

Sunday Sermon June 21, 2026

Today's Gospel passage is difficult and challenging. Jesus is sending his disciples out into the world to proclaim the Kingdom of God come near, and He is telling them that they will need to sacrifice, and that they will experience suffering, as He did.

The Gospels were written after Jesus' death and resurrection, so the Gospel writers knew that Jesus had experienced rejection, persecution, suffering and death, and that His followers were experiencing the same things as the Gospels were being written. It wasn't a future prediction, it was happening.

And so they recorded Jesus' words about not fearing those who can kill the body, and those who would deny Him before others. They wrote about the sword, and divisions, even in families, for those who would choose to be Jesus' followers, because choosing to follow Jesus was putting those early Christians at odds with the ways of this world.

Jesus was constantly opposed by the religious and political authorities of His day. They saw him as a threat to their power. The compassion and love that He proclaimed and embodied were not just warm, fuzzy feelings, they were the inspiration to take up the cross, to stand up for others, and to sacrifice for other peoples' sake.

Jesus was clear that following Him in the Way of Love involves suffering and sacrifice, challenging the ways of this world in favor of the ways of God. But what does that mean for us, today, in a world that is so very different, and yet so much the same?

My second floor office at St. Paul's in Duluth, where I prepared many sermons, looked out on the rooftops of 4 Catholic Worker houses in our neighborhood. The community is called "Loaves and Fishes" and founded on the principles and practices of Dorothy Day, who started the pacifist movement that combines direct assistance for the poor and homeless with nonviolent action on their behalf.

Loaves and Fishes is a community where people are sheltered and fed, but perhaps more importantly treated as beloved children of God. They are people who have fallen through the cracks. Some guests come out of abusive and unhealthy living situations, some struggle with substance abuse or mental health issues, many are working but simply can't afford safe, decent housing. Regardless – they are welcomed and treated with dignity and respect. Every time I was there, it always felt like the kingdom of God come near.

In addition to this hospitality and assistance, the community is always engaged in nonviolent action on behalf of the marginalized. They lead war protests and take direct action. When homeless people were being arrested for resting on park benches, they went to city hall to challenge the ordinance. When the local hospital was tearing down affordable housing to build parking ramps, they challenged the board to replace the housing that was lost. Most recently they have been very active in opposing ICE and protecting those under threat.

Needless to say, the powers that be are often at odds with the community as they challenge unjust structures and practices. Most people are perfectly fine with them sheltering and feeding the homeless, but can't they just do it quietly?

They face opposition and criticism from civil and religious officials, even from their own families. The Catholic Bishop cut off funding when he deemed them too “inclusive and affirming.” Some of the families of the volunteers ask them “what are you thinking serving there? You need a career, a home of your own.” Sounds a lot like today's Gospel...

Many a day that I sat in my office preparing a sermon, preparing to talk about the Gospel, I would look out on those rooftops and think about what was going on inside – think about how they were living out the Gospel by sheltering and feeding and advocating and building Beloved Community by working

together for a more just, equitable and humane society. I would think about how they were willing to put themselves out there in service and sacrifice, just as Jesus did.

Because the Gospel reminds us that following Him is not always easy or comfortable and that living it out sometimes puts us at odds with the powers that be.

And so this day, I lift up people in communities like Loaves and Fishes as shining examples of people striving to live out Jesus' call to service and sacrifice. But not everyone is called to live and serve in an intentional community like theirs.

So what about the rest of us? There are opportunities all around. Get involved with LIFE or another of our outreach partners like Pine Manor, FISH or All Souls. Provide financial support for organizations and causes doing the work of the Gospel by housing and feeding, advocating and acting on behalf of the marginalized.

Write a letter. Send an email. Make a call. Attend a peaceful protest to challenge unjust policies and structures.

Advocate in your "circle of influence" – we all have one – family, friends, co-workers, neighbors, club members, church members, classmates. When things are being said or done that are antithetical to the Gospel, contrary to Jesus' Way of Love, say so. Stand up for the Gospel.

You may receive some pushback, but you'll join a long line of Christian people going all the way back to Jesus himself, who lived lives of service and sacrifice, and in so doing helped the Kingdom of God to come near.

Amen