

Sermon for Sunday August 16, 2020, 11th Sunday of Pentecost
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May the words of my mouth and the meditations of each of our hearts be acceptable before you O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

I have had camp on the brain lately. . .

Maybe because it is the sticky part of the summer

or we are currently doing a bikeathon to support Luther Park

But camp was a big part of my life growing up all the way into college

Forgive me if I have already shared this story. .

But the summer before 6th grade- was a pivotal time for me.

My body was changing and life was weird

and even that year at camp was not much fun

There was a girl in our cabin who was super sassy and mean to everyone

and at one point she said- “Sticks and stones can break my bones but words will never hurt me.”

That summer at camp- I also got my first terrible nickname- Crisco- named for the vegetable lard- because I was more round than my skinny friends.

6th grade girls can be so mean to each other- and of course as much as we want these words to make no difference- we know the opposite is reality words hurt.

The intention behind our words have real meaning

Even if we never say them out loud- if our brain is thinking these unkind thoughts- they affect the way we treat each other.

Today we are tasked with the 8th commandment

Bearing false witness against our neighbor.

This is concept sounds strange and so ... I am grateful for our African descent commentary's help:

“We should be so respectful and in awe of God that we do not lie to one another or bear false witness against one another. Besides straight-up, outright lying, these are some ways in which we live and bear false witness today: using white lies to “protect” someone, thinking you will do more harm than good by telling the truth; telling people what they want to hear instead of what they need to hear; failing to tell something that ought to be told for the common good (snitching actually helps the community become stronger, not weaker); telling partial truths that make you look good; talking about people behind their backs; betraying others by revealing secrets they shared with you in confidence; and passing along gossip that maligns or destroys someone’s character.

People of African descent such as Emmett Till and George Stinney lost their lives due to allegations that lacked proof or were false. At 14 years old, Till was lynched in Mississippi in 1955 for allegedly offending a white woman in a grocery store. Also at 14 years of age, Stinney

was executed in South Carolina in 1944 for allegedly killing two white youngsters. Furthermore, greed and false statements have threatened the lives of African Americans in other ways. For example, people of African descent made up the majority of the populations of Flint, MI in 2014, when the city changed the source of its water supply. Despite ensuing complaints about corrosive and lead-tainted water, officials were reticent to address the residents' concerns."

The 8th commandment is really all about attacking the character of our neighbor. . .
And this is actually what Jesus does today in our gospel
This is one of those gospel texts most preachers avoid because who wants to talk about a Jesus who is not gracious and lovely??
who wants to talk about a grumpy, racist Jesus??
and yet- it is in scripture- not just once but twice- here in Matthew and also in Mark
So we have to deal with it.

Perhaps Jesus is tired.
His cousin was just beheaded. .
He keeps trying to get away and rest BUT the crowds keep finding him
the bumbling disciples keep asking pesky questions
and today story is no different.
Jesus tries to get away and then this foreigner woman starts shouting him
Have mercy on me- Please help me.
Jesus tries to ignore her and the disciples say- Send her away. She is annoying us
and then Jesus says I was only set to the lost sheep of Israel . . .aka- I'm not here to help you.
and then she comes even closer- Please help me.
and then Jesus says the line we all wish we didn't know about:
It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs.
In this cringe worthy moment- Jesus is not loving or compassionate- he calls her a common racial slur of the time- a dog.

In text study- we went back and forth about this
Did Jesus do this intentionally to bring to light the way that people talked to each other today?
Or was Jesus really being racist here?
unfortunately – we don't have a time machine.
I cannot go back and do interviews or capture intentions by watching a video retake play by play
All we have is the fact that out of the thousands of interactions Jesus had with people, this story was thought to be important enough to be written down in two gospels.

The turning point comes next- because this fierce mama bear does not give up.

Her child has been suffering too long to let hurtful words get in her way.

Yes I may be a dog, but even dogs get to eat eventually.

And in that moment of tenacity and bravery- something opens up for Jesus.

He says- Great is your faith. Let it be done for you as you wish.

And the woman's daughter is healed.

And from here Jesus' whole ministry changes.

Jesus' healing and feeding and teaching starts to include not just the local Jewish folks, but everyone. the lame, the maimed, the blind, the mute and many many others.

While we often talk about God as the omnipresent being who never changes. . .here is a text that begs us to think twice about that concept

Jesus, God in flesh, changes his mind.

Robin DiAngelo, professor and author on anti racism work in the United States, in her book White Fragility writes. . .

“In my workshops, I often ask people of color, “How often have you given white people feedback on our unaware yet inevitable racism? How often has that gone well for you?” Eye-rolling, head-shaking, and outright laughter follow, along with the consensus of rarely, if ever. I then ask, “What would it be like if you could simply give us feedback, have us graciously receive it, reflect, and work to change that behavior?” Recently a man of color sighed and said, “It would be revolutionary.” I ask my fellow whites to consider the profundity of that response. It would be revolutionary if we could receive, reflect, and work to change the behavior.”

We all have racists tendencies.

We cannot escape it – it is entrenched in every part of our life and as white people we are taught not to even think about it.

sometimes we hear this defined as implicit bias- subconsciously- we are trained from birth to think of people of color as lesser than, folks to be afraid or leery of, keep an eye on and this list could go on and on

And perhaps this was true for Jesus as well. . . in his day and age- women, especially foreign Canaanite women, were the other, the ones to be treated less than human.

But this powerful invisible force does not stop this mama from crossing the barrier and challenging Jesus to see her as a human

And in the end- he does.

and it is revolutionary.

not just for her but for her daughter

and for the disciples, and for the crowds to come in the chapters ahead and really for us because we too are now included in the gospel story.

The flipside of the 8th commandment according to Martin Luther goes like this- *We are come to our neighbors' defense, speak well of them, and interpret everything they do in the best possible light.*

And this brings me back around to camp

This time it is my first summer as a camp counselor working with middle schoolers- my very first week, that very first night- we built a covenant with our campers- an updated ten commandments- rules to live by in community

My co counselor Katie- suggested this as one of the first rules to live by. One downer equals two uppers.

For every insult, teasing word thrown at a camper- you must share two good qualities about that person.

A slightly awkward goofy concept- but I wonder if it could be revolutionary for us and help us lean into the 8th commandment. . .

Every time we notice implicit bias/ racist thoughts in our self- could we pause. take a breath and remind our heart and brains- that people of color are our siblings in Christ, full of incredible unique strengths and beautiful gifts we need in our community

This is not easy.

and yet I feel like this work is needed now more than ever.

It is time to pause and pay attention to the way we live and interact with the world around us.

To hear our siblings when they call us out

and say I hear you. I am sorry and I will work to be better.

For the name God calls all of us is beloved.

and so it is our work too – to call ourselves- God's beloved. and to proclaim that name for one another.

Amen. Thanks be to God.