

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church  
 "You Might Be Wrong"

Scripture: Luke 9:51-62

Hymns: Lord, I want to be a Christian 571; O Jesus, I have promised 569, Thou didst  
 leave thy throne, Here I am Lord, Step by Step, Cry of my heart, lead me Lord

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Communion

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Sometime back in 2009

Small black-and-white signs started popping up  
 Along the city streets of New Orleans.

These signs were nailed to poles  
 and bolted to posts

and they proclaimed a simple message:  
 "Think That You Might Be Wrong".

Think that you might be wrong.

Is there someone in your life

That could benefit from such an admonition:  
 "Think that you might be wrong!"

Someone who needs a reminder above their desk,

Or a sticker on their dash that says:  
 "Think that you might be wrong!"

PAUSE

But what about us?

Do you think WE would benefit from  
 installing a sign here?  
 Maybe just above the exits???

I'm not suggesting that we need to be unsure or ambivalent  
 About our faith in Jesus.

But sometimes Jesus' disciples are a little reckless,  
 A little overzealous in how we represent him.  
 Sometimes... we get things wrong.

PAUSE

Last week we hit a turning point in the Gospel of Luke.  
 At the Transfiguration, Jesus' identity and mission  
 Is confirmed by God the Father.

Today, we are told how Jesus  
 Gathers up his courage and starts  
 His journey to Jerusalem,  
 Where that mission will be fulfilled.

But this is not a quick day-trip.  
 They will need some lodging.  
 So Jesus tasks some disciples to book a hotel  
 At a Samaritan village along the way.

You may recall that the Jews and Samaritans  
 Had a long history of hostility.

While they both traced their ancestry to the Patriarchs  
 "the full-blooded, monotheistic Jews  
 detested the mixed marriages  
 and worship of their northern cousins."<sup>i</sup>

And the Samaritans,  
 Well they had little love for the Jews in return.

So maybe it isn't surprising  
 That when the disciples come looking for lodging  
 The Samaritans lock the doors and close the blinds,  
 And turn on the 'no-vacancy' signs.

They have no beds for Jews,  
 Especially Jews on pilgrimage.

So how do the disciples respond to this rejection?  
 Well they get mad, they get angry.  
 They want to retaliate.

When James and John hear about it  
 They head straight to Jesus, and ask him:  
 "Master, do you want us to call a bolt of lightning  
 down out of the sky and incinerate them?"<sup>ii</sup>

Incinerate the Samaritans?

If you are wondering where this comes from  
 they are taking a page  
 from the playbook of Elijah.

In Elijah's encounter with King Ahaziah,  
 Son of Ahab and Jezebel,  
 (whose palace was in Samaria),  
 Elijah calls down fire upon Ahaziah's servants.

Not just once, but a couple times.

So when Jesus' disciples get into conflict with modern-day Samaritans  
 They figure they'd do the same.

So what do you think about this proposed  
 Course of action?

The disciples have some biblical precedent.  
 And yet their plan is so contrary the way of Jesus.

Earlier in the chapter Jesus sent them out on a mission-trip  
 to gain some field experience.  
 He even gave them advice  
 on how to handle rejection:

"If you're not welcomed, leave town.  
 Don't make a scene.  
 Shrug your shoulders [shake the dust off your feet]  
 and move on."<sup>iii</sup>

Earlier in the chapter Jesus also spoke  
 About his impending time of trial.  
 How "the Son of Man [would] be tried and found guilty...  
 be killed, and on the third day be raised up alive."<sup>iv</sup>

He spoke about his suffering, and then invited the disciples  
 to take up their cross too:

"Don't run from suffering; embrace it...  
 Self-sacrifice is the way,  
 my way, to finding yourself, your true self."<sup>v</sup>

Notice the incongruity.  
 The disciples had just been instructed  
 On Jesus way of grace and sacrifice.

But their plan, their plan, is all about vengeance.

And when you think about it  
 They aren't just violating the ways of Jesus.  
 They are undermining God's mission.

They want to napalm a village  
 That God has plans to save.

Before Jesus ascends to heaven  
 He tells the disciples to wait for the Holy Spirit.

He tells them that they will be his witnesses where?  
 "in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and SAMARIA,  
 and to the ends of the earth."<sup>vi</sup>

Later in the book of Acts we are told how Philip  
 Shares the Gospel in a city of SAMARIA.  
 We are told that they believe and are baptised,  
 And that when Peter and John visit  
 They also receive the Holy Spirit.<sup>vii</sup>

When the disciples are provoked  
 They want to resort to power,  
 They want to respond with vengeance:

"Can we call down fire upon them Jesus?"  
 Jesus rebukes them: "Of course not!"<sup>viii</sup>

But if the misdirected plans of Jesus' disciples  
 Can undermine God's mission and purpose  
 what happens when our thinking is reformed  
 when our imaginations are sanctified?

What happens when we adopt the mind of Christ?

Let me tell you another story,  
 A story that is shared by Donald Miller  
 in his New York Times bestseller, *Blue Like Jazz*.

In Don's own words:

*Each year at Reed [College]  
 they have a renaissance festival called Ren Fayre.  
 They shut down the campus so students can party.*

*Security keeps the authorities away,  
 and everybody gets pretty drunk and high,  
 and some people get naked...*

*Some of the Christian students in our little group  
 decided this was a good place  
 to come out of the closet,  
 letting everybody know  
 there were a few Christians on campus.*

*Tony ...and I were sitting around in my room one afternoon  
 talking about what to do,  
 how to explain who we were  
 to a group of students who, in the past,  
 had expressed hostility toward Christians.*

*I said we should build a confession booth  
 in the middle of campus  
 and paint a sign on it that said "Confess your sins."*

*I said this because I knew a lot of people would be sinning,  
 and Christian spirituality begins by confessing our sins  
 and repenting.*

*I also said it as a joke.  
 But Tony thought it was brilliant...*

*"Tony," I said very gently...  
 "We are not going to do this," I told him...*

*"Oh, we are, Don. We certainly are.  
 We are going to build a confession booth!"*

*We met in Commons—Penny, Nadine, Mitch, Iven, Tony, and I.  
 Tony said I had an idea.  
 They looked at me...*

*I told them I had a stupid idea  
 that we couldn't do without getting attacked.*

*They leaned in.  
 I told them that we should build a confession booth  
 in the middle of campus  
 and paint a sign on it that said "Confess your sins."*

*Penny put her hands over her mouth.  
 Nadine smiled.  
 Iven laughed.  
 Mitch started drawing the designs  
 for the booth on a napkin.  
 Tony nodded his head...*

"Okay, you guys." Tony gathered everybody's attention.  
 "Here's the catch." He leaned in a little.  
 "We are not actually going to accept confessions."

We all looked at him in confusion.  
 He continued, "We are going to confess to them."

We are going to confess that, as followers of Jesus,  
 we have not been very loving;  
 we have been bitter,  
 and for that we are sorry.

We will apologize for the Crusades,  
 we will apologize for televangelists,  
 we will apologize for neglecting the poor and the lonely,

we will ask them to forgive us,  
 and we will tell them that in our selfishness,  
 we have misrepresented Jesus on this campus.

We will tell people who come into the booth  
 that Jesus loves them."

PAUSE

Pretty brave, eh?  
 So are you curious about what happened?

They set out on their plan.  
 The day before the fair  
 they dressed up as monks and walked around campus  
 telling people to come to the booth the next day.

And this is what occurred...

[Don continues]  
 I was going to tell Tony that I didn't want to do it  
 when he opened the curtain  
 and said we had our first customer.

...he said his name was Jake.  
 I shook his hand because  
 I didn't know what to do, really.

"So what is this?  
 I'm supposed to tell you all of the juicy gossip  
 I did at Ren Fayre, right?" Jake said.

"No."  
 "Okay, then what? What's the game?" he asked.  
 "Not really a game. More of a confession thing."

"You want me to confess my sins, right?"  
 "No, that's not what we're doing."  
 "What's the deal, man?"  
 "What's with the monk outfit?"

"Well, we are, well, a group of Christians here on campus, you know."

"I see. Strange place for Christians, but I'm listening."  
 "Thanks," I said.  
 He was being patient and gracious.

"Anyway, there is this group,  
 just a few of us who were thinking  
 about the way Christians  
 have sort of wronged people over time.

You know, the Crusades, all that stuff..."

"Well, I doubt you personally were involved in any of that, man."

"No, I wasn't," I told him.  
 "But the thing is, we are followers of Jesus.  
 We believe that he is God and all,  
 and he represented certain ideas  
 that we have sort of not done a good job  
 at representing.

*He has asked us to represent him well,  
but it can be very hard."*

"I see," Jake said.

"So this group of us on campus wanted to confess to you."

"You are confessing to me!" Jake said with a laugh.

"Yeah. We are confessing to you.

I mean, I am confessing to you."

"You're serious."

His laugh turned to something of a straight face.

"There's a lot. I will keep it short," I started.

"Jesus said to feed the poor and to heal the sick.

I have never done very much about that.

Jesus said to love those who persecute me.

I tend to lash out, especially if I feel threatened,  
you know, if my ego gets threatened.

Jesus did not mix his spirituality with politics.

I grew up doing that.

It got in the way of the central message of Christ...

There's a lot more, you know."

"It's all right, man," Jake said, very tenderly.

His eyes were starting to water.

"Well," I said, clearing my throat, "I am sorry for all that."

"I forgive you," Jake said. And he meant it...

He sat there and looked at the floor,  
then into the fire of a candle.

"It's really cool what you guys are doing," he said.

"A lot of people need to hear this."

[Don continues] "It went on like that for a couple of hours.

I talked to about thirty people,

and Tony took confessions on a picnic table outside the booth.

Many people wanted to hug when we were done.

All of the people who visited the booth

were grateful and gracious.

I was being changed through the process.

I went in with doubts

and came out believing so strongly in Jesus

I was ready to die and be with Him..."<sup>x</sup>

PAUSE

Like those early disciples of Jesus

Our minds seem to easily "grasp and hold those Scriptures

Which seem to bless our worst behavior

And yet [we struggle to] retain past the sanctuary door

Those texts which summon to love,  
forgiveness, and mercy..."<sup>x</sup>

Lent is an opportunity to consider

Where we have been wrong,

Where we have made mistakes.

To repent and ask for forgiveness.

Lent is also a time to discover, to discover

That the most convincing part of our witness,

God's witness through us,

Is not our powers of coercion and control

but our willingness to sacrifice,

Not our zeal but our grace.

Amen.

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<sup>i</sup> “Hatred between Jews and Samaritans” as referenced to *The Word in Life Study Bible, New Testament Edition* (Thomas Nelson Publishers, Nashville; 1993), pp. 340-341 [bible.org/illustration/hatred-between-jews-and-samaritans](http://bible.org/illustration/hatred-between-jews-and-samaritans)

<sup>ii</sup> Luke 9:54 MSG

<sup>iii</sup> Luke 9:5 MSG

<sup>iv</sup> Luke 9:22 MSG

<sup>v</sup> Luke 9:24-25 MSG

<sup>vi</sup> Acts 1:8 MSG

<sup>vii</sup> see Acts 8:5ff

<sup>viii</sup> see Luke 9:55 MSG

<sup>ix</sup> Donald Miller *Blue Like Jazz* 116-125

<sup>x</sup> Fred B. Craddock *Luke* 143