



LESSONS IN LIVING

“Crossroads”

A St. Andrew's Sermon
Delivered by Dr. Jim Taylor
June 1, 2025

Scripture Readings:

Matthew 7:12

Treat others as you would have them treat you. That is the whole meaning of the Law and the prophets.

Isaiah 1:17

Search for justice and help the oppressed! Protect those who are orphaned and plead the case of those who are widowed.

Micah 6:8

God has already made abundantly clear what “good” is, and what the Holy One needs from you: “simply do justice, love kindness, and humbly walk with your God.”

Sermon

Before I begin this morning, if we might have a moment of thanksgiving. What I mean by that is I am so proud of our staff. We are blessed to have them. During the time that Jim has been away, I can't imagine anyone doing a better job than they've done. But I also would like to look outward at the congregation because we rely so heavily on volunteerism. You have just been magnificent in what you have done as well.

When I thought about this before the first service, what I realized we are experiencing is family, and Mary Ann and I are blessed to be a part of St. Andrews Presbyterian Church. Thank you very much. *(applause)*

Now, while I'm speaking this morning, if you would keep the centering and the scripture that were so beautifully read in your mind and heart, because they both are at the very core of what I want to talk about this morning. I suspect you would agree that as a society, we're not in a very good place right now. The last several months have been truly devastating. I suspect that you are experiencing a sense of loss and maybe even bordering on hopelessness.

You've probably heard a little bit of that in the messages that people have been preaching over the last several months. I've taken great encouragement from a number of positive things speakers have said. Let me remind you of several of those.

A few weeks ago, Erica talked about the importance of reaching out. When we have a polarized society like we have now, there's a tendency to retreat inward and to associate only with those people who are like-minded. Erica challenged us to reach out, to try to touch those people with whom we normally might not associate, to try to find a way to reach them.

Representative James Talarico came along with his very eloquent Easter sermon and talked about the power of love. That becomes the vehicle for what Erica was talking about in terms of reaching out.

Last Sunday, Erica talked about and provided us with a spiritual and biblical mandate for women. That is really what I want to build upon this morning, along with the other positive messages I referred to just a moment ago.

Now, I may begin to swim in some dangerous waters as we go along here, so you may not agree entirely with what I say. I would ask you to at least consider it, because what I say in a couple of places may be a little jarring.

Let me begin by reminding you of what it is we think we have lost over the last several months. Maybe a few of you will remember that sometime last year, I talked to us about the civil rights movement. I talked about the first half of the 20th century as being very dark and depressing in terms of social justice and advancements in civil rights. I made the point that the only positive from that period was the ratification of the 19th Amendment in 1920, giving the vote to [white] women. But that's about all we had in a half century. Then, beginning in the mid-1950s and carrying over to the early 1970s, we began to make seemingly some significant progress in terms of social justice and civil rights. We started with [U.S. Supreme Court ruling] *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954, which at least theoretically ended segregation in public education. We had the *Civil Rights Act* of 1964, the *Voting Rights Act* of 1965, Supreme Court decision, *Griswold v. Connecticut* in 1965, that legalized birth control, *Medicare* and *Medicaid* in 1965, *Title IX* in 1972, which eliminated discrimination on the basis of gender, and of course, *Roe v. Wade* in 1972, [which legalized abortion].

We could add to that list. There's a number of other court decisions and pieces of legislation during that time.

And now what? All of that seems to be being undermined, if not totally discarded. And one can certainly understand the feeling of a sense of loss well-justified, and a growing sense of hopelessness. Here's where I'm going to take a little different track. I'm going to suggest if we're going to find a way to move forward, it's going to require a little different perspective than we have now.

It's this new perspective that may trouble you a little bit. I'm going to suggest what we thought we had gained, that is, we moved forward as a society as a result of what happened in the '60s

and '70s, is in very large part an illusion. That is, individuals moved forward, but not so much a society as a whole. Let me see if I can explain why I think that's the case.

Why did we have compliance to the court decisions and legislation vision of the 1960s and '70s? Was it because of a change of heart? Had we suddenly grown more inclusive and accepting?

Or was it because of a fear of consequences, that if we didn't comply, then there would be consequences. It wasn't so much that our spirit had changed as it was our priorities had changed a little bit.

I don't know about you, but to me, that doesn't necessarily constitute progress. What it does constitute is when you're asked to do something you don't really want to do, what does that breed? It breeds resentment and discontent. I suspect what we are seeing in the Trump years is license to let go of that. I can now say what I wanted to say all along and do what I wanted to do all along.

It's extremely frustrating and discouraging to confront what we thought was a lot of progress that turned out not to be. I want to revisit the 1950s and '60s and talk about what they were really like, not the idealized version where we talk about a society remodeled and rebirthed and growing and changing and becoming loving and accepting. That's not the real 1950s and '60s.

Historians love to refer to the 1950s as the placid decade, where nothing happened. People were not affected by any change that might be on the horizon. They just lived their lives. But even more than that, what was the role of wife and mother in the 1950s and '60s? It was primarily to keep the family, that's very patriarchal in nature, on an even keel. No ruffled waters. Things must be smooth and content. Don't let any problems surface. Keep them tamped down. That's what family life looked like in so many homes in the 1950's.

Now, I really get into trouble here. What were the professional opportunities for women during this period? We could talk about the Big Five if you wanted to spend time with them, but I'm only going to mention them. *Teacher, Secretary, Flight attendant*, or if we called it in those days, *Stewardess, Clerk, and Nurse*. I am reminded almost every day, in fact, it's become my mantra, something that Shirley Chisholm said during this period. She was the first black lady elected to Congress. She said,

"I've experienced far more prejudice as a woman than I have as a black."

That's why I'm building on what Erica said last Sunday, because I think instead of seeing progress for women, what we really have seen is something far more discouraging, and that is being trapped in the past.

Something else we talked about last year in trying to review the civil rights movement is the contrast between accommodationists like Booker T. Washington and assimilationists like W. B. Du Bois. And Du Bois, in his 1903 work, *The Souls of Black Folk*, introduced a concept that is critical to our understanding here. He talked about double consciousness, and he's applying that to Blacks. And he's talking about Blacks during the first half of the 20th century. What he meant by double consciousness is Blacks had possession of individual self-concepts but layered on top

of that was a self-concept assigned to them by the dominant white power structure. He stated it was very difficult to move beyond that, and very limiting and very controlling.

I make the argument that that's the same issue confronting women still today. We believe with the women's movement that women had moved forward. Individuals moved forward, at least in my view, but not women, generally.

Now, continuing our review of the 1950s and early '60s. This was a period of concentrated wealth. Remember Jim Rigby's views on concentrated wealth, and he's not a big fan of capitalism because of concentrated wealth. Whether that's legitimate or just an unfortunate consequence, we could debate. But nonetheless, concentrated wealth was a real issue in the 1950s and '60s. It increased dramatically.

The impact of that on the middle class was to cause problems because you had more trouble having ends meet. This meant you became more fearful about minorities, you became more concerned about anyone that was different, and it created a real barrier for us in terms of growth and development.

If I ask you to write down on a sheet of paper your top five American presidents, there's a name I expect would not appear on any of your lists. That's the name of Dwight Eisenhower. We could debate whether he was a great president or not on another occasion. But he made an observation in 1961 in his farewell address that, at least in my view, is one of the most powerful statements of the 20th century.

He said:

We must guard against the acquisition of unwarranted influence by the military-industrial complex. [he meant that with the concentration of power and wealth] the potential for the disastrous rise of misplaced power persists and will persist. We must never let the weight of this combination endanger our liberties or democratic processes.

Let me read that last sentence again.

We must never let the weight of this combination endanger our liberties or democratic processes.

But that's exactly what's happened. We *have* let the weight of this combination endanger our liberties and democratic processes.

If you want an exemplar for that, there is no better exemplar than Donald Trump and his administration. I need to give the President his due here. I don't know of probably anyone, at least in my understanding, who is more effective in appealing to the concerns of the middle class and then using those concerns to further his own agenda. He then carries that one step further by convincing the middle class that their agenda is his agenda, whether it really is or not. He's *very* adept at doing that.

To make matters even worse, I think we are compromised by the failure of Christianity to live up to the principles it espouses. Think for a moment about the scripture that was just so beautifully

read by Tara a moment ago. Do you think Christian Nationalists are living their lives consistent with that Scripture?

Obviously, the answer is no, and that's a real problem for us.

For me, one final factor compounding the situation, as an educator for 40 years, is that I am deeply disturbed by the failure of education to develop and maintain critical thinking skills. What few courses and curricula deal with critical thinking *now* are being undermined every day by this administration.

What I want to say today, and this is the controversial statement, that when we say we have lost ground in the Trump administration, we really are talking about something that we never really had in the first place. Individuals, yes; societally, no.

Have I depressed you enough? (*laughter*) The question I would then put, is there a way forward?

I happen to believe there is a way forward. Clearly, we're at a crossroads in society. We have to find a way, change the paradigm, so that we are really, truly improving the human condition.

Typically, in the past, we've relied on legislation to try to do that. You pass laws, you hope they'll make changes. But what does legislation do? And yes, it can be helpful, but it almost always ends in compromise. And compromise never endures.

If you want evidence of that, I will remind you of the period leading up to the Civil War and the efforts of Daniel Webster, Henry Clay, and John C. Calhoun to force all the Civil War into a compromise. You want to look at abysmal failure. That's a good example, but it was from three guys who were pretty sharp, but they couldn't get it done. Compromise through legislation is not going to be the answer.

What is the answer? You've probably already figured it out based on what I've said to this point. I think our best and perhaps only path forward is a new and redirected Women's Movement. You may recall Babs and Morgan talking about what they referred to as, and I want to be sure I get this right, transformative growth.

In our lives, as we move forward, hopefully we have periods where we really do grow. We become new and better-developed human beings because of that growth. My contention has been with women from previous attempts at movement, individuals who move, not women as a whole. We must find a way to bring them forward. You have to redirect the women's movement to do that.

I've been a member of the National Organization for Women for decades, and I love the organization. But if you look at their strategy, it's a strategy really based on policy change. They seem to make the underlying assumption that women are sitting here ready to move, and all we have to do is increase opportunity and acceptance, and they can move forward.

I think that's not an entirely accurate picture. If a woman's movement is going to work, it has to go back and move women forward from what is still definitionally a male dominated society. I think there's real hope of that happening.

If you don't think what I'm saying has any validity, think back to the last three presidential elections. Slightly more than 50% of women voting in those elections voted for Donald Trump. Yet, if you talk to those women, they don't like him at all. They think he's a cad. But if you listen to their explanation for why they voted for him anyway, they will say,

"Well, that's just the way men are."

That's a classic example of double consciousness, of letting someone else define who you are, and it is totally destructive for personal growth.

My solution then is a revitalized and redirected Women's Movement. It would be really helpful if we had charismatic figures to do that for us. If you think back to the civil rights movement, having a Martin Luther King was a real blessing in terms of trying to move us forward. I don't see prominent examples of charismatic figures on the horizon right now, but it would certainly be helpful.

Speaking of Dr. King, he observed in 1960 that I wish to my very soul were no longer true, but it's equally applicable in 2025. Here's what he said,

One of the great liabilities of history is that all too many people fail to remain awake through great periods of social change. Every society has its protectors of the status quo, its fraternities of the indifferent. Today, our very survival depends on our ability to stay awake, to adjust to new ideas, to remain vigilant, to face the challenge of change.

That is my prayer, and I hope it is yours as well. May we also live our lives in the words of the Centering that you heard read so beautifully just a moment ago.

When we love deeply, defiantly, unapologetically, we become untouchable. And that's how the world begins to shift.

I invite you now to your own reflection upon these words.

Benediction

Rev. Carol Johnson

Now, if you came here looking for God, may you leave with God. If you came here looking for a way, may you leave with a way. If you came here looking for community, may we be your community and your friends. If you came here looking for peace and justice, know that you are not alone. We are with you. You go with the spirit of love that birthed you, the spirit of love that travels beside you, and the spirit of love that travels inside you. Amen.

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

Our Vision Statement

St. Andrews will be a church that celebrates and lives Christ's universal love in the modern world.

Our Mission Statement

The mission of St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church is to learn and teach the radical and universal love of Jesus Christ by:

- ❖ *Nurturing individual spirituality and growth*
- ❖ *Fostering a community that shares and celebrates the circle of life*
- ❖ *Providing space and time for personal and communal reverence*
- ❖ *Championing the cause of human-kind and courageously acting to overcome injustice*



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