

What Kind of Christian?

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0 COMMENTS



Preaching on:

[Luke 13:10–17](#)

What kind of a person do I want to be? What kind of a person do I want to be? What kind of a Christian do I want to be? What kind of a Christian life and Christian witness do I want to express with my day and with the years that are given to me? What kind of a Christian Church do we want to be? What values do we want to lift up? How do we want our community to look? How do we want it to operate? What do we want people to think about us?

These are the kinds of questions that we need to wrestle with as individuals and as a Christian community: What is God calling us to do? Who is God calling us to be, how is God calling us to behave in this world?

Speaking of behavior, I know that you know that I am now a father of two sons—one who is too small to be naughty yet, but another one who is two years old and he's in his terrible-two twos. And it is a struggle with behavior—as any of you have been parents or spent any amount of time with a two-year-old know. One thing that Bonnie and I really work hard to do is to avoid all of the “good boy, bad boy” talk. We don't try and put that on our son, Romey, at all.

I don't want to do good boy, bad boy. I don't tell him he's a bad boy if he's doing something that's

driving me crazy, if he's doing something that he shouldn't be doing. And I don't ask him to be a good boy for me, or praise him as a good boy, when he is doing something that's pleasing to me. I feel like he could get hung up on that good boy, bad boy stuff. And instead, I try to focus on his actions, what he's actually doing. So I say, "Oh, that is not safe. We don't do that." But I don't say, "You're a bad boy for climbing up the bookshelf." Or I say, "Oh, that's very nice to give your brother a kiss. What a kind thing to do." But I don't tell him that he's being a good boy.

And I try and avoid that whole pressure of trying to make him put himself into the mold of good boy and bad boy, because in reality, I don't think there's any such thing as a good boy or a bad boy. And many of us, I think get stuck in trying to figure out how we're supposed to be good boys and girls or not. And unfortunately I think that this is something that comes across in Christian faith a lot. When we think about this question, what sort of a Christian am I supposed to be? What kind of a person am I supposed to be? What does Jesus expect of me? What does the gospel expect of me? A lot of people feel, and there is this real cultural sense that a Christian is just supposed to be a good boy or a good girl.

And what does that actually mean? And how limiting is that, right? Because good boys and good girls, usually are what? They're the way mom and dad want them to be at the end of a long, hard day at work, right? So you're being quiet. You're being agreeable. You're not causing any trouble or any commotion in the house. You're just pleasant to be around. You're seen, not heard. Everything you do is cute and sweet and nice. And there's no trouble whatsoever because mom and dad are stressed out and tired and we don't want any trouble. And I think, unfortunately, some of us think that that's what God wants from us—to be good boys and girls. Just keep your nose clean. Don't do anything too disruptive. Don't hurt anybody's feelings. Just be nice. And I think being nice is a dangerous thing to uphold and uplift to our children as the highest Christian ideal.

Now there's nothing wrong with being nice, at least a good part of the time, but that can't be the highest Christian ideal, right? As Christians, we are asked to really struggle with the virtues and figure out how to be a Christian in a world full of conflict and struggle, and in a world where it's not always clear what the right or the wrong thing to do is. And the question is, how does a good boy or a girl step into the strife of this world and make a difference if they're just supposed to be quiet and nice? And I think as Christians, we're called to step into the strife and conflict of this world. And if we're all hung up on being good boys and good girls and having everybody praise us for being nice and for never doing anything unexpected, it's very hard, I think, to live up to what the gospel expects of us.

Luckily we have Jesus here to show us another way. He never really asked us to be good boys or good girls. He asked us to do our best. He asks us to struggle. And Jesus himself must have struggled. Did you hear what he was going through when he was teaching on the Sabbath? "Now he was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath. And just then there appeared a woman with a spirit that had crippled her for 18 years." And right there, Jesus must have heard the question in his

own mind: What kind of a person am I going to be? Am I going to be the good boy that everybody wants me to be? Or am I going to do the right thing?

Just imagine the context of what Jesus was dealing with here. He was in public, right? This wasn't the privacy of his own home. He was in the synagogue. He was in his "church." Everybody was gathered there—all kinds of people. This was a bit of a spectacle. And here he was in a position where I'm sure a lot of the people expected him to honor what scripture said, to honor what the tradition said, to follow the rules, and to not upset anybody because upsetting somebody on the Sabbath in the synagogue would be a real tragedy. Nobody comes to the synagogue to be upset, do they? Nobody comes to church to be all riled up and to leave in turmoil with more questions than they had when they walked in the door. We want simple answers. We want to be reassured that the tradition is right and we don't have to struggle with it. But Jesus says, "No. Sometimes you do have to struggle."

Jesus was in public. And he was also in view of the authority of the synagogue, right? There was a leader of the synagogue there. We think of Jesus as the authority. But in this context, Jesus was just some guy at the synagogue teaching. And there was an authority figure there watching him teach and expecting him to toe the line. "If you're gonna stand up and speak in my synagogue, you better make sure that you're following what scripture tells us to do and what everybody in here is expecting of our tradition." But Jesus decided that he wasn't going to do that.

Now I want you to think about the disruption and the conflict that Jesus caused in that synagogue on that day. And I want you to imagine that Jesus was in your church, our church on that day, or a church that you really love, a place where you feel safe, a place that you really invested in. What do you want Jesus to do? Do you want him to break the rules? Do you want him to make people feel kind of bad and get kind of upset? Do you want him to divide the synagogue between the people who say "yes, that was the right thing to do" and the people who say "no, that was the wrong thing to do, and all of a sudden, we recognize that there's a divide here among us and we have to talk it out and we have to feel that there's division in the place that we love, where we all just want to feel unified? Would you want him to seem to go against what scripture and tradition was telling him to do? In public? To cause a spectacle like that? Would you want that to happen in your church, in your holy place, in your religion? It's a tough one. It's a tough question. But Jesus does what he believes is right to do. And he causes a commotion in that synagogue and there is yelling and there are accusations flying and people are being scolded. But Jesus does it.

I think it's important to remember here that Jesus was not throwing the Sabbath out, right? Jesus, wasn't saying the Sabbath is a bunch of garbage. We don't need a Sabbath. I should just be able to do whatever I want on Sabbath. And I don't believe in the rules and I don't believe in tradition and I don't like the Sabbath. So I'm just gonna do what I want and I'm gonna heal on Sabbath. What Jesus says is, I believe in the Sabbath, I observe the Sabbath every seventh day. I keep it holy and I believe that

the Sabbath is big enough to hold this woman's healing. I believe that the Sabbath is big enough to hold this woman's healing. Jesus doesn't create conflict and trouble and disruption just to throw the world on its ear, right? Jesus isn't trying to destroy tradition. He's not trying to throw away everything that we hold dear. Jesus is the kind of person (and is calling us to a kind of religion) that sticks its elbows out into tradition and says, you need to get a little bit bigger. There's room here for this. This is a good thing.

Jesus is the one who steps into tradition, and scripture, and people's expectations, and he always, always points to the higher law—the law of love. And he says, “We have to look at this through the eyes of love! In the eyes of love, what is able to be done on the Sabbath? Observe it, keep it holy! But does love make room for this daughter's healing? And Jesus' answer is yes. Jesus calls us, I think, to the same kind of activity in our lives, right? Jesus is not asking us to be rebels without a cause. Jesus is asking us to be disruptors with love—people who look at the world around us and who look inside of our own church and who stick their elbows out into tradition and expectations and say, love, love, love, make a little more room. Let's make a little more room. It's not always easy to do. But what about the benefit?

This is another important thing to remember about who Jesus is. He's not the kind of person who just does something for no reason. And there is a human being in this story, right? What kind of person is Jesus? What kind of Christian does he want us to be? He is someone who does what is right. He does it in public. He does it in full view of the authorities. He does it with boldness. He does it with authenticity. He is courageous. He is not afraid. He is not afraid to cause disruption or conflict within the congregation or within his world. And he does this while also doing something so simple and beautiful that we can almost miss it. He does it while making sincere, personal, meaningful, transformative, physical contact with another human being that heals them. Sometimes when we stick our elbows out into tradition and expectations and ask for them to make a little more room for love and to make a little more room for someone else, it can transform hearts and it can open the mouths of people who were maybe full of doubt and pain and fear. And it can open their mouths to praise God because God's love made room for them and you were willing to fight for their inclusion and their healing.

What kind of person do you want to be? What kind of Christian do you want to be? What kind of church do we want to be?