

FEB 23, 2025

Marion weekly update

FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

February 16 sermon— “A Bunch of Sickos”

Mark 2:13-21, Luke 6:12-16

Our message this week ties together a hopeful reality, a call to action, and puts it in the context of Jesus' disciples.

In Mark we see Jesus calling Matthew, who apparently hangs around with some ne'er do wells. As Jesus hangs out with them the religious muckity mucks look on with accusatory and criticizing eyes. Jesus knows they are taking issue with the folks he's socializing with and calls them out. He tells them that he hasn't come for the healthy, but the sick. Not the righteous, but the sinners. We'll get more to this in a bit.

For now let's take a look at the disciples. All of them are just like us, a mix of strengths and weaknesses. What they are not are perfect examples of holiness and understanding. They are sinners. They are sick. They graft onto Jesus seeing something in Him worth following. Despite frequently failing to grasp the fullness of His message, nevertheless they forge onward and finally after the resurrection seem to get it. Here they are:

Peter- Peter was arguably the most written about disciple. He was known to be brash, outspoken, and not always getting the point. There was a violent streak in him evidenced by cutting off a servant's ear in Gethsemane. Despite his bravado his courage failed when Jesus was arrested. He mistook Jesus' Messianic identity as a conqueror who couldn't be killed and even argued that very point with Jesus Himself. This sounds a bit arrogant and Jesus set him straight when He said “get behind me Satan.”

James and John- These brothers were called the Sons of Thunder. They were strong headed and had a streak competitive, decisive and somewhat arrogant. These are the two arguing over who was greater, and whose mom asked Jesus to seat them in places of honor. They are also the ones who asked Jesus to reign down fire on a Samaritan village that didn't receive their message. Jesus said “no”.

Philip- Not much negative about this one. He was tested at the feeding of the 5,000 being asked what to do about the hungry mass. He replied with confusion not having an answer. Jesus was planning to feed them Himself anyway. At most perhaps this revealed that not unlike the others Philip had missed just who Jesus is, His power, and His compassion. In John 14 Philip asks Jesus to show them the Father, not grasping that He and the Father are one. Otherwise Philip seems to be an evangelist bringing Greeks to Christ and famously working with an Ethiopian Eunuch to help him understand Isaiah and lead him to Jesus.

Andrew- Another disciple not widely written about, we at least know that he understood to listen to his teacher John the Baptist when Jesus was revealed at His baptism. He then persuaded his brother Simon(Peter) to follow Jesus as well. Without Andrew it's likely Peter wouldn't have come along.

Nathaniel/Bartholamew- While he did eventually come to see Jesus as Messiah(though he was mistaken as to what all this entailed), at first we see prejudice afoot in his heart. Upon hearing that Jesus was from Nazareth his response was “what good can come out of Nazareth?”

Judas/Thaddeus- Not a lot is spoken of this disciple. At the last supper he asks Jesus why He would reveal Himself to them and not the world. Jesus' response is part of letting the disciples know that it is their job to carry the message forward.

James(the lesser)- Nothing is recorded except that he was a disciple/apostle. He is also known as “the lesser”. Perhaps because the other James was more prominent. Regardless, he is listed as both disciple and apostle in Acts.

Simon the Zealot- This Simon was a member of a rebellious group. They were a resistance to Rome and prone to violence and causing all kinds of problems. Multiple times they waged revolts, always coming down on the losing side. They had a hateful and mean streak for the empire and Simon was part of it.

Thomas- Other than being listed as a disciple, Thomas is known for asking for physical proof that Jesus was who He claimed to be post resurrection. History named him “doubting Thomas” as a result. Certainly Thomas doubted. I personally speculate that he was the only one brave enough to give voice to what the others may have been thinking as well. Otherwise, like James, Simon the Zealot, and Judas/Thaddeus Thomas is largely a background character noted primarily in listings of Jesus’ inner twelve.

Matthew/Levi- Matthew was a tax collector. This is the reputation that precedes him when he is called. Known for being dishonest, shady, and in league with Rome as a representative of the empire tax collectors were reviled by the Jews. There is no reason to think Matthew was or was seen as any different. Nevertheless Jesus calls him, and even eats with him and many other “sinners” while the religious snobs look down on Him and attack His reputation and character.

Judas(Iscariot)- The most infamous disciple of them all. A thief. A betrayer. Apparently known from the get go that he would be the one to sell Jesus out. Yet Jesus never ejected him. In fact, he even served him at the last supper.

Judas gets a terrible rap. After his deed he was grief stricken, returned his bribe, and promptly took his own life. Some are convinced that he was never forgiven because it’s never explicitly written that he asked for forgiveness. At the same time there are a lot of things that happened and weren’t written down.

Judas is an incredible case for all of us to look at for inspiration. Think about it. We trust that Jesus knew everything about Judas from the get go. He knew he was a thief and a betrayer. Yet He never got rid of him. Jesus kept him right there with him all along until the very end.

If Jesus can give this kind of grace to Judas. If He can stick with Judas knowing where things would end up, what kind of incredible patience, love, and loyalty can we expect for ourselves? This rabid devotion to His followers is a lesson for us as we walk with each other in our own messiness. It is also a lesson to those who would exclude people from our fellowship because of some misgiving or peevishness about another’s struggles.

Some might argue, “well Jesus knew that it all had to happen for salvation to take place, so that’s why He kept Judas around.” Maybe. This argument is essentially that Jesus knew that whatever bad Judas might do God would make something great out of it. If this is the case, this argument falls flat. Yes, there will be the potential for some to come into our midst who might cause a problem, but if God can take the betrayal of Judas and turn it into the greatness of salvation, certainly God can take whatever damage someone might do and use it for something grander.

This also returns us to the Mark passage about Jesus coming for the sick.

If we are all sinners, then we are all sick. The religious folks looking on with criticism and resentment were just as sick as the ones Jesus was eating with. What was the difference?

Just like today, the first step to getting better is recognizing we are sick, that we have a problem. Without owning our illness there is no motivation to go to the doctor, who has the cure. It’s no different with our sickness of sin. Until we own it, no matter what our statements of faith happen to be on the outside, we haven’t done a thing to be saved from it by Jesus. We can’t truly ask Him if we don’t truly own and take responsibility for our sin.

One of my great frustrations is watching Christianity today and seeing that religious folks haven’t come too far. There are still plenty of people who claim to follow the one who sat with sinners and look at others who sit with the ones they see as sinners with resentment and judgment.

It is my experience that you can tell how much someone has truly owned and taken responsibility for their own sin by the way they judge the sin of others. The harsher the judgment, the more unwilling to understand someone else’s predicament, the less welcoming, the less that individual has faced up to their own sin. The less they have genuinely worked with Jesus to see and overcome.

That may sound harsh, but Luke 7 tells us

44 Then he turned toward the woman and said to Simon, “Do you see this woman? I came into your house. You did not give me any water for my feet, but she wet my feet with her tears and wiped them

with her hair. 45 You did not give me a kiss, but this woman, from the time I entered, has not stopped kissing my feet. 46 You did not put oil on my head, but she has poured perfume on my feet. 47 Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven—as her great love has shown. But whoever has been forgiven little loves little.”

The love and grace we are willing to extend has everything to do with the forgiveness we receive. If we aren't facing our own imperfection we're not asking forgiveness, and so our love is shallow. Our gratitude is limited.

On the other hand bravely confronting our faults and humbly taking them to Jesus, accepting His grace and strength to grow beyond ourselves gives us an uncommon gratitude. It promotes a deep love that we want to extend to others so that they can experience that same grace and freedom from their own struggles.

The sad part of modern faith is that while there is no fear to be had coming to God vulnerable and bare, to do so with people is terrifying. While God's grace is abundant, that's not necessarily true of people. While Jesus might cling to Judas despite his failings, many today would boot him to the curb. Judas was 1 of 12 plus many more. Look at what happened with the other 11 plus many more. Jesus' love and compassion on them led them to powerful lives of life and world changing faith and ministry. It wasn't the judgmental religious folks that experienced this. The ones who already thought they were righteous, that they were “healthy” had no need for the healer, the Savior.

Who will we be? Will we be the religious muckity mucks or will we join the bunch of sickos?

I can tell you I've been with both and I'll take the sickos looking for a healer any day of the week.

They are the ones with whom we can walk arm and arm knowing that they will help us as we help them. We can live in mutual understanding.

Then we pray and trust that others who are struggling themselves will see us. They will see the grace as well as the growth our faith has produced. Our simple presence is both a rich salve of love and compassion yet at the same time and accountability that staying stuck in whatever problematic predicament we find ourselves in isn't where we are called to stay or be. We are called to move forward towards Jesus and living into His image.

Keep in mind that if someone calls you sick you can respond with “yup, I am, but I also know where to get healed.”

None of us have the same illness. We all sin differently. The cure is the same. Embrace the love, grace, and transforming power of Christ. Be the love, grace, and transformation of Christ in our own lives so that others can see it and join us along the way.

BIBLE STUDY 2 Samuel 11

Chapter 11 is incredibly well known. It is David's adultery with Bathsheba. Interestingly, the chapter itself is much more involved with David's treatment of her husband, Uriah. Also telling is that Bathsheba is mentioned by name only once here, and not much attention is given to her. This is telling. Bathsheba is merely, in this instance, an object in the story of David's sin, which this chapter is really about. Treating Bathsheba as an object is very much what got David into trouble. Sadly even today women are treated merely as objects for a man's amusement far too often.

David sees her bathing on a roof, has an urge, then indulges it. It is important not to fall into the trap that too many have in laying even the slightest bit of blame on Bathsheba. She was merely bathing. She was cleansing herself from menstruation, which was a ritual custom and necessity for the Israelite people. This detail is important as it confirms beyond a doubt that prior to her incident with David she could not have been pregnant.

Sending people to fetch Bathsheba wasn't just a polite request. David is exerting his royal power. Being summoned by the king is not optional. Nor is there any indication that she knew why she was being called. Despite finding her married, and to one of his own “30 mighty men” of renown, David nevertheless has his way with Bathsheba. Nowhere is there any sense that there was a choice offered to her. Nowhere is there any sense that there was a way for her to safely back out of the engagement.

This is David aggressively asserting himself as king. It is a strong warning to anyone who ascends to a place of influence and/or power. Idleness can easily lead to temptation. Lust is a powerful force. Perhaps most dangerous is the seductive influence of power. Knowing one has the authority to get anything desired isn't a far jump from assuming that anything one desires is acceptable and deserved. This is a reality that has continued to pervade throughout history to our present day.

Once the encounter is past, David hasn't use for her. We know this because he doesn't seem to have any sense of her until she sends word to him. She is pregnant. David is the only candidate for the father.

Immediately David goes into cover up mode. What unfolds next is another cautionary tale. When mistakes are made, the natural urge is to avoid being found out. It's embarrassing and runs the risk of consequences we don't want. The temptation is to try and manipulate circumstances in order to keep the misdeed from becoming known.

Unfortunately once the covering begins it takes on a life of its own. Often as time goes on it is necessary to continue to add on to the lies and actions of the cover to keep it hidden. Sometimes the lies to cover the lies take on even more malicious and damaging traits. Sometimes worse things are done to cover up the mistake than the mistake is bad itself. Bad becomes worse. This is what David finds out. Later he will also find out that as the bad becomes worse with the cover up, so consequences compound and guilt increases.

Uriah, her husband, is summoned from battle. David isn't shy about his intention, though what is plain to us likely isn't to anyone else. He asks about the battle and Joab. He encourages Uriah to take some rest and to go home and "wash his feet." This is a euphemism for "sleep with your wife". David is trying to manipulate circumstances to make it look like Bathsheba is pregnant by her husband.

Notice that Bathsheba still isn't included in any of this planning or plot. David hatches the scheme. We don't know if Bathsheba is even aware of Uriah's presence back from battle. How would she have responded had her husband shown up at the door? Would she have let him know what had happened? Would she have kept silent and unwittingly gone along with David's plan? We don't nor will we ever know.

Uriah doesn't bite. His integrity is too great. He is a lone soldier given reprieve for no reason. While his comrades suffer and live in discomfort he refuses to enjoy himself. He will not enjoy the creature comforts of home while the army is in battle.

David has Uriah stay another day. He gets Uriah drunk hoping that this will persuade him to go home and sleep with his wife. Not so. Uriah will not be moved.

Next comes something revealing a desperation and uncommon coldness on David's part. He writes to Joab asking him to put Uriah in the heat of the most violent part of the battle and then have the men pull back leaving him to be killed. What's worse? He gives the letter to Uriah himself to deliver it. Uriah carries his own death warrant as a reward for conducting himself with honor before a dishonorable king.

Things unfold not quite as David imagines. Like many who plan the demise of someone else in the midst of chaotic circumstances they give orders without fully grasping all that's really going on. David gave an order without fully grasping what was happening, or could happen, in the ongoing fighting. Somehow in the midst of Uriah being killed, the Israelites had pushed to the wall of the city Rabbah and that's where the harshest fighting would be. Not only was Uriah killed, but some of David's servants as well.

We know that this would disturb David because of Joab's instructions to the messenger. David would be furious and criticize the fighting being so close to the city wall where archers and people from above could more easily pick soldiers off. Why? Probably because some of his own men had fallen. What would persuade his anger to subside? Hearing that Uriah was also among the dead.

The problems with David's sin pile up. Bathsheba is pregnant. He tries to manipulate Uriah. Not being able to do so David resorts to a murderous plan foolishly thinking that Uriah would be the only casualty. Not so. His own men would be victim to the plot designed to cover up his sin.

No matter how slick we think we are, there will always be collateral damage and consequence when we engage in plans to cover our mistakes and misdeeds. How much are we willing to endure?

David encourages Joab that these deaths are the misfortunes of war. An honest question is “who is David trying to convince?” Is it Joab or himself? Perhaps David is trying to cover his own conscience. “Well, Uriah may have been killed anyway. It is war after all.”

When Bathsheba hears of her husband’s death she properly observes the ritual mourning. There is nothing to indicate that she knows anything about her husband’s death other than that it took place in battle. David sends for her after the time is done and marries her.

Once again there is no sense that Bathsheba is given an option. That said, perhaps this was to her some form of relief that the actual father would be present and she wouldn’t be left alone, with child, and having to navigate what that might look like in her time and place.

In David’s own eyes he has now succeeded. Now the pregnancy is covered. He and his wife consummated their marriage and as luck would have it conceived right away. There is a catch.

At the end of the chapter(or beginning of the next depending on the translation)we see that what David did was evil in God’s sight.

Any time we roll the dice on bad decisions there are things out of our control. These are the things that complicate matters. They author our consequences, our guilt, and our undoing. In David’s case there are three main examples of this.

David couldn’t control that Bathsheba got pregnant. He could control her location by summoning her and even to a large degree her assent(if not consent) to sleep with him with his royal authority. Her pregnancy he didn’t see on the horizon.

David couldn’t control Uriah’s honor and integrity. No matter what he did to try and manipulate Uriah to sleep with Bathsheba, Uriah’s integrity held fast. One might wonder if David felt some sense of deep shame when confronted with the honor of the very man whose wife he had sinned with. Uriah’s integrity was not in David’s power, and the consequences would build.

David couldn’t control how God viewed this situation. It’s likely that David was breathing a sigh of relief once it was all over with. No one knew the full story. Bathsheba knew what David had done with her, but not with her husband. Uriah didn’t have a clue. Joab only knew he had a strange order to follow. David was free to marry Bathsheba and who would know? God would. God was not pleased and we will see in chapter 12 how that turns out for David.

In everything, we must remember that it isn’t people that we are trying to please or persuade. It is God. We all have temptation. Resisting it always yields a better result than not resisting. Confession quickly after a mistake is made tends to be superior to trying to hide it over and over again. In the end God is never fooled. If we follow God not only is a natural consequence likely to come from mistakes and covering them. There is also the matter of conscience that haunts us the greater the nature of the mistake. Many have said that there is no price to be put on peace of mind. I would imagine David would be in agreement.