

Mark 9:30-37

They went on from there and passed through Galilee. He did not want anyone to know it, for he was teaching his disciples, saying to them, “The Son of Man is to be betrayed into human hands, and they will kill him, and three days after being killed, he will rise again.” But they did not understand what he was saying and were afraid to ask him. Then they came to Capernaum, and when he was in the house he asked them, “What were you arguing about on the way?” But they were silent, for on the way they had argued with one another who was the greatest. He sat down, called the twelve, and said to them, “Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all.” Then he took a little child and put it among them, and taking it in his arms he said to them, “Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me.”

Last week, I started a 3 part series where I will introduce a group of people and have you try to figure out who I am talking about. I will give historical and biblical background on each group of people that is intended to help us challenge our long-held beliefs. I started with explaining the view of the ELCA church, which Bethel is a member, and then discussed inter-racial couples. To make complete sense of this sermon, I urge you to read last week's if you haven't already. In the end, what stance you take on a topic is 100% between you and God. We are destined to see issues differently. That is part of free-will. Once you have looked at your views and the views of others, you have the choice to continue steadfast in your beliefs or to adapt and change your beliefs. Neither is right. Neither is wrong. Both are ways to "Take up your own crosses".

Here we go:

Who do people say that I am?

60% of my people report having had a direct, personal experience with hate in the past 12 months, such as graffiti or vandalism to their property, experiencing online harassment, or hearing someone spew hatred in their faces. Just over half also say they feel less safe in America than they did five years ago. One college student described being spit on and called “dirty” during an on-campus protest.

Who does history say that I am?

Negative attitudes and negative experiences for these people, by every metric, are growing, not fading. And most troubling, this type of divide—for the first time—is growing among younger generations of Americans. Since 1964, we reliably found that discrimination for this group of people was stronger among older Americans and

weaker among younger. However, this trend has reversed. In 2014, one study found that only 9 percent of Americans harbored extensive negative views of this group of people; that jumped to 20 percent in 2022. Today, that figure stands at 24 percent. When nearly one in four hold intolerant attitudes toward this group of people, we can no longer consider this not important. What we are witnessing is a normalization of hatred across society.

Who are we: Jewish people

More History: Jews have faced persecution throughout history, from the violent anti-Jewish riots in Eastern Europe to the horrors of the Holocaust, where six million Jews were murdered. Despite this suffering, the Jewish community has shown resilience and perseverance, maintaining a strong cultural and religious identity. Today, anti-Semitism persists, but the Jewish people continue to contribute greatly to global civilization.

Who does the bible say that I am? The Jewish people are the lineage through which the Messiah, Jesus Christ, came into the world. Jesus is a descendant of King David and born into the Jewish nation. He fulfills the prophecies of a Messiah who would save and deliver not only Israel but also all of humanity. While many Jewish people in Jesus' time did not recognize him as the Messiah, the New Testament highlights that God's plan was always to offer salvation through the Jewish Messiah, first to the Jews and then to all nations.

Taking up Their Crosses: Czeslawa Kwoka, a 14 year old Catholic girl from Poland dies in Auschwitz on February 18, 1943 with a phenol injection into her heart. She was one of 750,000 children that were executed at Auschwitz. "Whoever welcomes one such child in my name

welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me.”

Throughout Jewish history, from the Babylonian Exile to the Holocaust, Jews have faced immense suffering, persecution, and displacement. Despite this, they have often viewed these trials as part of their collective responsibility to maintain their identity, faith, and covenant with God. Jewish resilience in the face of persecution can be seen as an example of "taking up their cross" by enduring hardship for the sake of their covenant with God.

3. Who do people say that I am? I am disgusting, misguided, and sinful, and the choices I make will send

me to hell. I am an abomination, in the same class as Charles Manson or Adolph Hitler. I represent 7.2% of the US population but my identity takes up a lot of energy in some people's worlds. Violence against us and our allies has really ramped up. We have seen 350 acts of violence or threats of violence against our community in the past year. It makes it really dangerous for us to exist. You shouldn't have to die in America for being for a marginalized community or supporting someone in the community.

Who does history say that I am? The history of these people and this topic is complex because it involves various social, cultural, and religious attitudes. We have always been a part of human history. It's important to note that concepts, as we understand them today, didn't exist in the same way in ancient societies.

Who are we? Members of the LGBTQ Community

More History: From the rise of Christianity in the 1st century through the Middle Ages, views on homosexuality grew more restrictive, with theologians like Thomas Aquinas deeming same-sex relations sinful, because they believed sex was only for procreation. The Bible, particularly passages like Leviticus 18:22 and Romans 1:26-27, was used to justify the condemnation of homosexual acts. However, these views were about *behavior* rather than *inherent identity*, because the modern concept of sexual orientation as a natural variation in human sexuality didn't exist until the 19th century.

Despite emerging scientific discussions, homosexuality was still criminalized in many countries and homosexual acts were punishable by death or imprisonment. In the early 1900s, homosexuality was considered a mental

illness by most medical professionals, but in 1973, the American Psychiatric Association declassified it as a mental disorder.

Who does the bible say that I am? The bible cites many times that homosexuality is a sin. However, there are a few main points that have been argued: What is the actual definition or translation of the word homosexual? What do Malakoi, Arsenokoitai and Pedestary mean? And What was the actual sin at Sodom and Gomorrah?

One bible version of 1 Corinthians 6: 9-10 I found says: “Instead, you yourselves do wrong and cheat; and you do it to your own brothers! Don’t you know that unrighteous people will have no share in the Kingdom of God? Don’t delude yourselves - people who engage in sex before marriage, who worship idols, who engage in sex after marriage with someone other than their spouse, the Malakoi and any kind of Arsenokoitai, those who steal, those who

are greedy, who get drunk, who assail people with contemptuous language, and those who rob — none of them will share in the Kingdom of God.”

Most bibles have used the interpretations of the words Malakoi and Arsenokoitai as “men who lie with other men”. Therefore, if you look up the same verse in the Bible in front of you it will use this phrase instead of these Greek words.

However, many biblical scholars believe that the words referred to people who worshiped the sex God, Aphrodite, in the Temple in Corinth by engaging in sex with both female and male prostitutes. Malakoi was used to describe men who had no self-control and indulged their every whim. Men who ate too much, used fabrics that were too fine, drank too much, and indulged sexually beyond a monogamous relationship and especially for those who

participated in pederasty. Pederasty in ancient Greece was a socially acknowledged sexual relationship between an adult male and a younger male, usually in his teens. It was an early example of a combination of pedophilia, prostitution and rape. The influence of pederasty on Greek culture of these periods was pervasive, and the practice was viewed with concerns and disapproval by many social group and Christians can certainly see why it would have been viewed as sinful, excessive, lustful, and against God's law.

As more and more research is done, many people now believe that the homosexual relationships that are spoken of in the Bible were not referring to consensual, loving same-sex relationships as we understand them today, but rather to exploitative or abusive sexual behaviors, both in same-sex and in heterosexual relationships.

Therefore, because of Paul's audience in Corinthians, where there was a temple to Aphrodite where sexual worship took

place, and were known to engage in pederasty rather commonly, it is very likely that Paul was referring to sexual exploitation such as pedophilia, prostitution, rape, or incest. Today, we would have to include pornography and sex trafficking as sexual exploitation. Both straight and gay people would agree that sexual exploitation through any of these means is morally wrong back then and today!

There was no word in Hebrew or Greek that referred to men who were solely attracted to men but only words that described sexual exploitation. That is not the definition of homosexuality that we hold today.

I have now addressed two of the three main points that have been argued by Hebrew and Greek scholars. Forgive me for the longer nature of this sermon, but I am still going to explain the third point.

Genesis 19 is also used to condemn homosexuality. It tells the story of the destruction of Sodom (where the term “sodomy” came from) and Gomorrah. The story and the true nature of the sin has been the focus of many theological debates.

On one side, traditional Christian interpretations view Genesis 19 as a condemnation of homosexual acts. Many religious scholars, however, argue that the sin of Sodom was not sexual immorality but rather inhospitality, cruelty, and injustice.

The men’s attempt to sexually assault Lot’s male guests is seen more as an act of humiliation, using sexual violence to assert dominance over outsiders. In this view, the issue is not homosexuality but the violent attempt to degrade and subjugate.

Ezekiel 16:49-50 is often cited to support this view, where it says that Sodom’s guilt was rooted in arrogance, lack of

care for the poor, and committing violence or injustice to the guests. Ezekiel 16:49 specifically states: “Now this was the sin of your sister Sodom: She and her daughters were arrogant, overfed and unconcerned; they did not help the poor and needy.”

Isaiah 1:10-17 and Jeremiah 23:14 also describe the sins of Sodom as relating to social injustice and moral corruption rather than solely sexual behavior.

The term sodomy emerged in the Middle Ages and was used in legal and religious contexts. Sodomy laws began to emerge and, in many countries, criminalized sexual behaviors that were not for procreation, regardless of whether the participants were of the same or opposite sex. This legal and religious focus contributed to the marginalization and persecution of homosexuals, based on their sexual practices.

Many countries and U.S. have repealed sodomy laws, especially after landmark rulings such as the Lawrence v. Texas decision by the U.S. Supreme Court in 2003, which struck down sodomy laws as unconstitutional in the United States. The decision marked a significant shift in how sexual privacy and individual freedoms are protected.

Leviticus is where the Bible straight-up says that homosexual behavior is an abomination. It also says that homosexuals should receive the death penalty. It also says the same thing about eating pork or shellfish, charging interest on loans, and a whole bunch of other restrictions that were a part of the Old Testament Law. But for Christians, the Old Testament doesn't settle any issue because Romans 10:4 says that Christ is the end of the law. Which is probably why most Christians today eat meat, use credit cards, wear makeup, and support equality for women.

Because, as Hebrews 8:13 says, the old law is obsolete and aging.

Many theologians emphasize that Jesus' teachings on love, compassion, and justice should be central to interpreting sexual ethics. They often cite Matthew 22:37-40, where Jesus emphasizes love of God and neighbor as the greatest commandments, and Galatians 3:28, which affirms that "there is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus."

Jesus said nothing about homosexuals, but was very clear about adultery (Matthew 5: 27-28). However, if you want to believe that homosexuality is a sin, you have that right. If you assume that homosexuality is a sin, what makes that sin different from your sin? What gives you or anyone the right

to openly condemn homosexuals who are in loving, monogamous relationships? Homosexual and heterosexual people commit the sins of adultery and sexual promiscuity all the time, and, according to all counts in the bible, these are definitely sins. But, simply being homosexual, if you look at it according to the explanation and interpretation many scholars have given, is simply how someone was born.

Taking Up Their Crosses:

On the night of October 6, 1998, Matthew Shepperd was lured out by two men who pretended to befriend him, but instead brutally attacked him because he was gay. They tied him to a fence in a remote area, beat him, and left him there to die. Eighteen hours later, he was found by a passerby who initially mistook him for a scarecrow. Matthew was taken to the hospital but succumbed to his injuries on October 12. Matthew was 21. He had parents, a

younger brother, and many other family members and friends who loved him.

Matthew Shepard's death became a catalyst for legislative change in the United States. At the time of his murder, Wyoming did not have hate crime laws, and there was no federal hate crime law that covered crimes based on sexual orientation.

Matthew Shepard's murder was not only a personal tragedy but also a national symbol of the need for tolerance, understanding, and legal protections for marginalized communities. His death continues to be remembered as a significant moment in the fight for LGBTQ+ rights and hate crime legislation in the U.S., ensuring that his legacy lives on through ongoing advocacy and education.

“Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me.”

Like I said last week, whether you believe differently than others or not, we are all still children of God. We all have a right to our own beliefs. I am not trying to change how you believe I am simply offering other explanations. So, before we condemn others for doing something that is against our traditional religious views, let's make sure *our* actions are inline with other morals that our traditional views uphold. We should not condemn others, ever, because 1 John 1:8-10 reminds us that we are not without sin. I too am guilty of what I am asking us to change! I too need to learn not to condemn others simply because they sin differently than I do. We cannot allow each other to

point out the twigs in another's eyes, without pulling the log from our own.

Jesus taught that **true greatness is not found in dominance or being above others, but in serving others**. To be "first" in God's kingdom requires a willingness to humble oneself and take on the role of a servant. Jesus exemplified **servant leadership** throughout his life. He consistently served the marginalized, the poor, and the outcasts. By washing his disciples' feet (John 13:1-17), healing the sick, and caring for others, he showed that leadership in the kingdom of God is about **service, compassion, and humility**. To be a leader or to seek greatness in the Christian sense means to serve the needs of others, especially those who are vulnerable or overlooked. It's about putting others first rather than seeking self-promotion or arguing that your beliefs are the only beliefs someone should listen to.

We cannot love our neighbors while supporting or accepting systems that crush, exploit or dehumanize them. We cannot love our neighbors while accepting less for them than we do our own families. Let us pray:

Heavenly Father, We have much to learn about our neighbors. We close our eyes and hearts to people we don't understand or people we disagree with. We share hateful messages, especially now during this hateful and divided time we are living in. We see Facebook posts dehumanizing others and instead of stopping to think about how those people are actually affected, we share it. It is so easy to dismiss others when we don't actually know them. It is easy to get caught up in the negativity and hateful rhetoric and views that are frankly as far from Jesus as they could possibly be. That is why we all need

your help, today and every day, so that we can see all people as your children and treat them with dignity and kindness. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.