

Lose Your Life and Repent
John 12:20-33
Psalm 51:1-12

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Port Williams United Baptist Church
Fifth Sunday in Lent

It is the fifth week in our series, *"A Repentant Lent."* During this season we have been considering what it means to repent, to metanoia, to turn around and go in a different way. We have seen that it means repentance goes with trust, that it is in God and God's way that we find our meaning and purpose. We have heard Jesus call to deny our natural tendencies in order to follow Jesus. We have detoured into John's gospel as we do every now and then during the church year since John doesn't get his own year in the lectionary to see that sometimes we have to make a ruckus, to declare and live our trust publicly. Last week we saw that repentance means we have to allow God's light to shine on those places where we hide our secrets, those places that need the cleansing light of Christ in order to show us the way to true life.

As we move closer to Easter we need to orient ourselves in the story. In our scripture this morning we are now in Holy Week. The week before Jesus had raised Lazarus from the dead, creating such a disturbance that he could barely move through the streets of Jerusalem. You can understand why, can't you? Can you imagine if Sydney Crosby came to Wolfville? He would be mobbed! Now imagine if he came with Sir Stanley's Cup?

That was the scene with Jesus except on steroids! Everybody wanted to see him, to be able to tell their children and their grandchildren they had seen this prophet from Galilee! Everybody wanted to see him, including some Greeks.

They were foreigners, visiting for Passover. They didn't want to miss anything, especially maybe the Messiah. It was the same then as it is now. The way to get in is to know somebody who knows somebody. So they approach Phillip, one of Jesus disciples with the simple request, "*We wish to see Jesus.*"

Maybe to show that he was a big deal, he took them to Andrew, who being Peter's brother was another degree closer to Jesus who then went to Jesus! See how it works!

And Jesus' answer???

This is another one of those bizarre answers that Jesus is famous for; an answer that isn't an answer. These people want to see Jesus and he starts giving an agricultural lesson about seeds! Then he gets to the crux of the matter. *"If you love your life, you will lose it. If you give it up in this world, you will be given eternal life."*¹

What kind of answer is that? And what about these Greeks who want to see Jesus? What happens to them? Did they ever get to see Jesus? We don't know. They just disappear from the story never to be heard of again!

My guess is that you have never heard of Eleanor Taylor. She isn't from the Port. She isn't a figure skater or a curler, so you probably haven't heard of her unless you are a news junkie. Even if you are you may not recognize the name without the title.

¹ John 12:25. *CEV*.

Until last week Lt. Colonel Eleanor Taylor was the deputy commander of the 36th Brigade group and a veteran of combat in Afghanistan. She made the news last week when she resigned, *“saying she is disgusted by ongoing reports of sexual misconduct in the Armed Forces and dismayed that it has taken this long for the problem to come to the fore.”* She went on to say *“Unfortunately, I am not surprised. I am also certain that the scope of the problem has yet to be exposed. Throughout my career, I have observed insidious and inappropriate use of power for sexual exploitation.”*²

Her resignation came in light of the investigation of Canada’s two most senior military leaders concerning allegations of sexual misconduct. According to the CBC “the investigation has rocked the Department of National Defense to its foundation.”

And yet no one is really surprised. Well, not surprised by the allegations. A culture of sexual misconduct, harassment, assault has long been a part of the military. In her resignation letter Taylor wrote that the behavior has

² <https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/eleanor-taylor-canadian-forces-sexual-misconduct-1.5952618>

been accepted as just a part of military life for far too long by everyone, including herself. What was surprising was that anyone was willing to talk about it publicly. Even more shocking is that an officer was willing to give up her position to bring attention to the issue.

Is there something that would cause you to give up your job, to just quit?

Or have we, like Lt. Col Taylor said, just accepted what is for far too long?

That is a real struggle isn't it? Martin Luther King Jr said that a person who does not have something for which they are willing to die is not fit to live. We know that will rarely be the case for us. We aren't talking about actually dying! That might be easier!

But, are we willing to quit our job?

That has real life repercussions! It means the loss of position, of status, of place. It means a threat to our ability to pay the bills, to raise our financial level.

Is there anything for which we are willing to give that up? Is there a cross are you willing to let your job die on?

In writing about this passage Gerald Sloyan says,
*“Following Jesus is, from first to last a matter of letting go. Modern acquisitive life is a matter of hanging on. Being told to follow the injunction of Jesus, to let go, to die...creates consternation. Imagine a world without cutthroat economic competition, without the profit motive as the highest motive. To lose selfhood through losing the possessions that define selfhood is not the world’s way. It can lead to being buried alive, much harder than being dead and being heard of no more.”*³

Are we willing to let go of our stuff or will we just remain silent.

As a husband, father to two daughters, a brother to a sister, I will confess that I still have trouble getting my mind around the issue of sexual harassment, assault, discrimination that so many women face daily. I just don’t understand. It’s not that I don’t believe it. I do! I have heard too many stories, but I just wonder where these men were. Where were they on that day in kindergarten when we were taught that we don’t pull down our pants? Where were they

³ Gerald Sloyan. *John: Interpretation Bible Commentary*. (John Knox Press: Atlanta, 1988) 156-157.

when we learned that “No” means “No;” that this is my space and that is yours? Did they just miss that day?

And too often we in the church have just said that we aren't going to talk about that. We don't want to talk about it, because, well we don't want to offend anyone. We don't want to point out the fact that something is just not right. It's just the way it is. It's just a joke, right?

I have a minister friend who played golf with another minister almost weekly. Almost every week when they got to the first tee the other guy would say, “What shall we play for? How about each other's wife?” It was just a joke. Until my friend discovered that this minister was having an affair with his wife.

How often do we just ignore comments because they are just too uncomfortable, because it is just a joke, right?

We know that it is just a joke, a way of making a political point when a world leader talks about the 'kung flu,' or the 'Chyna Virus.' So we remain silent, even when people start yelling at Asians on the streets of Toronto, of Atlanta. We don't say anything until a young man who grew up in a

Baptist Church, where just last Sunday the sermon was an the coming battle when Christ returns to wage war against those who have rejected his name,⁴ goes on a murderous spree killing 8, six of whom were Asian. Even then the police officer said he was just “having a bad day.”

The victims could have been black, or indigenous, or LGBTQ. Does our faith in Jesus call on us to say anything? Can we just agree that this is wrong, that is isn't the way God wants life to be?

Can we at least say that?

It is easier to spiritualize the Bible, turning it into a feel good guide to being prosperous, assuring us that if we will just follow Jesus then we will be healthy wealthy and wise. It is a gospel that works in this world. I have thought about adopting it myself. I have the hair for it; a great looking wife. If I could just get the smile down I could fill stadiums.

“Believe this and all will be well!”

⁴ <https://www.washingtonpost.com/religion/2021/03/17/atlanta-shooting-southern-baptist-pastors-wrestle/>

But that isn't what Jesus says! Jesus doesn't say that following him will lead to the "good life." Rather he invites us to follow him....and we know where that leads.

If you have heard me preach very much you know that I am a BIG fan of Kate Bowler. A Canadian professor at Duke Divinity School, (how can you not love her, eh?) she is an authority on the prosperity gospel. And then at 35, with a small child she was diagnosed with Stage 4 cancer. She has written a wonderful book and has a podcast that I highly recommend where she interviews some of the most amazing people. She recently had conversations with Anne Lamott and Matthew McConaughey. (Told you it is worth a listen!)

Each week as she begins she sorta paraphrases our scripture as she says:

The world loves you better when you are shiny, when you are cheerful, when you still believe that your best life now is right around the corner. I've written multiple books on the history of the idea that you can always fix your life. So I'm going to be the one to say it. There are some things we can change and some things we can't. And it's OK that life isn't

*always getting better. We can have beauty and meaning, community and love, and we will need each other if we're going to tell the truth. Life is a chronic condition and there's no cure for being human.*⁵

Life is a chronic condition.

We need to hear that. We need to say that. We don't have it all together in our lives, and definitely in our world. We must be willing to tell the truth, even when it is hard.

I am not good with languages. I grew up in an area where Rutherfordton was about as complicated as town name got, and I constantly got it wrong. So you can imagine my struggle here where cities have names that have more vowels and syllables than people!

So the other week when I tried to read our Land Acknowledgment statement, I really butchered it. But Corrine was kind enough to come and let me know and offer to help me the next time. It would have been so much easier for her to just pass it off as the dumb American trying to say Indigenous names, to think it is what it is, to think that

⁵ Kate Bowler. <https://katebowler.com/podcasts/anne-lamott-loved-and-chosen/>

Reverend Doctor William Donald Flowers, Jr doesn't need any correction.

It would have been easier, but that would have allowed me to continue my abuse of these names, to keep me from growing.

I may not get them right. I'm not good at languages. Explanation, not excuse. But at least I know, and I can try.

We need to be willing to take risks, to point our the places where our world falls so short of the glory of God, not to put ourselves above, but so our world might rise together. It may not cost us our lives, or even our jobs. But we must be willing to follow Christ, wherever it leads us. As individuals, as a congregation.

May we have that courage. May we have that faith.

Amen.