



LESSONS IN LIVING

“It’s not about being Christian, it’s about love”

A St. Andrew’s Sermon
Delivered by Dr. Jim Rigby
October 5, 2025

Scripture Reading: Matthew 7:21-23 (*The Inclusive Bible*)
(Jesus is teaching) *“It isn’t those who cry out, ‘My Savior! My Savior!’ who will enter the kindom* of heaven; rather, it is those who do the will of God in heaven. When that day comes, many will plead with me, ‘Savior! Savior! Have we not prophesied in your name? Have we not exorcised demons in your name? Didn’t we do many miracles in your name as well?’ Then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you. Out of my sight, you evildoers!’”*

**The word ‘kindom’, often used by mujerista theologian Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz, replaces ‘kingdom’ because it represents an egalitarian realm and emphasizes our familial relationship with each other.*

Sermon

What happens to me all the time, and I assume it also happens to a lot of you, about once a day on Facebook, I’ll get a message from somebody saying, I’m not a real Christian.

It’s understandable. I know in seminary I was taught the way you’re saved is to declare Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior. If you do that and you happen to be an ax murderer, it’s no big deal. Let’s not get hung up over that. *[laughter]*

It’s right there in Romans: *“Whoever calls upon the name of the Lord”* I’m using the word ‘Lord.’ We don’t usually use that word because it’s male, and it’s also a very bad translation of the word. We’ll talk about that in a second.

But today, just so you recognize it and what happens. Romans says, *“Whoever calls upon the Lord will be saved.”*

Jesus says, *“not everyone who calls me Lord will enter the Kingdom of Heaven.”* I know you don’t hear many preachers say this, but there are some pretty big contradictions in the Bible. Maybe you’ve been taught to blame yourself for your honesty. But this is one of those moments where you realize you can’t reduce it to one simple framework.

Paul is saying, *“just say these words and you’ll be saved.”*

Jesus is saying it's a lot deeper than that.

How do these two things fit together?

The real question I want to talk about is how did Christianity get so mean? How did it get predatory? How did it become a disguise for fascism? Last week, we talked about how Jesus said false prophets will be wolves in lamb's clothing. People who don the name of Christ, the name of the Church, but don't teach grace, forgiveness, or love. They frighten you with threats of hell. And if you get frightened enough, their cruelty seems appealing.

That's not what Jesus taught.

When I got to college, I was a philosophy major, but most of the stuff I read was outside of the curriculum. I wanted to know what parts of what I've been taught were true and what parts were just what somebody said somewhere. I started studying other religions, started studying other philosophies and things. One of the most helpful phrases I ran across was from Albert Schweitzer. He said,

There are two things calling themselves Christianity. One is the religion of Jesus, which is the Sermon on the Mount, and the other is all the thousands of religions about Jesus who take the name and use it for something else.

That was really liberating for me to run across that. This week, when I hear that one of Trump's spiritual advisors has been arrested for repeated sexual abuse of children, I wonder, how does somebody call that Christian? The answer clearly is they've been taught that saying certain words will save them. It may save them, but it won't save the world. It won't bring any compassion or clarity to our world.

Kristi Noem is rightly indignant that the Super Bowl halftime is going to be hosted by Bad Bunny. Thank God the Trump administration is focused on important things. My mother told me never to use the word 'stupid,' and I'm trying as best I can. *[laughter]* But sometimes I run out of synonyms. You know they let the athletes kneel ten years ago, and we still haven't been able to sleep since then. We don't want justice to enter the world.

This is a quote this week from Kristi Noem:

The NFL [stinks]. Jim: I'm changing the word there because the vocabulary they use now is not appropriate for church. You can look it up and see the real word.

The NFL sucks. [Oops, I said the real word. Censor that, erase that. Sorry about that. If there are any children here, I apologize.] [laughter] The NFL [stinks], and we'll win, and God will bless us, and we'll stand to be proud of ourselves at the end of the day, and they won't be able to sleep at night because they don't know what they believe, and they're so weak. We'll fix it.

What a beautiful, loving statement of Christo-fascism. We've been walking through the Sermon on the Mount for the longest sermon series I've ever done. We're at the last two passages this week and next week. This whole last series is like the warning label on the Sermon on the

Mount. It is just not as simple as loving everybody. There are boundaries that have to be there. There are abusive people we have to deal with.

If I thought MAGA Christianity were the only option, I would gladly volunteer to go to hell. Gladly. *[laughter]* I would rather spend eternity being punished for being kind than spend eternity listening to televangelists, say, who doesn't belong here.

We're going to look at this little phrase that's here. *“Not everybody who says Lord, Lord, will be able to enter the Kingdom of Heaven.”*

Remember, the Kingdom of Heaven is the way of things. It means the path. The early church was called the Path. They didn't have all the theology. They didn't have all the moralism and the rituals. They just had a simple way of living.

When Christianity got to Europe, the word for 'Lord' in Greek is *kyrios*, and that can mean something like 'Lord,' but it can also be a principle and not a person. But the word that was chosen happens to be a white male, upper class person. Isn't that convenient for the oppressor class? Isn't it convenient that patriarchal males, people who think they're better than everybody else, that they should be running the world, can look Jesus Christ and think, *“you know that looks like me. It doesn't look like my sister. It doesn't look like the people from across our boundary. But it looks just like me, just as mean, just as selfish.”*

One disconcerting thing I learned at seminary is that most people going into the ministry are doing it to find themselves. They're lost. Every other door has been locked, and they're going to go into the ministry to make things right.

If I have the religion of white supremacy, and we didn't realize that's what's going to happen, but if you've been raised looking at the white pictures of Jesus on the wall you were being asked to swallow the European distortion of Christianity.

And when you talk about Jesus as King, that's not the humble rabbi who entered Jerusalem on a donkey. The word 'Lord' is the farthest word I can think of from Jesus Christ. That is the farthest Jesus' distortion of what he taught.

When your Christ is a Christ of power, you should not be surprised if your religion turns cruel. That's what power does. Which is why Jesus is warning us in these last sections. That love is sometimes a path of humiliation and even some danger to stand up for other people. For Jesus, the Cross was not a theological nicety. It wasn't a necklace. It wasn't something hanging on a wall. It was Rome's threat to any human rights activist. That if you do not submit to our cruelty, you'll be next.

That's what that meant when they did the executions and hung them up publicly. You will not live in solidarity with the weak and the poor. You will not support them against us in our oppression of them.

The early Christians lifting the Cross, they were not like the MAGA people lifting the Cross, where the guy's got the little rollers, he's rolling the Cross along. To take up your cross did not mean to buy cufflinks, crosses or necklaces. It didn't mean to call yourself a Christian. It meant to live in solidarity with the oppressed. Leave your place of safety and comfort if that's what it takes to stand with the oppressed of the world.

Now, we can all understand why we might not want to do that. Let's find something else. Let's find a nicer thing. The cross became a false story of an angry God. And even if you said yes to it, your heart said no. Your heart cannot love that God, a torturing, abusive God. Your heart can only say yes to the suffering servant. Not one of us wants the world to be this way. But all of us know it is this way.

We don't have to choose cruelty. We don't have to choose ignorance. We can have peace and joy inside our heart, even as we march down roads we don't really want to go.

When Jesus said, *"Depart from me, you evildoers, I don't even know you."* That sounds harsh and unloving. But realize that for Jesus, heaven was not a place. Heaven was the path. When we live in love, we're in heaven. When we surrender our hearts to fear and hatred, we're in hell already. You don't have to be punished for that. You don't have to be rewarded for love.

Jesus is saying just praising me is not the point. Obeying me is not the point. I don't want obedience. I want responsibility. I want you to find your own heart and live in your own heart. You are the light of the world. If you let fear dim your light, if you let somebody else's judgment of you dim your light, if you let somebody disqualify you from your calling, then the world will be a darker place. You are the light of the world. Let your light shine. That's what he taught.

Being in Christ does not mean being a Christian. Being in Christ means having a sense of your larger connectedness with other beings. I don't think it has to be human beings necessarily. Sometimes things are so cruel and stupid with people that you have to go to the animals to remember what compassion feels like. And you do it with your dog or your cat, and then you can do it back to people again, whatever it takes.

Jesus is saying that heaven is universal love, and the door to universal love is justice. How we treat the weakest, the lowliest, the most oppressed, is the degree to which we can experience universal love. If I write off any human being, I cut myself off from the tree of life. Jesus is teaching us not how to always feel love. Nobody can do that all the time, but we can act on behalf of love even if we don't feel it sometimes. And that's what sacraments and rituals and symbols are trying to help us do. When we've shut down to act in a kinder, more Christ-like way.

Sometimes you have to go through hell to get to that heaven.

That's what this last little section is saying. Then instead of selfishly trying to get to heaven, instead of being so afraid of a punishing God that you don't realize you're being called to love. Be willing to go even through hell if that's where love is, because that's always your home.

The last thing we'll talk about today is the word *kyrios*, or 'Lord,' does not mean 'boss.' I think Jesus is talking about the creative principle that brings you into being. When you see the word parent, you might scratch through that and say source. I don't know if there's an old man or woman up in heaven doing things, but I know I come out of something. Whatever that something is my source. I need to harmonize myself with that.

One of the great ambassadors to that greater love was Jane Goodall, who passed away this week. She taught us we are not isolated members. We are part of the tree of life. The gorillas, chimpanzees, all the plants and animals are our extended family. When politics gets so bad, you can't breathe, sometimes going into the woods and remembering that you are deeper than anything happening in the short run can help you remember the heaven that's in there.

You have an inner sanctum. If you don't let desire lure you away from it, if you don't let fear frighten you out of it, that peace, that light is always there inside of you. If you just get still, it's always there.

I think that's what Paul was trying to get at. He had people that were so mechanical in their religion, they thought you were saved by obedience. Jesus was the embodiment of everything the Jewish culture was looking for. He was still Jewish, but he had a human face. The Ten Commandments had a human face and were a call to love and compassion and healing. The law never got between Jesus and people who needed compassion.

If you've ever known anybody who heard your heart song before you did, maybe a grandparent or a teacher. Somebody who resonated so deeply with you, and you felt a depth inside yourself you weren't in touch with before, that's the Christ principle. That somebody who loves you for who you are is giving you the key to your own heart.

This kind of *kyrios*, 'Lord,' does not want your obedience. It wants your liberation. When you hear somebody say you're not Christian because you see the contradictions in a literal understanding of scripture, and because you think it can all be summarized by love. That's what Jesus is saying. Don't let people frighten you away from that.

The word 'Lord' does not mean 'boss.' It means creative principle. The word 'heaven' is not a place. It's the tie that binds us to all other beings. And the door to that universal love is justice, how we treat the least of these.

I think in summary, Jesus is saying the door to heaven may look like it's in hell. It may be a place of despair. But when you choose kindness, you bring a light to that darkness. When you are true to that inner sanctum, there is nothing that can extinguish that light.

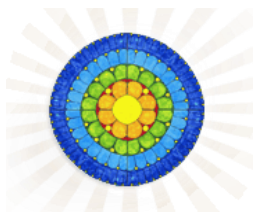
Well, that's my understanding of this passage. We'll take a moment for you to think about how you would have preached it.

Benediction

Rev. Babs Miller

Sometimes during hard times, we forget that each of you is a child of that wonderful spirit of love that we sometimes call God. That spirit knows when you skin your knee or your heart. That spirit knows when you admire a butterfly or cry in the darkness. So go out into this wonderful creation and tell everyone you meet that they are loved just exactly as they are. Go and kiss the hurts of this world. Go and laugh and play in the fields of grace and love. Go in peace. Amen.

Transcribed and edited by a member of the St. Andrew's Sermon Transcription Project.



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