”



Exegesis

As we enter a text assigned to Palm Sunday and often entitled “The Triumphal Entry,” it is important to note that Luke’s version of this story is low on both palms and triumph. Where other accounts of the beginning of Jesus’ Passion Week emphasize the crowd’s understanding of Jesus as a Messiah who will save the nation of Israel, Luke focuses more on Jesus’ kingship. In the opening verses, Jesus demonstrates kingly authority by sending two disciples to requisition a colt for his use. During this time, military and political authorities would impound provisions or mounts from citizens for their own use. Thus, Jesus acts as a king even as he prophesies where the disciples will find the colt and what they will need to say to commandeer its use. In addition, until this point, Jesus has been depicted as traveling on foot. Placing Jesus on a mount indicates his royal role, an honor that Jesus does not refuse.

At the same time, there is also an ambiguous quality to Jesus’ kingship in this opening portion of the text. While riding on a colt indicates Jesus’ kingship, the colt is also a mark of humility. The colt would not have been the mount of Tiberius or Pilate but would have been used by a king with lesser power and significance. The Passion also hangs a pall over this episode. Only in Luke’s version of Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem do the people declare “Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!” Importantly, Luke locates this peace in heaven because the evils of oppression and discord still exist on earth, as demonstrated in Christ’s upcoming crucifixion.

Despite the ambiguity of the nature of Jesus’ kingship, Luke reinforces Jesus’ kingly authority by recounting Jesus’ encounter with the Pharisees in the crowd. Expressing their opposition to his kingship, the Pharisees call Jesus “Teacher” and implore him to silence his disciples. In essence, the Pharisees attempt to cut Jesus down to size and then ask him to make his disciples stop declaring his kingship. However, Jesus’ response turns the silencing rebuke toward the Pharisees who would reject his kingship rather than his disciples. In Luke’s Gospel, stones symbolize death and silence. Hence, by telling the Pharisees that if the disciples are quiet, then the stones will cry out, Jesus communicates that the truth of his kingship cannot be deflected or shut down.

As we witness Jesus riding through the crowd praising God and declaring Jesus’ kingship, we must then ask the question, what kind of king is Jesus? First, Jesus’ kingship comes from God. Note that the crowd gives God praise for Jesus’ works. God permits and empowers Jesus’ works and deeds to be effective. Second, as king, Jesus brings peace. Only in Luke’s Gospel do the people proclaim Jesus’ work of peace, which harkens back to Luke 2:14 when the multitude of angels announce Christ’s birth and proclaim peace on earth to the shepherds. Yet unlike Roman peace that comes at the end of a sword, Jesus offers God’s peace to the world even as the world rejects it. When Jesus looks upon Jerusalem and weeps—literally, wails—he mourns that the people did not recognize their need for the peace that only comes by following the way of Jesus.

Further, the peace of King Jesus is not just a peace of laying down weapons and ending violence. Certainly, this is underscored by the ways that Luke both identifies Jesus as a king yet resists any triumphal military performance on Jesus’ part, real or metaphorical. Verses 41-42 might be read as a king arriving outside a city, waiting to see if the city will surrender before using force to take siege of it. And yet, Jesus demands surrender to the Messiah who brings peace as a baby, a traveling teacher, and ultimately a crucified king. This kind of peace, from the Greek *eirene*, indicates harmony, security, and prosperity. Jesus brings a peace of harmony with God and one another, a peace that will certainly lay siege to people’s lives, but never violently or coercively. Nor is this peace limited in heaven. God’s peace might not be recognized by the Holy City, but as God’s peace reigns in heaven, so are Christ’s followers called to live and invite others to live God’s peace here on earth.



Sermon Notes

INTRODUCTION

Throughout this season of Lent, we have encountered Jesus in a multitude of situations. Whether teaching a crowd or a small group of disciples, whether tested in the wilderness or driving out animals, each of these events have led us to this week, to Holy Week. Throughout the Gospels, time seems to stretch out during this week leading up to Jesus' crucifixion. Up to this point, we see Jesus going from place to place, healing to healing, teaching to teaching. We have no real sense of how much time has passed in some cases, but we get a sense of the energy and at times urgency that propels Jesus' ministry forward. And then we come to this week, and time slows down, as if each Gospel writer wants to make sure we do not miss any of the details of the week of Jesus' Passion. Hence, today we enter into the first episode of Holy Week, Jesus' entry into Jerusalem. Where other Gospels depict this as a triumphant entry with the crowds waving palm branches and shouting "Hosanna!" Luke gives us a bit of a different account. The crowds are still there, and no doubt they were quite loud. But Luke wants us to focus not on triumph but kingship, not on momentary victory but on Jesus as the bringer of everlasting peace. As we draw close to Jesus as the Bringer of Peace, we begin to recognize the trauma that comes from using our differences to promote divisiveness. As we name this trauma, Jesus invites us to move from the narrative that humility is shameful toward Jesus' way of humility that brings peace through resilient love, that love that brings forth life in the midst of trauma.

SERMON NOTES

1. The beginning of our passage finds Jesus instructing two of his disciples to go find a colt for him to ride into Jerusalem. Jesus does not just ask them to find any colt but tells them exactly where they will find it and what to say to convince the owner to let them have use of the colt. Jesus acts as a king would during his time by requisitioning the use of a mount from one of the citizens. In addition, up to this point in Luke, we have seen Jesus travel by foot. By riding on a mount, Jesus further signals his royal status and role. Yet, a colt would not have been considered a proper mount for a ruler of high consequence. Rather, the colt is a mark of humility, the mount of a king with lesser power. Already, Jesus demonstrates a kingship marked by humility.
2. As the people praise God and declare Christ's kingship, some Pharisees voice their opposition to Jesus' kingship, calling him "Teacher" instead of "King." They ask Jesus to rebuke or censure his disciples, in effect asking Jesus to silence their proclamation that Jesus is King. Jesus responds with a rebuke of his own for the Pharisees, effectively silencing them by declaring that if the crowd did not declare his kingship, the stones would cry out. In the Gospel of Luke, stones symbolize silence and death. The truth that Jesus is King is so fundamental to every part of creation that even the most inert of objects in creation must testify to it if those who are living do not! If such a statement were made by any other king, it might be taken as a statement riddled with pride. Yet Jesus does not shame the Pharisees or puff himself up. He simply states the truth and continues on his way.
3. As Jesus approaches Jerusalem, he begins to weep, or, more accurate to the Greek, he wails. As Jesus enters the city that will put him to death in a few days' time, his immediate response is not action, but mourning. Verse 42 points to the source of his grief, namely that the people did not recognize what made for peace. In other words, they did not accept the peace that God brings through Jesus. If we return to verse 38, the people proclaim Jesus' work of peace, which harkens back to Luke 2:14 when the multitude of angels announce Christ's birth and proclaim peace on earth to the shepherds. Yet unlike Roman peace that comes at the end of a sword, Jesus offers God's peace to the world even as the world rejects it. As Jesus approaches Jerusalem on his royal mount, he is similar to a king waiting just outside the city to see if the city will surrender before entering and laying siege. The way of peace that Jesus brings also demands surrender, surrender to a Messiah who brings peace as a baby, a traveling teacher, and a crucified king.

4. Surrendering to Jesus' peace is not merely putting down arms and ceasing violent conflict. The Greek *eirene*, translated throughout this passage as "peace," indicates harmony, security, and prosperity. Peace, then, is not a mere lack of conflict but the ability to live in harmony and togetherness with God and with the neighbors all around us across our many differences. Such a peace lays siege on the lives of those who surrender to it, but not coercively or forcefully. Jesus' way of peace brings the peace of heaven down to earth, inviting all Christ followers to actively live into God's peace in this world as it is in heaven. Jesus mourns because he demonstrated how to make peace in a discordant world, and the people did not recognize or receive his invitation.

5. As we come alongside Christ on the road to Jerusalem, what would Christ say if he turned to look at you, to look at us? Have we chosen the way of peace or the way of division that leads to destruction? We are certainly surrounded by a lack of harmony. Whether divided by political, spiritual, economic, or cultural differences, society pits us against one another, replacing dialogue with argument and humble listening with prideful monologue. While an argument over Sunday lunch or an impassioned Facebook post may not seem to do a great deal of harm, divisiveness in our community and the wider culture—whether in-person or online—results in trauma. Divisiveness breeds distrust, isolation, uncertainty, and feelings of instability. Over time, the stress of divisiveness produces trauma as persons experience prolonged emotional disturbance that have a lasting impact on their overall wellbeing. In addition, the trauma of divisiveness does not only impact individuals; it has social effects, as well. A community characterized by divisiveness has difficulty responding to crises with resilience because the bonds of trust and the impulse to care for one another's wellbeing have eroded. Whether in response to a sudden crisis or a long-term problem in need of solutions, divisive communities, or even families, have difficulty communicating needs and acting on potential solutions because of distrust and fear, which can impact the wellbeing of *everyone*, including those who are the most directly impacted by the problem.

6. In fact, so many of the traumas we have discussed throughout this series are heightened by divisiveness. If we view people living in poverty as the enemy, we are not invested in promoting long-term solutions for their wellbeing. If we shame people suffering from relational wounds instead of listening and believing them, we only reinforce the message that they do not deserve to be loved for who they are. If we refuse to talk to our neighbors because of the political signs in their yard or where they go on Sunday mornings, we will not know who to help or who will help us if a natural disaster strikes. If we are suspicious of those who do not look or think like us, we no longer value their lives and the good work they bring to the world. This Jesus knows all too well as he approaches the city that will put him to death. As Jesus weeps during his approach to Jerusalem, he mourns for the pain and suffering the people inflict on one another, including the pain they will inflict on him, by choosing to live in discord instead of choosing the divine peace that Jesus offers. As we look at our own lives today, what does it look like to choose God's way of peace?

7. In today's passage, Jesus shows us that the beginning of peace is humility. Jesus claims his role as king, but not in the way of the powerful rulers of his day. Jesus rides a colt instead of a great steed. He does not deride the Pharisees for their opposition, but simply holds to the truth of his kingship. In a culture where humility is shameful, Jesus shows us that humility is peaceful. Our society shames humility as a sign of weakness. Jesus demonstrates humility as understanding our proper place before God and neighbor without taking power away from or using power against another. The humble person does not need to insult or criticize another in order to claim their identity. Thus, humility is the foundation of peace because it enables us to live in harmony with one another.

8. Peace built on humility realizes that people living in poverty are beloved children of God and seeks to love them as such. Peace built on humility notices the pain of those experiencing relational wounds and responds with compassion and care. Peace built on humility embraces the differences among the people in our community, recognizing that difference does not have to be a barrier to relationship. Peace built on humility knows that no one person can know everything, and thus approaches the world with an attitude of learning instead of silencing what you don't understand. Peace built on humility receives the challenge of dialoguing across differences in perspective and experience as critical to growing trust and promoting the wellbeing of the whole community. When we practice peace built on humility, we practice God's resilient love, building the strength we need as individuals and as a community to face challenges and traumas together.



Benediction

As we begin our Holy Week journey, may you go forth in Christ's humility and peace as messengers of curiosity and healing in a world riddled with division and distrust.

Amen.

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A Service of Tenebrae

Good Friday



The Service of Tenebrae, meaning “shadows,” invites participants to enter into and meditate on the story of Christ’s Passion. The main portion of the service includes several readings, in this case seven, that recount the events of Christ’s crucifixion. The tone of the service is solemn and silent, which should be reflected both in the liturgical leadership and in the arrangement of the space.

In preparation for extinguishing a candle after each reading and lament, arrange seven candles either on a candelabra stand at the center of the chancel or on the altar. Light the candles before the beginning of the service. Whether using a candelabra or placing the candles on the altar, the altar should be arranged in a sparse manner reflective of the somber tone of Good Friday. You are encouraged to keep the lights low throughout the service so that the extinguishing of each candle has a marked impact on the lighting in the space. After the final candle is extinguished, lower the lights as much as possible while still allowing for safe participation of all congregants during the remainder of the service.

For the readings, it is recommended that you select one person to read the Scripture passages and one person to read the laments. Feel free to allow plenty of time and space for prayer and contemplation between each reading.



Call to Worship

As we journey with Christ toward Calvary,

Jesus Christ, draw near to us.

As we enter the shadow of the cross,

Jesus Christ, draw near to us.

As we witness the Messiah’s violent death,

Jesus Christ, draw near to us.

As we lament the violence that continues in our communities today,

Jesus Christ, draw near to us.

Draw near to us, Jesus, and help us not look away from the trauma and suffering produced and perpetuated by violence, whether on the cross, down the street, or around the world.

Jesus Christ, draw near to us as we draw near to you in the hour of your death.

Amen.

HYMN

What Wondrous Love Is This, vs. 1-2

United Methodist Hymnal #292

OPENING PRAYER

God of love, who sent Jesus to show us the way back to your love, be with us now as we come near the cross. In our remembering, may we not forget that Jesus suffers alongside those who suffer. In our lamenting, help us remember that we are not alone in our pain. In our silence, teach us how to love those who experience the trauma of violence as you love them.

Amen.

THE PASSION OF JESUS CHRIST

THE FIRST READING

The Crowd Chooses Barrabas: Matthew 27:11-14, 20-26

As we witness Jesus, an innocent man, sentenced to death by the crowd, we lament the death sentence our neighbors both local and global face every day due to lack of food, clean water, basic health care, and safe neighborhoods.

Lord, have mercy. Christ, have mercy. Lord, have mercy.

Extinguish the first candle.

THE SECOND READING

The Soldiers Mock Jesus: Matthew 27:27-31

As we witness soldiers mocking and torturing Jesus simply for being who he is, we lament the bullying and torment that occurs in schools, workplaces, online spaces, and homes that make our neighbors feel unsafe being who they are.

Lord, have mercy. Christ, have mercy. Lord, have mercy.

Extinguish the second candle.

THE THIRD READING

Jesus Crucified among Criminals: Luke 23:32-34

As we witness Jesus on the cross, hanging between two criminals and offering forgiveness to those who crucified him, we lament those times that we look away as violence breeds more violence in our communities, choosing distance instead of engagement, neglect instead of peace.

Lord, have mercy. Christ, have mercy. Lord, have mercy.

HYMN

Were You There, vs. 1-2

United Methodist Hymnal #288

Extinguish the third candle.

THE FOURTH READING

Jesus Cares for His Mother: John 19:25-27

As we witness Jesus tend to his mother from the cross, we lift up a cry of lament for those parents around the world for whom violence has stolen their children and their families, leaving them alone in their grief and suffering.

Lord, have mercy. Christ, have mercy. Lord, have mercy.

Extinguish the fourth candle.

THE FIFTH READING

Jesus Cries to God: Mark 15:29-34

As we witness Jesus' cry to God as he nears death, we lament that so many in our community and our world suffer and die alone each year, whether due to physical violence, illness, or family estrangement.

Lord, have mercy. Christ, have mercy. Lord, have mercy.

HYMN

Were You There, vs. 3-4

United Methodist Hymnal #288

Extinguish the fifth candle.

THE SIXTH READING

Jesus Thirsts: John 19:28-29

As we witness Jesus, thirsty and offered sour wine to drink, we lament the neglected cries of those in need of food, water, clothing, and shelter who resort to meeting their needs through violence because they are offered no other way.

Lord, have mercy. Christ, have mercy. Lord, have mercy.

Extinguish the sixth candle.

THE SEVENTH READING

Jesus Breathes His Last: John 19:30; Mark 15:37-39

As we witness Jesus breathe his last breath, we lament that we all too readily accept the death of some as a payment for the peace of others.

Lord, have mercy. Christ, have mercy. Lord, have mercy.

HYMN

Were You There, vs. 5

United Methodist Hymnal #288

Extinguish the seventh candle.

Silence.

DISMISSAL

God is our refuge and our strength, a present help in times of trouble. As we wait with God and one another by the tomb, may our waiting produce hope that we carry to places where hope seems lost and forgotten.

Amen.

Depart in silence.

Sermon Guide

Easter





Call to Worship

Welcome, you who have found ways to love in the midst of trauma.

Jesus Christ, draw near to us.

Welcome, you who endure trauma and struggle to do more than put one foot in front of the other.

Jesus Christ, draw near to us.

Welcome, you who come alongside the suffering and journey with them toward resilience and life.

Jesus Christ, draw near to us.

As we enter the empty tomb of Easter, may God guide us into resurrection life as we practice resilient love together.

Jesus Christ, draw near to us as we draw near to you. Alleluia! Amen.



Hymn Selections:

- **“Christ the Lord Is Risen Today”**
United Methodist Hymnal #302
- **“He Lives”**
United Methodist Hymnal #311
- **“Christ Is Alive”**
United Methodist Hymnal #318
- **“Because He Lives”**
United Methodist Hymnal #364



Children's Sermon

MATERIALS: Flowerpot filled partway with soil, and the [Color 4] pom-poms glued to the outside; a small trowel or scoop; one or two flowers to plant in the pot, such as petunias

Place the flowerpot where the children can see the pot and the soil inside it. Have the flower(s) and trowel/scoop close at hand.

Say: Good morning and Happy Easter! Look at our flowerpot! It's all dressed up for Easter too! All of our pom-poms have been cleaned out of the flowerpot, and instead of keeping us from planting our flowers, now the pom-poms decorate the outside of our flowerpot. That is a lot like what happens when we build resilience in response to trauma. The pom-poms represented different kinds of really hard experiences that hurt us for a really long time. Resilience is the strength we build as we go through those hard things. When trauma fills us up with hurt, resilience helps us clean the hurt out so that we can keep loving and living life well. But that doesn't mean the trauma or the hurt disappear.

Today is Easter Sunday, which means we are celebrating the resurrection of Jesus, the fact that Jesus came back to life after dying on the cross. As wonderful as the resurrection is, we never forget all the pain and hurt Jesus experienced when he died on the cross. The resurrection doesn't erase the cross—the resurrection shows us that God's love is bigger than any hurt or trauma we might experience, even a violent death like Jesus'. God is a God of resilience. Any time we build strength during hard things, we are not alone—God is with us, and God's love helps us. That also means that God asks us to help one another when we are struggling. None of us can be resilient all by ourselves—we need God, and we need each other.

(Take the trowel/scoop and begin making a hole for the flower(s) as you say:) The last few weeks, you have helped me, and we have helped each other think of ways that we could build resilience while we emptied out this flowerpot. We talked about how we could help people who do not have much money build resilience by helping them not feel stress about having enough food, clothing, or medicine for their family. We talked about how we could help people who have been hurt by others and don't feel like they deserve love by showing them that God loves them, and we do too. We talked about how hard it is to not have control over the weather or our environment, but that we could do small things to take care of the Earth and be ready for a natural disaster. Last week, we practiced how to make peace when we disagree. All of these are ways that we practice God's resilient love together. And when we practice resilient love, we make room for beautiful things to grow all around us and inside of us. *(Plant the flower(s) in the flowerpot.)*

What beautiful flowers we finally got to plant today! I hope every time you see this pot, or you take time to notice some flowers, you remember that God's love is big enough to help us get through anything, and with God's love, we can get through hard things together. Let's pray:

God, thank you for loving us with a love so big. Show us how to love each other with your enormous love so we can grow strong together as we face hard things. Amen.



Scripture • Luke 24:1-12

On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, the women took the spices they had prepared and went to the tomb. They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. While they were wondering about this, suddenly two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning stood beside them. In their fright the women bowed down with their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, “Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here; he has risen! Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee: ‘The Son of Man must be delivered over to the hands of sinners, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.’” Then they remembered his words.

When they came back from the tomb, they told all these things to the Eleven and to all the others. It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the others with them who told this to the apostles. But they did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense. Peter, however, got up and ran to the tomb. Bending over, he saw the strips of linen lying by themselves, and he went away, wondering to himself what had happened.



Exegesis

The Lukan account of the resurrection opens with the return to activity after the narrative slowed to a halt upon Jesus' death and burial in Luke 23. As Jesus' death coincided with preparations for the Sabbath, there was no time to prepare the body for burial beyond wrapping it in cloths and going home to prepare the spices and ointments to be used on the body after the end of the Sabbath. Thus, at the earliest possible moment, the women go to work again, shifting the narrative from silence and rest to action once more. Yet when they arrive, they are doubly surprised. Where they likely expected the stone at the entrance of the tomb to be in place, it was rolled away, and where they expected to find a body, there was none. Their attempts to tend the body of the man they followed, revered, and loved are once again thwarted.

Where the NRSV says “were wondering” about these surprising discoveries, the Greek *aporeo* might better be translated as “perplexed” or “to be at a loss.” Luke uses *aporeo* to indicate a circumstance wherein God's plan is perceived but not yet evident. Standing in the empty tomb, the women witness the fulfillment of God's plan, but they can't quite put the pieces together. Looking around the empty tomb, the women occupy a liminal space—their expectations have been challenged, but they have yet to cross the threshold into faith in the resurrected Christ. Notably, the empty tomb is not enough to guide them toward faith. They need help interpreting what they have witnessed.

The two men—set apart as divine messengers by their gleaming clothing—appear, ultimately helping the women move from this liminal space across the threshold into belief. If we place ourselves in the women's shoes, their initial question is quite jarring. The women are quite concerned about the dead because, up until they arrived at the tomb, the majority of their lives and the history of their people told them that dead people do not regularly return to life. They are not doing anything wrong. In fact, they are doing their duty to honor their teacher and friend in death. Yet with this question, from the perspective of the divine messengers, the women are focused on the wrong things, because Jesus is no longer among the dead. Thus, this jarring question invites the women to take the cognitive leap—they must start looking for the crucified Messiah among the living.

Continued on next page.

Notably, when the messengers proclaim—not predict—Christ's resurrection to the women, they tell of an event that has already occurred and thus interpret the evidence that the women see before them. Then, they implore the women to *remember*. The messengers remind the women how even back in Galilee, Jesus had predicted his own crucifixion and resurrection. Unlike other episodes wherein Luke highlights the fulfillment of prophecies from Scripture, this episode is a fulfillment of the prophecies of Jesus himself. Further, in remembering Jesus' teaching, the women's past experiences with Jesus now become key to interpreting their present reality. As they remember Jesus' teaching, what was perplexing now aligns with all they learned from Jesus in the past.

As the women return from the tomb, likely bringing back unused spices and ointments, the women tell the other disciples what they experienced at the tomb, but it does not compute. In fact, what the NRSV translates as "nonsense" is actually the Greek word *leros*, which is the root of the English word "delirious." *Leros* carries a condescending tone and was often used in medical texts of the day to indicate delirium. In other words, *leros* is speech that cannot be trusted. Whether the disciples do not believe the women because of the incomprehensibility of resurrection from the dead or because those testifying to the resurrection were women, the women's testimony of Christ's resurrection fails to convince the other disciples. Even after Peter runs to see the empty tomb and the burial clothes for himself, he comes away in amazement but does not yet believe.

For a text about Jesus' resurrection, Jesus is quite remarkably absent from the action. While Jesus' post-resurrection appearances begin just following this pericope, there is something appropriate about spending time in the empty tomb before encountering the living Christ. As God's response to the world putting Jesus to death for living God's love and peace in their midst, the resurrection completely reverses human expectations for how love, power, and strength operate in the world. Such reversals are powerfully life-giving, but they are also jolting to our sensibilities. While we celebrate the empty tomb with trumpet fanfares and joyful choruses, close encounters with resurrection can leave us feeling off kilter and in need of time to adjust. And even when such reversals are made with relative grace and enthusiasm, as in the case of the women, oftentimes our neighbors need more than one opportunity to hear and experience resurrection before they come to believe. Like so many things in life, resurrection is not clean and straightforward. But, when we draw close to the Resurrected One, we participate in God's resilient love that continues to answer death with life.



Sermon Notes

INTRODUCTION

Happy Easter! Throughout Lent, we followed Jesus toward the cross, encountering along the way how Jesus guides us to name trauma and practice resilient love together. Today, we come to the other side of the trauma of the crucifixion. But as we've said throughout this series, resilience does not erase trauma. Even as we celebrate the resurrection with joyous choruses and loud "hallelujahs," the resurrection was and always will be God's response to Jesus' death on a cross. And what a response it was! Our text invites us to journey with the women who had forgotten to expect a resurrection, who, in fact, had very little notion that resurrection was even possible as they went to finish tending Jesus' body. As the divine messengers guide the women in understanding what the empty tomb means, so they also guide us as we seek to build resilience and choose love in the face of traumas in our own lives and in the lives of our neighbors. Like the women, we must decide whether we will be people stuck in cycles of trauma or people freed from repeating traumas through resurrection. Fair warning: if and when you choose resurrection resilience over cycles of trauma, it will turn your world upside down and other people will think you are delirious. Just ask the women at the tomb! But when we draw close to the resurrected Christ, we begin to understand that the greatest source of both suffering and resilience we have is the gift that God gave us all: *life*.

SERMON NOTES

1. Luke 24 opens with immediate activity following the lack of activity at the end of Luke 23 after the hasty burial of Jesus ahead of the Sabbath. At the earliest possible moment, the women set to work, ready to complete their care of Jesus' body. The women walking to the tomb are women in the midst of trauma. They witnessed the violent death of Jesus at the hands of the Romans after their own people handed him over to be crucified on trumped up charges of treason. Their hopes for a better future are dashed. The despair of not knowing what to do next and wondering if life-giving, peace-bringing change is even possible is likely setting in. Forces outside of their control have physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually harmed them. They are victims of cycles of trauma in their society, and they have very few possibilities for getting out. And yet, they go to the tomb anyway to finish their ministrations of Jesus' body. Yet when they arrive, they receive a double surprise. Where they expected the stone to be in place, it is rolled away. Where they expected to see a dead body, there was no body to be found. Standing in the empty tomb, they "wonder," or more accurate to the Greek, they are perplexed. They are surrounded by the evidence of God's plan at work, but they do not understand what it means. They cannot yet comprehend the possibility of life where they expected death.

2. In that moment, divine messengers appear to help them interpret the evidence in front of them. The messengers address the women with a jarring question: "Why do you look for the living among the dead?" If we place ourselves in the women's shoes, this question makes little sense. They are not looking for the living—they are looking for the dead, specifically Jesus' dead body. Up until they arrived at the tomb, the majority of their lives and the history of their people told them that dead people do not regularly return to life. They are doing nothing wrong. In fact, they are doing their duty to honor their teacher and friend in death. Yet, from the perspective of the divine messengers, the women are looking in the wrong place. Jesus is no longer among the dead. Thus, this question invites the women to take a leap of faith, to move out of their confusion and start looking for the crucified Messiah among the living.

3. The messengers then proclaim Christ's resurrection and implore the women to remember what Jesus himself had told them about his suffering, death, and resurrection. The messengers put together the pieces of what the women learned from Jesus in the past and their current experience of the empty tomb to help them interpret what they are seeing—Christ is, indeed, risen. Throughout the Gospel of Luke, the author highlights how Jesus fulfills prophecies from Scripture. But in this instance, the messengers help the women understand the empty tomb as a fulfillment of one of Jesus' own prophecies. As the women remember Jesus' words, what was perplexing now aligns with all they learned from Jesus in the past. Note that the women are not asked to simply believe what the messengers say. Instead, they are invited to discern whether what they see and what they've heard from the messengers is consistent with what Jesus himself said. Jesus

was honest about the suffering and death he would face while also promising that trauma would not have the last word—resurrection would come. The women's encounter with the empty tomb does not erase Jesus' crucifixion—it fulfills Jesus' promises.

4. Looking back at our Lenten series on trauma and resilience, we can discern how various traumas are interconnected. The trauma of water shortage feeds the trauma of economic hardship and vice versa. The trauma of relational wounds can be heightened by the trauma of communal divisiveness. In fact, the pain and suffering of these traumas and many more are made worse by the disconnection and distrust that comes from being unable to love one another and talk to one another across our differences. As trauma feeds on trauma, cycles of trauma develop, often leading to increased physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual violence not unlike that experienced by Jesus and his disciples at the crucifixion. Cycles of trauma lead to deaths of all kinds, the death of our neighbors, the death of connection and trust, the death of vital resources, the death of hope. When we stop and consider the suffering and death that surround us, you might feel as though we too are stuck, caught up in cycles we are unable to stop. And yet, on Easter Sunday, we too are confronted by the empty tomb and a divine messenger who asks, "Why do you looking for the living among the dead?"

5. The promise of the empty tomb, the promise of the resurrection, is not that trauma will be erased but that God's eternal response to trauma is *life*. Where trauma draws our communities toward death, God responds over and over with resilient love that produces, sustains, and brings forth life. As we draw near to the crucified and resurrected Christ, we too are invited to respond to trauma and death with life, to do all we can to let *life* have the final say in our lives and in the life of our community. To do this work, we must first name all of the ways we look for the living among the dead. In other words, we must discern and resist all the ways we participate in cycles of trauma, thinking that we are keeping ourselves alive when we are actually harming ourselves and our neighbors, whether they live next door, around the block, or on the other side of town. Trauma will never produce life. We will never find abundant life in sources of trauma. Only then can we start looking for the living *among the living*. Only then can we overcome our fears and say hi to our neighbor. Only then can we bring community leaders together to hear from people living in poverty and work together to find solutions that promote the wellbeing of the whole community. Only then can we address food insecurity not as a charitable endeavor but as critical to loving our neighbors the way God loves them. Only then can we exercise curiosity in the face of difference and care for ourselves and others in the face of adversity.

6. Resurrection resilience never asks us to forget our trauma. Instead, God's resilient love offers us a path to build the strength to continue living through the trauma. However, we cannot build this strength and practice resilient love on our own. We need companions. Just as God sent the women messengers to point them in the direction of life where they looked for the dead, so we need each other to point us toward life when we are caught in wave upon wave of suffering and death in our own lives and in the lives around us. Further, as much as we might wish that resurrection was neat and tidy, easily explained and easily received, proclaiming life in the face of trauma and death is shocking to the system. The women at the empty tomb required divine messengers with dazzling clothes to help them make sense of what they were seeing. Then, when they returned to tell the other disciples of all that they had seen and heard, they were met with disbelief. In fact, the Greek word translated as "nonsense" in the NRSV is *leros*, indicating delirium or speech that cannot be trusted. These disciples had heard the same teachings from Jesus about his Passion and resurrection. These disciples had been in community with the women throughout Jesus' ministry. Yet the news of Jesus' resurrection, the news that life had overcome death, was so shocking that they did not know how to trust it.

7. When we participate in God's resurrection resilience, we too will meet those who call us delirious. When we commit to doing the slow work of listening to one another across our differences, some will call it nonsense. When we seek solutions to problems in our neighborhood while refusing any options that would do harm to others, some will call us foolish. When we are willing to acknowledge our mistakes and move forward with grace, generosity, and flexibility as we participate in God's resilient love in our communities, some will wonder why we even try. When we encounter those who do not understand, and we likely will, remember—bringing forth life in the midst of trauma is slow, steady work. Just as the resurrected Christ will keep showing up in the midst of the disciples in the following verses, so we too are called to keep showing up as God's resurrection people, doing what we can to promote life and wellbeing in places of trauma and death and trusting God to do the rest.



Benediction

Hear this Good News: in the midst of trauma and death, God brings forth life. As you draw near to the Resurrected Christ, may you be empowered to live as God's resurrection people, seeking life among the living as we give and receive God's resilient love wherever we go.

Amen.

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