

JESUS WENT THERE (sermon by Pastor Michael Roehl)

A 11-5-17 Isaiah 55:1-3, 6-7 Romans 5:6-11 Psalm 111 Responsive Reading: from Psalm 51
Hymns: 537, 279, 360, 15

Grace, mercy and peace be yours in knowing that the perfect life and innocent death of Jesus Christ has paid the full penalty for your sins, and that even now—at this very moment—you stand holy, faultless, blameless in His sight. Amen.

Dear fellow Christians:

In his Sermon on the Mount Jesus introduced many of the truths he wanted to teach by saying, “*You have heard it said...*” He would then quote a popular religious or quasi-religious phrase of the day, proceed to shred the misconception connected with that phrase, and then go on to clarify His divine truth: “*You have heard it said, ‘Eye for eye and tooth for tooth,’ but I say to you...*” and so on (cf. Matthew 5).

We take our cue from our Savior today by saying, “You have heard it said, ‘Words can hurt,’ but God says to you, ‘Sometimes words have to hurt. Sometimes saying something or doing something that might hurt someone’s feelings is exactly the right thing to do, exactly what is necessary.’” That was also part of Jesus’ mission on earth to bring the sword, rather than peace (cf. Matthew 10:34).

Don’t expect the world to understand this. Our national mindset seems to be slouching toward the crippling notion that all pain and discomfort of every kind can and should be eliminated from life. Human beings should never have to do anything they don’t want to do—nothing that they find arduous or unpleasant. If I find work too difficult, others should supply both what I need *and* what I want. It takes too much work to bathe and dress myself, so I’ll just go to Wal-Mart unwashed and in my pajamas. I find it uncomfortable to exercise, so I’ll just wait until they come up with a pill that will allow me to eat whatever I want, as much as I want, remain sedentary, and still be physically fit.

It was inevitable that this destructive, totally-detached-from-reality, mindset would eventually seep also into mankind’s religious convictions. Modern religion, to many, now means never having to say no to any natural impulse or desire. Nor should anyone else ever tell me that what I am doing is wrong. That sort of thing is hurtful and, therefore, represents the worst sin imaginable in the new “Religion of No Discomfort.”

This is the growing trend we are going to examine in light of our text. There we will see how Jesus Himself felt about this idea and how it relates to the message of Lent. That text is the Word of God found recorded in the Gospel account of John, chapter 4:

Jesus said to her, “Go, call your husband, and come here.” The woman answered and said, “I have no husband.” Jesus said to her, “You have well said, ‘I have no husband,’ for you have had five husbands, and the one whom you now have is not your husband; in that you spoke truly. “The woman said to Him, “Sir, I perceive that You are a prophet. Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, and you Jews say that in Jerusalem is the place where one ought to worship.” Jesus

said to her, “*Woman, believe Me, the hour is coming when you will neither on this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, worship the Father. You worship what you do not know; we know what we worship, for salvation is of the Jews. But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.*” The woman said to Him, “*I know that Messiah is coming*” (who is called Christ). “*When He comes, He will tell us all things.*” Jesus said to her, “*I who speak to you am He.*” (John 4:16-26)

These are God’s words. In humble reverence we pray, “Sanctify us by Your truth, O Lord. Your Word is truth.” Amen.

Throughout the Bible God tells us that He wants our Christian faith to be at the center of everything we do and say. He wants us to talk about it when we get up, when we work, when we play, and again before we go to bed. Our faith is supposed to permeate every aspect of our lives. His summary of the focal point of our very existence is to share our Christian faith with the world (cf. Matthew 28:19-20, Mark 16:15).

Have you ever heard the expression “Don’t go there!”? Maybe you’ve heard it more times than you care to remember. Hollywood loves it, and whatever they love they use, and whatever they use, society adopts. It’s used when someone refuses to talk about something that is uncomfortable, embarrassing, or in some way hurtful. The underlying thought is not whether the topic is right or wrong. The point is simply that the person doesn’t want to talk about it. He would rather everyone pretend that the problem doesn’t exist.

The problem, of course, is that there is nothing whatsoever in God’s Word that leads us to believe that Jesus bought into the notion of “Don’t go there.” In fact, just the opposite is true, and it’s not because He was ignorant of the concept. He just recognized it for the nonsense that it is. This is the basic substance of the Devil’s temptation in the wilderness that Jesus rejected as He began His public ministry. It was Satan saying, “Self-denial? Don’t go there. Turn the rocks into bread. Doing things God’s way instead of Your own way? Don’t go there. Do whatever *You* want and make God conform to *Your* actions. Suffering and dying to save the world? Don’t go there. Worship me and I’ll give it all to You without all that pain and misery.”

Nor did He hear it just from the Devil. Remember when He told His own disciples that He was going to Jerusalem to suffer and die to pay mankind’s sin debt? What was their response? “Don’t go there.”

But Jesus always did “Go there,” didn’t He? He went even when it caused Him abject misery the likes of which we could never fully comprehend. The first place to which Jesus went but which Satan opposed was earth itself. The Devil knew full well that mankind had one chance at salvation. Jesus had to come to earth to pay our sin debt. Mankind had to be *rescued*. Not enabled, not guided, not empowered. Rescued. For that to happen, Jesus had to leave the perfection of Heaven, place Himself under the demands of the Law by being born a human being, live a perfect life, and then offer that life to pay what mankind could not. Satan’s counsel: “Don’t go there.” Jesus went.

What was the next “Don’t go there”? You just heard it, and it came not just from Satan but from Jesus’ own disciples. They begged Him not to go to Jerusalem. By doing so, they were pleading with Him not to offer His life in payment for their sins. They implored Him not to walk the path to the cross and thus open Heaven’s door for mankind. And why not? Because that way was much too difficult, far too painful, way too unpleasant. “Don’t go there.” Jesus went.

No one needs to remind you what would have happened if Jesus hadn’t gone. No one needs to remind you, therefore, what would have happened had Jesus bought into modern man’s idea that all things unpleasant are to be avoided at all costs. No one needs to remind you of the *result* of the fact that Jesus *did* go there.

Or do they? Do we? Do we need to be reminded? Do we need to remind each other? Absolutely. Every day.

Today we remind ourselves and each other by examining one more “Don’t go there.” It involves Jesus’ encounter with the Samaritan woman described in our text. Many lessons are taught there, but we are going to look at one in particular. The woman whom Jesus met was living in sin. She’d had had five husbands and was, when Jesus met her, living in sin with a man who was not her husband.

Can you imagine what our society today would have said to Jesus the moment He began to contemplate bringing up this particular subject? They would have shouted, in deafening unison, “Don’t go there!” They would have pleaded, threatened, tried to shame Him into anything but that. They would have screamed at Him, “Judge not! Judge not! Judge not!” Jesus went there anyway. He dove in, all-in, head first. He began with a simple, “*Go call your husband.*” And He followed up by simply dragging her shameful sin into the light of day: “*You are right in saying, ‘I have no husband’ for you have had five husbands, and the one you now have is not your husband. What you have said is true.*”

How could Jesus have made such a mistake? How could He have stumbled so clumsily into what was obviously a most disagreeable and uncomfortable confrontation? How could He have committed so great a social faux pas? Didn’t He know how the game was played? Didn’t He know that He was supposed to just pretend that such things weren’t happening; or if they were happening He was supposed to act and speak as if all was well? Jesus, obviously, knew all that the world expected of Him in that situation. The fact that He went there anyway teaches us a vital lesson. He loved this woman—loved her so much that He wanted her with Him in Heaven for all eternity. Because of that love, He wouldn’t allow her to slide quietly into the night of eternal torment. He knew full well that saving faith cannot coexist in a heart that has given itself over to sin. Her sin was as a great, infectious boil that had to be lanced if she was to survive. It was unpleasant in the extreme, but absolutely necessary.

The woman’s reaction is typical. She did what most of us sinners do when first confronted with our sins: she tried to change the subject, rationalize, or, better yet, attack her accuser. The woman, no doubt ashamed, seems to try a combination of all three: “*Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, and you Jews say that in Jerusalem is the place where one ought to worship.*” [v. 20] What in the world does this have to do with the woman’s five husbands and live-in

boyfriend? What did it have to do with her sin? Nothing at all. That's the point. The woman rolls a rationalization, an accusation, and a change of the subject all into one big evasion. In effect she is telling Jesus that she would like to repent and change her ways, but she can't because the religious leaders—including Jesus Himself—have her so confused about whether she needs to go to Jerusalem or to Samaria to repent. In her twisted, sin-enslaved mind she is actually blaming Jesus for her ongoing sin. Since He is a prophet, He is a spiritual leader and, therefore, a part of the problem that's keeping her from changing her ways. It's just not her fault.

Jesus proceeds to tear down all of the woman's defenses, to redirect all of her diversions. Finally, having had all of the many layers of deception and denial stripped away, the Master knows when the Law has done its work for the woman turns to the heart of the matter: "*I know that Messiah is coming*" (who is called Christ). "*When He comes, He will tell us all things.*"

Jesus evidently recognized not only that the woman had been crushed under the weight of her sin. He gives the woman one of the clearest and most direct statements we find in the Bible up to this point in Jesus' life: "*I who speak to you am He.*"

Because Jesus "went there," and only because He went there, the end of our text is truly a happy ending. The seed, the Law and Gospel planted by Jesus, came to life in the Samaritan woman. The woman then became a missionary among her own people and through the testimony of this one woman the first of many generations was turned to the Lord Jesus. Truly this is one of the greatest studies found in the Bible on how to reach those who are dying; yet if you break it down into its basic components, what do you find? Simple Law and Gospel that are honestly, lovingly, and forthrightly applied. How exciting to recognize that these are the very same tools we have been given to carry out this same work today.

For the love of souls, you and I need to "go there." Sinful, rebellious mankind needs, not just the Gospel but also the Law. We need to reach out to those caught up in sin precisely because the Gospel has no meaning or relevance until the Law has done its work.

Remember, Jesus' own disciples begged Him not to go to Jerusalem. Had it been up to mankind—even Jesus' own friends—He would not have made the trip to Jerusalem, would not have suffered and died there, and would not have rescued all of mankind from its sin. What possible motive could His disciples have had for trying to prevent Jesus from going where we and they needed Him to go? Why would they possibly try to deter Him from fulfilling His life's mission? The answer is that they regarded His mission as too hard, too unpleasant, too disagreeable. In their minds there had to be a better way, an easier way. Obviously, there wasn't.

The problem was not that they wanted to spare their Friend and Savior the misery that awaited Him in Jerusalem. Jesus Himself asked that very thing of His Father: "*O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will*" (Matthew 26:39). Where the disciples erred was when they allowed their emotions and their own short-sighted selfishness to dictate their actions. They failed to acknowledge the hard cold fact of life that sometimes there is no other way but the hard way. Not everything that is unpleasant can be avoided—not in a sin-broken world.

Jesus refused to fall into the trap. He went there and by doing so He walked the one incredibly difficult path that could bring forgiveness and eternal life to mankind.

God grant each of us the strength and determination to go where God's Word directs. No one is ever saved by pretending that sin isn't sin, that it doesn't matter, and that it is compatible with true Christian faith. The very fact that Jesus went where He did—to earth itself, then to Jerusalem, and finally to the cross to pay our sin debt—all proves that sin brings a consequence that cannot be ignored. The good news is that by doing what He did, Jesus solved that sin problem for every single human being.

God bless us with such wisdom, understanding, love, and resolve, especially when we contemplate our Savior's death on the cross. It was the necessary step in the victory He won for us over sin, death, and Satan; and He went there for you. Amen.