

Sunday, March 24, 2024

**FIRST LESSON:** Matthew 11:28–30

**GOSPEL READING:** Mark 14: 1–9

Sermon Series: Enduring: Envy

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 Envy.
- Now some of you may find it a little odd that the topic of envy would even play in the role of Palm Sunday.
- For, Palm Sunday is a significant day in the Christian calendar that commemorates Jesus Christ's triumphal

entry into Jerusalem, as recorded in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

- However, may I suggest to you this morning that not everyone who was proclaiming “Hosanna, Hosanna in the Highest” upon Jesus’s triumphal entry were coming from a good place.
- For as the O’jays song “Backstabbers”, (They smilin' in your face), All the time, they want to take your place... The back stabbers—
- I stopped by to suggest that some of the same dynamics were going on in this day as well!
- While envy may not be explicitly mentioned in the biblical accounts of Palm Sunday, there are elements of jealousy and rivalry that can be inferred from the events leading up to Jesus' entry into Jerusalem.
- **Envy can be seen** in the reactions of some of the religious leaders and authorities of the time, particularly the Pharisees and Sadducees.
- These religious elites were threatened by Jesus' popularity and influence among the people.

- **The Pharisees and Sadducees were envious** of Jesus' ability to perform miracles and teach with authority, things they could not do themselves.
- **Therefore they were envious because** of Jesus popularity for in their own eyes it undermined their own authority and status.
- The envy and jealousy of these religious leaders ultimately played a role in their plotting against Jesus and his eventual crucifixion.
- They conspired to have him arrested and put to death, fearing that his teachings and popularity would undermine their own power and authority.
- Hence why it may be of no surprise that envy is considered to be one of the 7 deadly sins.
- The concept of the Seven Deadly Sins originated in early Christian teachings, particularly in the 4th century AD with theologian Evagrius Ponticus, who listed eight "evil thoughts" that could lead to sinful behavior.
- These were later refined by Pope Gregory I in the 6th century, who categorized them into what we now know

as the Seven Deadly Sins: pride, greed, lust, envy, gluttony, wrath, and sloth.

- Envy our topic today is considered one of the Seven Deadly Sins because it is seen as a profound and corrosive form of discontent.
- Envy involves desiring what others have, whether it be possessions, status, abilities, or relationships, and feeling resentment or bitterness towards those who possess them.
- It often involves a sense of rivalry or comparison with others, leading to feelings of inadequacy or inferiority.
- Envy is particularly insidious because it can lead to other sinful behaviors and attitudes.
- It can fuel greed as one seeks to acquire what others have, lust as one desires relationships or pleasures that others enjoy, and even wrath as one becomes resentful or hostile towards those who are perceived as having more or being more fortunate.
- In our Wednesday Night Applying the sermon to life class, we also began to explore the differences between envy and

jealousy, for it may be a surprise to some that the two terms are not interchangeable.

- From our class we identified that **envy arises when someone desires what another person has**, whether it's possessions, qualities, achievements, or opportunities. It often involves feelings of resentment or bitterness towards the person who possesses those things.
- **Jealousy arises in the context of relationships** when there's a perceived threat to a valued relationship. It involves a fear of losing the affection, attention, or loyalty of a loved one to a rival
- **Envy is primarily directed outward, focusing on the person who possesses the desired qualities or possessions.** It's about coveting what others have and feeling a sense of lack or inferiority in comparison.
- **Jealousy is focused both inward and outward.** It involves feelings of insecurity or possessiveness regarding the relationship, as well as concerns about the actions or intentions of the perceived rival.

- **Envy is motivated by a desire to possess what others have or to be perceived as equal or superior to them.** It often stems from feelings of inadequacy or low self-esteem.
- **Jealousy is motivated by a fear of loss and a desire to protect or preserve the relationship.** It stems from feelings of insecurity, possessiveness, or a lack of trust.
- Therefore, I have hopefully made the case for envy's role in Palm Sunday in such a way that we are now hopefully able to point out some themes of envy in our gospel this morning, which as we just learned transpired before Jesus triumphal entry.
- The anointing of Jesus at Bethany is recorded also by Matthew (see notes on Matt. 26:6–13).
- It is evidently the same incident as that described in John 12:2–8, but definitely not the same as that in Luke 7:36–50.
- John says that the anointing took place “six days before the passover.”

- On the surface this conflicts with the time notice here and in Matthew.
- The consensus of scholars is that the statement in John is more definite and determinative, and that the anointing actually took place on Friday or Saturday evening before the Triumphal Entry.
- Once again although our gospel this morning doesn't explicitly mention envy, there are elements within the narrative that can be interpreted in terms of envy.
- In the story, Jesus is dining at the house of Simon the leper when a woman comes in with an alabaster jar of expensive perfume.
- She breaks the jar and pours the perfume over Jesus' head. Some of those present criticize the woman, saying that the perfume could have been sold and the money given to the poor. They see the act as wasteful.
- Some of our Wednesday night class identified some additional opportunities for envy to reveal itself.

- **Some of us noted** the potential for the disciples to envy that the woman had possession of the ointment at all, for it was expensive.
- **Some of us noted** how some would have been outraged that a woman of her caliber had given Jesus the ointment when it should have been them.
- **Some of us noted** how some would have been outraged that they were not the gift deciders.
- **Some may have been** envious of the attention and praise that the woman received from Jesus.
- **Some might have been** envious of her ability to perform such a generous and meaningful act of devotion.
- **Some of their** focus on the value of the perfume and its potential use for the poor could also suggest envy, as they may have been envious of the woman's ability to make such a lavish gesture towards Jesus.



- Finally, Jesus' response emphasizes the significance of the woman's act of love and devotion, highlighting its value over material possessions or concerns for the poor.
- In this context, envy can be seen as detracting from the genuine expression of love and devotion shown by the woman and the recognition of Jesus' impending sacrifice and burial.
- **So the million dollar question for us to wrestle with this morning, is what are we to do with all of this potential newfound knowledge that envy is something that I suspect all of us wrestle with?**
- For the undergirding claim that this sermon is naming is that **envy is something as a human race we must endure** by way of confession and repentance because it is ruining our society as a whole.
- In an article that I came across on Social Science and Medicine, the question that the article addressed was, “is envy harmful to a society’s psychological health and wellbeing?”
- This article was based on a longitudinal study of 18,000 adults.

- The short answer to this question is yes...
- **Yes envy is harmful** to our society's psychological health and wellbeing.
- Nearly 100 years ago, the philosopher and mathematician Bertrand Russell warned of the social dangers of widespread envy.
- In the study of this article 18,000 randomly selected individuals over the years 2005, 2009, and 2013 in which **four main conclusions emerge**.
- **First**, the young are especially susceptible, and this could be linked to the role of social media and advertising that tend to make people feel inadequate and envious of others.
- **Second**, using fixed-effects equations and prospective analysis, the analysis reveals that envy today is a powerful predictor of worse mental health and well-being in the future.
- **Third**, no evidence is found for the idea that envy acts as a useful motivator. Greater envy is associated with slower -- not

higher -- growth of psychological well-being in the future. Nor is envy a predictor of later economic success.

- **Fourth**, as people get older, envy decreases over time, but the overall pattern of well-being from age 20 to 70 remains like a U-shape. This suggests that it's important for society to pay attention to institutions that encourage widespread envy.
- Thereby making the antidote to envy being gratitude!
- This is because **gratitude serves as the antidote to envy because it shifts our focus from what we lack to what we already have.**
- **When we cultivate gratitude**, we appreciate the blessings and positives in our lives, making it harder for envy to take hold.
- **When we cultivate gratitude**, we learn to stop comparing ourselves with others and feeling resentful as a result which then helps us to foster contentment and satisfaction with our own circumstances.

- **When we cultivate gratitude**, it helps us recognize the abundance around us and promotes a more positive outlook, thereby reducing the tendency to covet what others have.
- Therefore if I were to summarize this message into two words for us this morning I would invite us to **be grateful!**
- Be grateful that we woke up this morning!
- Be grateful for nature's beauty!
- Be grateful for the relationships that we are able to have with one another and continue to have if we are open to them!
- Be grateful for our shared collective experiences, both the good and the bad.
- Be grateful for the opportunities to learn, grow and evolve as individuals, whether through education, personal development, or new experiences, helping us become the best versions of ourselves.
- Be grateful for the sunshine,
- Be grateful for the rain,

- Be grateful for the snow in March...it has to contribute to something bigger than we may ever know...
- Be grateful in just the simple pleasures, good food, a quiet moment of reflection or just the ability to laugh and cry...
- Be grateful for this day and moments of awe, wonder and inspiration that always awaits us;
- Be grateful that there is One who desires to give us rest from the sheer miracle of us being alive, where with each day we are receiving new mercies and graces everyday....
- Hosanna, Hosanna, Glory to God in the Highest! Blessed is He Who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!