

Sunday March 3, 2024
First Lesson: Matthew 11: 28-30
Gospel Lesson: John 2: 13-22
Sermon Series: Enduring Corruption
Preacher: Kirstie J. Engel

- Good morning Beloved Community!
- Today we are continuing with our Lenten sermon series Enduring.
- Every week leading up until Resurrection Sunday, which lands on March 31 this year, our Lenten journey will be a time of engaging a new spiritual growth opportunity to talk about and learn from so that on that great Resurrection Sunday, we will be able to look over our time together and celebrate the liberation that has come as a result of us doing this vital work together.
- The topic we are invited to endure this week is the topic of **corruption**.
- To ensure that we are all on the same page, let's define corruption.
- According to the online dictionary, corruption is defined as dishonest or fraudulent conduct by those in power, typically involving bribery.

- From a biblical perspective, corruption has a similar meaning.
- The Bible teaches that corruption can manifest as moral decay or the deterioration of ethical values. It often involves turning away from God's commands and engaging in sinful behavior. The concept is prevalent throughout both the Old and New Testaments in which I will aim to break down into three themes that we may encounter.
- The first theme where corruption can be observed in biblical stories is under the umbrella of **dishonesty and deceit**;
- Corruption in this instance is frequently associated with dishonesty, deceit, and fraudulent practices. The Bible emphasizes the importance of honesty, integrity, and truthful communication.

An Example: Proverbs 11:1 states, "The Lord detests dishonest scales, but accurate weights find favor with him" (NIV).

- The second theme where corruption can be observed in biblical stories is under the umbrella of **exploitation and oppression**.
- Corruption in this instance can be reflected in systems of oppression, exploitation, and unfair practices. The Bible condemns the mistreatment of the vulnerable and calls for justice and righteousness.

Example: In the Old Testament, the prophets often spoke out against corruption and injustice. Isaiah 1:17 exhorts, "Learn to do right; seek justice. Defend the oppressed. Take up the cause of the fatherless; plead the case of the widow" (NIV).

- Lastly, the third theme where corruption can be observed in biblical stories is under the umbrella of **idolatry**.
- The Bible associates corruption with turning away from the worship of the one true God and engaging in idolatry. Worshiping false gods or placing material possessions above spiritual values is seen as corrupting.

Example: Exodus 20:3-4 emphasizes the commandment against idolatry: "You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below" (NIV).

- On Wednesday Night applying the Sermon to life class, the number one question that I posed to our students was to discern what was corrupt about the story presented to us in John?
- What was so corrupt about what was going on in our story this morning where it caused Jesus to flip the tables over in the synagogue?
- In this passage, Jesus enters the temple in Jerusalem and finds people selling oxen, sheep, and doves, as well as money changers sitting at their tables.
- He becomes upset and makes a whip of cords, driving out the animals and overturning the tables of the money changers.

- He also rebukes those who were selling, saying, "Take these things away; do not make my Father's house a house of trade."
- The issue at hand was not necessarily corruption in the sense of personal gain or bribery but rather a perceived desecration of the sacred space.
- You see Church family, the temple was meant to be a house of prayer and worship, and Jesus was expressing his displeasure with the commercial activities taking place within it.
- **The money changers were likely there to exchange foreign currency for the required temple currency, and the sellers provided sacrificial animals for worship.**
- Jesus' actions were a symbolic gesture, emphasizing the importance of reverence and true worship over commercial activities within the sacred space.
- For my bible scholars out there, you may also be interested in learning that this same story appears also

in the book of Matthew, Mark and Luke, with different details being named and emphasized.

- Furthermore in each story, this idea of corruption was emphasized slightly differently for each disciple;
- **For Matthew**, the corruption highlighted in this passage is related to the commercial activities taking place in the temple.
- **Money changers were likely taking advantage of the worshipers**, charging unfair exchange rates for the required temple currency. Additionally, those selling sacrificial animals may have been exploiting people by overpricing the animals needed for religious rituals.
- **For Mark, the corruption** emphasized in this passage is similar to that in Matthew and John. The money changers and sellers of sacrificial animals **were likely engaging in exploitative practices**. They might have been charging exorbitant rates for exchanging currency or selling animals, taking advantage of the worshipers who had come to fulfill their religious duties.

- Finally, for Luke, the corruption in this passage is akin to what is described in the other Gospels. **The money changers and sellers of animals in the temple were likely engaging in exploitative practices, taking advantage of the worshipers.** By overturning the tables and driving out those involved in commercial activities, Jesus expresses his disapproval of the distortion of the temple's purpose.
- I felt it important to highlight these four disciples' experiences because it is in each story that we are witnessing how a disciple of today might begin to take steps in what it takes **to endure corruption.**
- If I can summarize it into one sentence, the way you and I begin to take steps to endure the corruption that exists, **you and I must be willing to confess that the corruption has happened!**
- You see, what is impressive to me is that no matter what gospel one might choose to learn what happened on that day in the synagogue from, **the greatest miracle is**

that each disciple was able to clearly name that corruption happened.

- You see Church, it is my observation that societies often grapple with various forms of corruption, and some types may be overlooked or tolerated due to a variety of reasons.
- For example **there is systemic corruption that exists** where corruption is embedded within institutions, bureaucracies, or systems that can be harder to detect and address.
- It might involve practices like bribery, nepotism, or favoritism within government, corporate, or other organizational structures....**thereby confining people from being able to name that it is happening.**
- **There is corporate corruption that exists** that involves unethical practices within corporations, such as embezzlement, fraud, or environmental exploitation, that might be downplayed or overlooked due to the economic interests involved.

- **There is silent discrimination that exists**, that involves discrimination based on race, gender, sexual orientation, or other factors that may persist in subtle forms.
- I'm referring to microaggressions, biased hiring practices, or unequal pay often overlooked or dismissed, perpetuating systemic inequalities.
- **There is healthcare disparities that exist** that involves unequal access to healthcare, medical corruption, that furthermore allows discriminatory practices in healthcare settings to be tolerated, leading to disparities in health outcomes.
- **There is education inequities that exists** that creates disparities in educational opportunities, unequal access to quality education, or discriminatory practices within educational institutions may persist without adequate attention.
- Church family, this is a long way of my naming that wherever people exist, unfortunately corruption exists!

- However, as long as we continue to remain silent about it;
- As long as we continue to do absolutely nothing about it,
- Then these patterns of corruption will insidiously become our norm;
- Thereby providing another plausible reason for us this morning why Jesus' reaction was so intense—
- You see Church, when Jesus overturned the tables in the temple, it was a wake up call to all of humanity—but especially to those of us who've chosen to endure discipleship—
- **By overturning the tables**, Jesus challenged people to reassess their spiritual priorities.
- For the temple, intended as a place of worship and connection with God, had become a marketplace where profit took precedence over spiritual growth. Therefore it was this act served as a wake-up call, urging people to refocus on the true essence of their faith and relationship with the divine.

- **By overturning the tables**—Jesus' actions highlighted the importance of justice and integrity in matters of faith. The exploitation within the temple, with merchants taking advantage of the people's religious obligations, underscored the need for honesty, fairness, and ethical conduct in all aspects of life, including religious practices.
- **By overturning the tables**—it was a rejection of religious hypocrisy. The leaders of the time often prioritized external displays of piety while neglecting the internal aspects of faith, such as love, compassion, and humility. Flipping the tables symbolized a rejection of empty religious practices and a call for authenticity in one's relationship with God.
- **Finally, overturning the tables** emphasized that God desires a genuine relationship with God's people rather than mere adherence to rituals.

- **It was a wake-up call** to move beyond superficial observances and engage in heartfelt, sincere worship that stems from a deep love and reverence for God.
- The ultimate confession that our Wednesday night class was able to name was that all of this corruption within our news, within our politics, within our churches, households, workplaces and more— are wearing us down;
- All of this un-dealt, often unspoken corruption has taken a toll and begun to drain the human soul— -
- So it is time for us **to have our tables overturned—**
- To allow the resounding boom to wake us up-
- Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed— **52** in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. **53** For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality.

- My personal take is perhaps this process is supposed to start now....
- Alas yes the process of sanctification begins within us all now--
- **Now is the time** to really see one another,
- **Now is the time** to really cherish one another,
- **Now is the time** to appreciate one another,
- **Now is the time** to act on our love for one another!
- **54 For it is when** the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: “Death has been swallowed up in victory.”^[a]

55

“Where, O death, is your victory?

Where, O death, is your sting?”^[b]

56 The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. **57** But thanks be to God! Who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Let the Church Say Amen!

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