

Sermon Outline
Burton Memorial United Methodist Church
“As Citizens of the Kingdom of God,
we stand with the poor, oppressed, & marginalized”
(Part III of “Kingdom of God Citizens”)
September 28, 2025

Scripture

Isaiah 11:3-4
Luke 6:20-26

Core Idea and purpose

Core ideas from earlier sermons in the series:

- As followers of Christ, we are citizens of the Kingdom of God. As such, we use unconditional & sacrificial love to change the world for the better – not strength, violence, or coercion.
- As citizens of the Kingdom of God, the Holy Spirit empowers us to unconditionally & sacrificially love people while pursuing justice for poor, oppressed, and marginalized people.

Core Idea: As citizens of the Kingdom of God, we stand with poor, oppressed, and marginalized people.

Challenge/purpose: To encourage congregants to stand with poor, oppressed, and marginalized people.

The Sermon

Citizenship is important. Without citizenship, a person is not part of a country and wonders, “Where do I belong?” Also, without citizenship, a person cannot expect any country to protect his/her civil liberties. This is why the 14th Amendment to our constitution is so very important. Without it, former slaves and the descendants of formal slaves could not claim citizenship and enjoy the legal protections that come with citizenship.

To us modern day Americans, the idea of citizenship is straight forward and easy to understand. With citizenship we have legal protections, such as habeas corpus, and the right to vote. To become a citizen is also straight forward. You’re either a natural born citizen, meaning you were born within the boundaries of the U.S., or you went through the naturalization process and took an oath of loyalty.

In the Roman Empire, citizenship conveyed social status. When Jesus walked the earth as a human, only certain people could become citizens of the Roman Empire. If your parents were citizens, then you were born a citizen. If you were rich enough, you could buy your citizenship. If you were lucky enough, citizens could adopt you and that would make you a citizen. Slaves, of course, could not

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be citizens. In addition, there were levels of citizenship. A citizen living in Italy had more rights and protection than a citizen living in one of the provinces. So, citizenship gave a small part of the Roman population higher social status.

Acts 22:25-28 teaches us about citizenship in the Roman world. When Roman soldiers were about to flog the Apostle Paul with 40 lashes, he asked, “Is it legal for you to flog a Roman citizen who hasn’t even been found guilty?” The soldiers reported this to the commanding officer. When the Roman commander learned that Paul was a Roman citizen, he declared, “I had to pay a lot of money for my citizenship.” To which Paul flaunted, “But I was born a citizen” - implying a higher status than the Roman commander.

So, in a society where only an elite group of people were citizens, Jesus announced the inbreaking of the Kingdom of God and made it clear that He invites all people to take part in the Kingdom of God as full-fledged citizens. As Paul would later put it, “There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” (Galatians 3:28) Anyone who receives God’s forgiveness and surrenders themselves to the loving authority of God automatically becomes a citizen of the Kingdom of God. As citizens of the Kingdom of God, the Lord God Almighty expects us to live as citizens of the Kingdom of God.

As fully human and fully God, Jesus shows us how to live as citizens of the Kingdom of God. He is, in fact, our perfect example. We talked about this last Sunday.

So, we do as Jesus did and He stood with poor, oppressed, and marginalized people. When God the Son became a human named Jesus, He at once placed himself in solidarity with poor and oppressed people. Instead of becoming a powerful emperor, mighty soldier, or rich merchant, he became the son of a struggling Jewish carpenter. This means he became a member of an ethnic and religious group that was oppressed by the tyrannical Roman Empire. By the time he was two years old, Jesus and his family fled mass murder as political refugees! If that is not standing in solidarity with poor and oppressed people, I don’t know what is.

Isaiah 11 is a foreshadowing of Jesus. After the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, Christian leaders looked at Isaiah 11 and realized that it was talking about Jesus. Verses 3 and 4 of this chapter describes Jesus as making judgments on behalf of poor and oppressed people. It says, “He will not judge by what he sees with His eyes, or decide by what he hears with his ears; **but with righteousness**

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he will judge the needy, with justice he will give decisions for the poor of the earth. He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth; with the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked.” Hmmm...He will slay the wicked. Who are the wicked? Those who mistreat the poor and needy.

Jesus reiterates this in Luke 6:17-26. This is the beginning of what we commonly call the ‘Sermon on the Plain’. Jesus gathers people on level ground and begins to teach them about living as citizens of the Kingdom of God. By being on the same level as everyone else, Jesus emphasizes that, along with being divine, He is also a human – one of us.

He then begins with the ‘Blessed are you...’ statements.

He starts with, “Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God” In Matthew’s version, he says, “Blessed are the poor in spirit” which could mean “Blessed are the humble” But in this version – Luke’s version – Jesus simply says, “Blessed are the poor” which means that he is referring to people with very little money – people who are homeless are blessed, people who struggle from pay check to paycheck are blessed, people who must choose between paying rent or paying for medicine are blessed.

He then says, “Blessed are you who hunger now, for you will be satisfied” and “Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh.”

This doesn’t seem to make sense. Why would Jesus call poor, hungry and hurting people blessed? Well, I think it is Jesus’ way of saying that there is a special place in God’s heart for poor, hungry, and hurting people – which is why Jesus stands with poor, oppressed, and marginalized people.

Jesus could have been content with using “Blessed are you...” statements but he really wanted to drive home His point. So, he added four “Woe to you...” statements.

We can think of them as warning statements. They are, “...woe to you who are rich, for you have already received your comfort. Woe to you who are well fed now, for you will go hungry. Woe to you who laugh now, for you will mourn and weep. Woe to you when everyone speaks well of you, for that is how their ancestors treated the false prophets.”

These verses make me very nervous. They even scare me. If I compare myself to people living in million-dollar homes, I don’t seem to be that rich. But, if I compare myself to the folks I met in Cuba & Uganda, or the Haitian community in

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Belle Glade, Florida, I suddenly become very rich. I’ve never had to worry about food, shelter, or clothing. I’ve never gone without medical or dental care. I also get to see whatever movie I want, go on vacation every summer and travel. I am a rich guy. So, Jesus is saying to me, “Woe to you who are rich, well fed, and laughing” It seems that Jesus wants me to use my wealth & resources to stand with the poor, hungry, and hurting people.

There are three ways we can be like Jesus and stand with poor, oppressed, and marginalized people.

The first way is to help meet their needs. William and Catherine Booth, the founders of the Salvation Army, exemplify this way of standing with the poor, oppressed, and marginalized. They fed the hungry, housed the homeless, and met other needs. Most churches are good at this. Churches have food pantries; Christians take part in Habitat for humanity; and many Christian ministries feed people around the world and provide basic health needs.

The second way to stand with poor, oppressed, and marginalized people is to pursue justice on their behalf. Sometimes, we must be the voice of the voiceless. Archbishop Oscar Romero and Benjamin Lay exemplify this way of standing with poor, oppressed, and marginalized people. Romero was the Archbishop of San Salvador, the capital of El Salvador. When a military junta seized power in 1979, Archbishop Romero began broadcasting weekly sermons over the radio. He openly criticized the tyrannical regime and those supporting it. On March 24, 1980, while Romero was leading worship, a gunman fired a single shot from the doorway of the church straight into his heart, killing him instantly.¹ Benjamin Lay was an early abolitionist in the 1700s. He was largely responsible for leading the Quaker denomination to become staunchly abolitionist. If you want inspiration to be a good follower of Christ, Google these two men and read about their lives.

The third way to stand with poor, oppressed, and marginalized people is to join them in their struggle. Jonathan Daniel exemplifies this way of standing with poor, oppressed, and marginalized people. He was a white Episcopalian seminary student who, in 1965, joined the struggle for voting rights in Lowndes County, Alabama. He was effective because he joined this non-violent struggle with humility and followed the grassroots leaders. On August 20, 1965, he gave his life while shielding 17-year-old Ruby Sales, a fellow civils rights worker, from a shot gun blast fired by a white racist.

¹ <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/church/news/2020-03/oscar-romero-forty-years-assassination-anniversary0.html>

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Today, if you perceive any oppression, there are plenty of non-violent ways to join people in their efforts to expose the injustice and put a stop to it. There are letter writing campaigns, prayer vigils, marches, and demonstrations. Last Sunday, I mentioned the Interfaith Coalition who is organizing prayer vigils outside of Alligator Alcatraz every Sunday at 5 pm until the government shuts it down.

If you want inspiration to be a good follower of Christ, google these people – William and Catherine Booth, Archbishop Oscar Romero, Benjamin Lay, and Jonathan Daniel – and read about their lives.

So, as citizens of the Kingdom of God, we follow Jesus’ example and He stood with poor, oppressed, and marginalized people which means we should stand with them as well.

Let’s pray.

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Sermon Outline

I. Introduction: Citizenship

A. Citizenship is important.

- Without citizenship, a person is not part of a country and wonders, “Where do I belong?”
- Also, without citizenship, a person cannot expect any country to protect his/her civil liberties.
- This is why the 14th Amendment to our constitution is so very important.
 - Without it, former slaves and the descendants of formal slaves could not claim citizenship and enjoy the legal protections that come with citizenship.

B. To us modern day Americans, the idea of citizenship is straight forward and easy to understand.

- With citizenship we have legal protections, such as habeas corpus, and the right to vote.
- To become a citizen is also straight forward.
 - You’re either a natural born citizen, meaning you were born within the boundaries of the U.S., or you went through the naturalization process and took an oath of loyalty.

C. In the Roman Empire, citizenship conveyed social status.

- When Jesus walked the earth as a human, only certain people could become citizens of the Roman Empire.
 - If your parents were citizens, then you were born a citizen.
 - If you were rich enough, you could buy your citizenship.
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- Slaves, of course, could not be citizens.
 - In addition, there were levels of citizenship.
 - A citizen living in Italy had more rights and protection than a citizen living in one of the provinces.
 - So, citizenship gave a small part of the Roman population higher social status.
 - Acts 22:25-28 teaches us about citizenship in the Roman world.
 - When Roman soldiers were about to flog the Apostle Paul with 40 lashes, he asked, “Is it legal for you to flog a Roman citizen who hasn’t even been found guilty?”
 - The soldiers reported this to the commanding officer.
 - When the Roman commander learned that Paul was a Roman citizen, he declared, “I had to pay a lot of money for my citizenship.”
 - To which Paul flaunted, “But I was born a citizen” - implying a higher status than the Roman commander.
- D. So, in a society where only an elite group of people were citizens, Jesus announced the inbreaking of the Kingdom of God and made it clear that He invites all people to take part in the Kingdom of God as full-fledged citizens.
- As Paul would later put it, “There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” (Galatians 3:28)
 - Anyone who receives God’s forgiveness and surrenders themselves to the loving authority of God automatically becomes a citizen of the Kingdom of God.
 - As citizens of the Kingdom of God, the Lord God Almighty expects us to live as citizens of the Kingdom of God.

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- E. As fully human and fully God, Jesus shows us how to live as citizens of the Kingdom of God.
- He is, in fact, our perfect example.
 - We talked about this last Sunday.
- II. So, we do as Jesus did and He stood with poor, oppressed, and marginalized people.
- A. When God the Son became a human named Jesus, He at once placed himself in solidarity with poor and oppressed people.
- Instead of becoming a powerful emperor, mighty soldier, or rich merchant, he became the son of a struggling Jewish carpenter.
 - This means he became a member of an ethnic and religious group that was oppressed by the tyrannical Roman Empire.
 - By the time he was two years old, Jesus and his family fled mass murder as political refugees!
 - If that is not standing in solidarity with poor and oppressed people, I don't know what is.
- B. Isaiah 11 is a foreshadowing of Jesus.
- After the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, Christian leaders looked at Isaiah 11 and realized that it was talking about Jesus.
 - Verses 3 and 4 of this chapter describes Jesus as making judgments on behalf of poor and oppressed people.
 - It says, “He will not judge by what he sees with His eyes, or decide by what he hears with his ears; **but with righteousness he will judge the needy, with justice he will give decisions for the poor of the earth.** He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth; with the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked.”
 - Hmmm...He will slay the wicked. Who are the wicked?

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- Those who mistreat the poor and needy.

III. Jesus reiterates this in Luke 6:17-26.

A. This is the beginning of what we commonly call the ‘Sermon on the Plain’.

- Jesus gathers people on level ground and begins to speak with them.
- By being on the same level as everyone else, Jesus emphasizes that, along with being divine, He is also a human – one of us.

B. He then begins with the ‘Blessed are you...’ statements.

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C. Jesus could have been content with using “Blessed are you...” statements but he really wanted to drive home His point. So, he added four “Woe to you...” statements.

- We can think of them as warning statements.
- They are:
 - woe to you who are rich, for you have already received your comfort.
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- It seems that Jesus wants me to use my wealth & resources to stand with the poor, hungry, and hurting people.

IV. There are three ways we can be like Jesus and stand with poor, oppressed, and marginalized people.

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- Last Sunday, I mentioned the Interfaith Coalition that has a prayer vigil outside of Alligator Alcatraz every Sunday at 5 pm.

D. If you want inspiration to be a good follower of Christ, google these people – William and Catherine Booth, Archbishop Oscar Romero, Benjamin Lay, and Jonathan Danile – and read about their lives.

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