

BROADWAY CHRISTIAN CHURCH • COLUMBIA, MISSOURI
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GUIDING LIGHT SERIES

The Litany
Based on Psalm 1

Happy are those who do not follow evil doers or walk the path that leads to destruction.

Real delight comes with walking in the way of God, meditating on it day and night.

Such people are like well-watered trees that bear much fruit.

They not only talk about faith but practice it.

Let us pray:

Lead us toward the way of peace, justice, and love,
and when we are tempted to abandon the path,
draw us back by the power of your tender mercy. Amen.

The Scripture
Luke 4:21-30

Then he began to say to them, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth. They said, "Is not this Joseph's son?" He said to them, "Doubtless you will quote to me this proverb, 'Doctor, cure yourself!' And you will say, 'Do here also in your hometown the things that we have heard you did at Capernaum.'" And he said, "Truly I tell you, no prophet is accepted in the prophet's hometown. But the truth is, there were many widows in Israel in the time of Elijah, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, and there was a severe famine over all the land; yet Elijah was sent to none of them except to a widow at Zarephath in Sidon. There were also many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha, and none of them was cleansed except Naaman the Syrian." When they heard this, all in the synagogue were filled with rage. They got up, drove him out of the town, and led him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, so that they might hurl him off the cliff. But he passed through the midst of them and went on his way.

The Message
Guiding Light: Faith
Mark Briley

Synopsis: The major themes of 2019, according to those who study the frequency of cultural conversation, include immigration, the impeachment hearings, and - fake news. The idea of fake news refers to published information intentionally designed to mislead. Fake news has many names: "*propaganda*," "*misinformation*," "*yellow*

journalism," "libel," and even "lies." Yet recently, some people have broadened the concept of *"fake news"* to mean any reports or political news that they don't like - regardless of the veracity of the information. Then, not only the news but the source of the news is attacked. It's a new version of *"kill the messenger."* While this exploded on the scene in a broad way last year, the cry of *"fake news"* has a much longer history. Just ask Jesus. How are we to decipher *"fake news"* from the *Good News*? *"When they heard this, all in the synagogue were filled with rage" (Luke 4:28).*



We were in the car when a lively family debate broke out. My daughter was talking about YouTuber's – essentially people who have their own YouTube channel and post videos on their YouTube channel for a living. Morgan was arguing how much money you could make as YouTuber commenting that every day she learns of another billionaire YouTuber. Taking this all in, my eight-year-old son, Hayes, blatantly shouts out *"Fake!"* I had never heard that retort from him before. I interjected to clarify Hayes' comment which he quickly said, *"Fake news, Dad. There's no way there's a new billionaire YouTuber every day."* Beyond the debate itself, I was taken by Hayes' use of *"Fake!"* as a comeback.

It totally affirmed what I've been reading of late. According to those who study the frequency of cultural conversation, the major themes of 2019 included immigration, the impeachment process, and fake news. The idea of fake news, of course, refers to published information intentionally designed to mislead. We know it by other names including propaganda, misinformation, yellow journalism, libel and even flat out lies. This has been a long-standing point of contention.

"The 1796 presidential race between John Adams and Thomas Jefferson was notorious for smear tactics carried out by the newspapers of the day. Jefferson's supporters let it be known that Adams wanted to be king of the United States by trying to marry off one of his sons to a daughter of English King George III, a move blocked by George Washington, who intervened just in time to stop it, or so the story goes. The political conversation remained riddled with false facts, with newspapers reporting, for example, that if Jefferson were president, *"Murder, robbery, rape, adultery and incest will be openly taught and practiced,"* that the country would be *"soaked with blood, and*

the nation dark with crimes.” Political parties owned newspapers in those days. There was no independent media.”¹

While this has clearly been an issue for some time, it seems we’ve ramped up the cry of fake news of late, broadening the concept to refer to any reports or political news that we don’t like regardless of the veracity of the information. And, we’re all over each other about everything and immediately discount anything that doesn’t fit with our current and embedded ideologies which just makes life much easier I suppose. I don’t have to listen any more to anyone else and to end any dialogue, my eight-year-old can yell, “*Fake!*” and the conversation is over. This is problematic on multiple levels and is driving us further and further apart. It’s what Science Mike calls our latest addiction as a culture – “*OUTRAGE.*” We’re addicted to outrage, and that addiction is being fueled like never before.

Jesus had his own experience of being accused of ‘*fake news*’ centuries ago and I wonder what guidance we can glean through his experience that may be an important guiding light for us during this incredible time and place that we find ourselves doing life together.

The story in Dr. Luke’s account is fascinating. Jesus had recently submitted himself to baptism. That is remarkable in itself and a message for another day. Jesus stood in line with others who John was baptizing so that “*he also*” might be baptized. Fred Craddock says those two words, “*he also,*” “*Jesus also*” may be the most important two words in Scripture. Why would the sinless one need to repent and be baptized? It’s an expression of astonishing humility and solidarity. Just imagine. In Jesus, God comes alongside of us, even to the point of joining us in a rite of passage like baptism. May his act humble us with the reminder that arrogance has no place in Christian discipleship. If Jesus undergoes this rite of conversion, how much more should we live humble, unpretentious lives of conversion?

So... Jesus is baptized, and he enters the wilderness for 40 days to get his heart and soul ready for the ministry ahead. Spiritual boot camp full of temptation and heartache and loneliness and discipline. His time blows away any reality show challenge that we’ll watch for hours on end. That trial complete, the “*devil retreating temporarily to wait for a more opportune time,*” what does Jesus do next? He goes home. Takes a shower probably – it’s been 40 days after all. He goes to Shakespeare’s or whatever that place is that he has a hankering for like a college student come home for winter break. But then what? He goes to his hometown synagogue on the Sabbath... “*as was his custom.*” Given what we know about Jesus and his departure from the orthodoxy of his youth, there must have been many things with which he radically disagreed and that

¹ James W. Cortada, “*How new is ‘fake news’?*” *Oxford University Press Blog*, March 23, 2017.

grated on him as he went to worship. Yet Jesus went, as was his custom, to honor his love of God and to worship with his community.

He was given the scroll to read from the Scriptures in worship. The church folks had been proud of Jesus. They had raised him and encouraged him in his studies. It was a treat to have him home and to hear him read the Scripture. He reads from Isaiah 61:1-2 (his source) and he offers this news: "*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.*"

Isaiah was a favorite prophet. His work is a good and reliable source for that community. But is it fake news? Interesting. If you compare Jesus' rendition of those two verses of the prophet with what Isaiah actually offers, you'll see that Jesus stopped short of reading the full passage which contains the line "*to proclaim the day of vengeance of our God.*" That seems a significant omission. He omits the piece about vengeance.

Jesus then sits down – which didn't mean he was done, it meant that he was really just getting started. Rabbi's sat to teach. What Jesus offers next is a bomb: "*Today,*" he says, "*this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.*" It seems to be that the parts of Isaiah that he named was sort of the mission statement of his movement of faith. Leaving out the vengeance part, perhaps, means that is not a part of his movement.

The congregation seems to be okay with this at first... in fact, they all seem to look over smiling at Mary who was recording her son's talk on her iPhone to share with the family later. They were all proud. Their own hometown boy is going to do well, and it seems they all may benefit from this.

It's like the neighbor kid that used to TP your yard once a month and wore earbuds all the time so as to never make human contact with you walks into your pre-op room as your surgeon for the day with his Harvard medical degree on the wall behind you. "*Isn't that Joe's kid? You know the ornery neighbor kid?*" All of that seems okay, especially as they assume that if Jesus is the Messiah they've all waited for their whole lives, knowing him personally and his family should surely bring about some special benefits for them. It's not fake news if it benefits you, right?

Methodist pastor, Jacob Lynn², says we often respond in this same way. Like most places in Scripture, we find elements of truth about ourselves in people portrayed negatively — like the Nazarene congregation of this text. We welcome Scripture that affirms us, our mindset, and our beliefs. We tend to discount, discredit, and dissent when confronted with texts with which we disagree. And if we disagree, we're prone to

² Rector First UMC, Rector, Arkansas.

toss it into the “*fake news*” pile. Do I allow Jesus to stretch and push my thinking, beliefs and faith, or do I prefer to throw the things with which I disagree off the cliff as the synagogue that raised him will soon attempt to do with Jesus himself?

Jesus squashes their enthusiasm when he declares that “*No prophet is accepted in the prophet’s hometown.*” They’ve maybe just tilted their heads at this point, a tad confused, but Jesus presses forward alluding to two biblical stories that would have been very familiar to them. The first is a reference to a great famine which God sent the prophet Elijah to a starving gentile widow rather than a starving Hebrew widow. That irked ‘em a bit. Why wouldn’t he take a casserole to Mabel –one of the home-centered women in the church instead of that immigrant lady that nobody knows anyway?

Several have crossed their arms over their chest by now. Jesus digs a little deeper telling a second story involving the prophet Elisha and his healing ministry with the gentile military officer, Naaman, who had leprosy. Elisha, apparently, was not sent to heal any of Israel’s lepers. The point is sinking in and not settling well. Even though Jesus wore a Nazareth High letter jacket in high school and the synagogue scholarshipped Jesus to go to church camp in the summers, they would have no special claim on his powers. I wonder if Jesus thought he’d be received better than this. A read of the room quickly tells the story however. This wasn’t going to end well.

Someone shouts, “*Fake news!*” and a mob mentality takes over. The congregation runs Jesus out of the synagogue to a nearby cliff, and they’re poking and prodding him to the cliff’s edge. It’s hard to go back in for the church potluck after a moment like this. But they’re so angry, and a Snicker’s bar isn’t going to calm anyone down.

Scottish historian Charles Mackay wrote in a work entitled, “*Extraordinary Popular Delusions and the Madness of Crowds,*” saying, “*Humans think in herds. It will be seen that they go mad in herds while they only recover their senses slowly, one by one.*” He also concluded that people are more prone to believe the “*Wondrously False*” than the “*Wondrously True.*” “*Of all the offspring of time, error is the most ancient, and is so old and familiar an acquaintance, that Truth, when discovered, comes upon most of us like an intruder and meets the intruder’s welcome.*”³

Jesus had intruded on their embedded theology, and the mob mentality consumed them. Most any leader who has revolutionized any thought or understanding has been met with such venom. John Wesley, co-founder of the Methodist movement, as an ordained priest for the Church of England, pressed in his preaching that followers of Jesus might actually attempt to live like Jesus every day. He was passionate about this

³ Maureen Dowd, “*Going mad in herds,*” *The New York Times*, August 21, 2010.

message and his journal entries say on such-and-such date he preached at such-and-such church and was thrown out and told never to come back. Entry after entry.⁴

We tend to not do well with challenging thought. We'd much rather deem it "fake" and burn anyone or anything that suggests otherwise. One of my colleagues shared something from a book he was reading that said, "*Old Believers in Russia resisted attempts to modernize Eastern Orthodox Christianity. Some locked themselves in monasteries in the late seventeenth century and burned them to the ground, perishing in the flames, rather than submit to the liturgical changes.*" Wild! My friend added, "Sorta takes the "we've never done it that way before" to a whole different level."



Even the guy who came late to synagogue for worship wearing a t-shirt that said, "*Sorry I'm late. I didn't want to come.*" Even *that* guy joined in on the rage of the mob. We are addicted to outrage.

Why they didn't go ahead and finish Jesus off is unclear. Did Mary's friends look at Mary's tears and have compassion enough to convince the angriest among them to let Jesus go? Was Jesus allusive enough with moves like Patrick Mahomes to wiggle his way out of the crowd? Did the crowd part and Jesus silently walk through the middle of them slowly nodding his head in sad acceptance of the rejection of his own people? We don't know for sure. But we know he goes on his way. The crowd surely starts the gossip grind around town saying, "*Jesus is a fake.*" "*He's certainly not one of us.*"

This is a real struggle for us, too. If we're honest and think that our personal take on Jesus is the absolute right and only take on Jesus, we've probably got some spiritual work to do ourselves. If Jesus' existence and teaching doesn't challenge us to expand our understanding and push some of the boundaries of our comfort, we're probably missing something ourselves. The congregation wasn't outraged or even angry with Jesus until he said that other people, totally different from them, were just as important to God as they were.

The basic ask of Jesus is simply, "*Follow me.*" It's not memorize a doctrine or add on to our lives the parts of his way that benefit us most, leaving the rest behind. It's "*Follow me.*" And you and I must decide how we'll do that. How do we filter through any particular agenda to walk that path right behind Jesus? How do you measure your followership? Is it your creed or your steps? Jesus says, "*Follow.*"

⁴ Also shared by Jacob Lynn, Rector First UMC, Rector, Arkansas.

We have become obsessed with what Christians believe rather than how Christians live. The prominent tab on most churches websites is “*What We Believe*” but might be more helpful to have a tab that says, “*How We Live*.”

Jesus was disruptive, trying to invite people into a new way of life. They were counting laws and Jesus was saying, “*Love God with all you have and your neighbor as yourself.*” Is that your measurement? When you watch the news or hear an opinion or see life happen before your eyes, do you jump on the mob mentality, or do you ask how, in this situation, might you exhibit your love of God and neighbor? Or what did Jesus say was fulfilled in their hearing that day? That the poor would experience good news, captives would be released, the blind would see, the oppressed would go free, and the year of the Lord would be proclaimed. The only thing he added to that word was that there would be no favoritism toward Israel in the delivery of the ministries cited above. His life was for everyone.

What do I hope for us today? I hope that we’ll clear through all the layers of anger and division that we’re holding and truly listen to each other again... and for the Spirit of God. That we might get in step with Jesus who is walking through an angry mob but doesn’t lash back. He simply goes about healing the world. Take an honest review of your motives and your measuring sticks about what it is to follow Jesus. Somehow, it seems, the guiding light of our faith is finding the joy in that fact that Jesus’ love is expansive ... more so than we could ever imagine. His is a love that will always be a struggle for us to practice, because we have some natural inclination to benefit ourselves first, our friends second, our “*sides*” next, and don’t seem to have any love left for those beyond that.

Black senator Tim Scott and white congressman Trey Gowdy released a book entitled, “*Unified*,” encouraging our stretch to create unlikely friendships in order to make room for the creation of a unified vision, purpose, or melody. While we need legislative change and need to press those in power to do right by all Americans, they note that we clearly aren’t getting anywhere with loyalty to labels above all else. Tim and Trey easily acknowledge the limitations and struggle for legislative remedies right now. You certainly don’t have to buy all they say or stand for (*or what anyone says or stands for*) to find common agreement. What stuck with me was this word: “*We believe the firmest foundation for positive change is found with individuals in relationship with one another. Laws are external. Relationships are internal. Policies make you have to. Relationships make you want to. Relationships contain the power necessary to change the course of history, and the delicate, personal touch needed to change the trajectory of a single life.*”⁵

⁵ *Unified: How Our Unlikely Friendship Gives Us Hope for a Divided Country*. Tim Scott & Trey Gowdy. Tyndale House Publishers. 2018.

Another friend offered me a quote just last week that applies here. She said, “*Relationships move at the speed trust, and social change moves at the speed of relationships.*” Jesus went straight to the relationship and, by example, said, “*Follow me.*”

If your faith is one that bears Christ’s name, it must expand beyond the immediate ‘*what’s in it for me*’ to include, ‘*what’s in it for all?*’ And maybe we reset our current tendencies to dismiss each other with a single word, “*Fake!*” and say instead, “*Okay... I’ll start with him, or her, or them. I’ll care about them first and foremost before I write them off.*”

I want to be more like Jesus... and I continually learn that becoming more like Jesus will cost me something of my own comfort. But I believe in his way... even when it cuts the grain of our current time and culture and popular thought. It is the truth of one church leader who said, “*Following Jesus makes your life better and will make you better at life.*” It’s why we need to lose the chip on our shoulders and be less concerned with sides and more concerned with where following Jesus actually leads us.

Brian McLaren asks this important question, “*What would it mean for Christians to rediscover their faith not as a problematic system of beliefs, but as a just and generous way of life, rooted in contemplation and expressed in compassion, that makes amends for its mistakes and is dedicated to beloved community for all?*”⁶

If Jesus pulled out the scroll and read it aloud to us today and then sat to teach, saying, “*Today, this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing,*” how would you respond? I must hope we’d ask Jesus to say more, show more, instead of yelling, “*Fake!*” and running him into the Missouri River.

And, what’s best? I must believe some of those people there in the crowd that day came around to a new understanding and were among those who ultimately heeded Jesus call of “*Follow me.*” I believe and hope in that because that means there’s a chance for me yet, too... a chance for me to grow, to heal, to advocate, to be forgiven, to serve, to love, to follow, to be more like Jesus. And that there’s room for even one like me? Well, that’s not fake news. That’s the Good News of Jesus Christ for all of us.

⁶ *The Great Spiritual Migration*. Brian McLaren. The Crown Publishing Group. 2016.