

Intro

Sometimes, half just doesn't cut it. Some religious beliefs are like that. You've heard the phrases, maybe even said them. They sound true, like everything happens for a reason, or God won't give you more than you can handle. Love the sinner, hate the sin, for God helps those who help themselves. But when we look at them carefully, we see they are only half true. Join us as we discover the whole truth behind half-truths.

Pastor Mandy Week 1 Half Truths

It has been a great morning of worship already. Yes. Yeah. So, thanks for being here today and this time. And I do hope Trent tells prayer in Linares, prayer just being open to the Spirit moving today. I do hope that is the case for all of us. So Mahatma Gandhi was quoted as saying, "Be the change that you wish to see in the world."

And I love that quote. That is a great quote. And Gandhi was a practicing Hindu. Gandhi was not a Christian. But I do think that Jesus would approve of this quote. It's a great quote. It aligns with what Jesus did and how he encouraged his followers to engage in the world. And I believe that God can and does use non-Christians all the time to help us experience the world around us.

We use quotes and phrases often that are or are. Some come from the Bible and some don't come from the Bible. And sometimes it's even hard to decipher what is in the Bible like we say that as Christians, but does that actually come from the Bible? So here's a little test for you. I want you to guess which one of these phrases comes from the Bible.

So number one, to love another person is to see the face of God. Number two, if you don't have oxen, at least your barn is clean. Number three, never eat more than you can lift. Now, what do you think? One, two or three? So the first one to love another person is to see the face of God that comes from lame is the musical.

If you don't have oxen, at least your barn is clean. That comes from the Bible. Proverbs. Yep. The third quote, which is a very good quote, Never eat more than you can lift pretty wise that quote comes from Miss Piggy. So there's that. But Gandhi, Gandhi, Gandhi also quoted some other great things and he was quoted once as saying that he would be a Christian if it weren't for Christians, as in the Christians that he encountered, he said, didn't act to anything like Christ.

And I wonder how many other non-Christians question who we are or question who God is by what we do or what we say. Now, take this passage, for example. Sometimes we might say this, this, this saying this quote that comes from the Bible and if we're saying this quote, usually it comes that we're justifying our own actions or we want to take revenge on someone or we want to give judgment to someone or we want to rationalize punishment.

So this comes from Leviticus 24, it says anyone who injures their neighbor is to be injured in the same manner, fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for a tooth. The one who has inflicted the injury must suffer the same injury. Whoever kills an animal must make restitution. But whoever kills a human being is to be put to death.

Now, imagine if everyone actually followed this command that's found in scripture. Well, Gandhi did imagine it and he responded with an eye for an eye only ends up making the whole world blind. Now,

there is some wisdom in what Gandhi is saying, but an eye for an eye is found in our scripture. It's something we can use to justify actions or punishments.

But it's only half of the story. Because if we stopped reading at the end of that passage and we didn't read the whole entire scripture message we'd missed, where Jesus says in Matthew Chapter five, Jesus says, You have heard that it was said, an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. But Jesus says, I tell you, but I say to you that you must not oppose those who want to hurt you.

If people slap you on your right cheek, you must turn to the other cheek to them to turn that left cheek to them as well. So do we discount that passage we found in Leviticus? Do we discount much of the Old Testament? Because what Jesus has to say is important. Of course, we don't discount the Old Testament, but we have to understand the whole story and the whole message to truly understand God.

So again, God still uses people to write things so that we can understand the character of God. God didn't stop working after the first or second century and say, okay, well, I have nothing more to say. Of course, God didn't just stop because God is still active in our lives today. God still can use others to help us see God's character.

But the flip side is kind of true because if we're not careful, we may say things that tell people about God. That might not be the whole truth. So the Bible is our greatest gift, but we are people who are far, far removed from the time of Jesus and the prophets and the events of the Old and New Testaments.

The Bible is also this big, long, sometimes complicated, confusing collection of books and letters from different authors written at various times. And so what happens over time? Even though we have more access to the scriptures than they did years ago, we start hearing things we associate with the Bible as a message. That may not be true. So we say things that sometimes maybe we think are in the Bible.

We say them to help us feel better. We say things to help others feel better, to justify our actions, and to point out the sins of others. And sometimes, these things are in the Bible. They're there in the Bible. We can point to the exact verse where we say, There it is. It says An eye for an eye, but we just sometimes don't have the whole story.

And that's what this sermon series is all about. And this is not just a sermon series, but it's also an invitation for you to be part of an all-church study. And if you want to study half-truths with a group, we have some great groups that are starting that you can join. You can find them on our website or on the church center app.

We have a Sunday morning men's group. We have a Monday night women's group. We have a Tuesday night in a Friday morning group that's open to anyone. We have a new group that is starting for parents with young kids. We have a young adult group and also a few others. So check them out if you want to get connected.

And if none of those groups work for you and you still want to go through the study, you can sign up for that option to study on your own and we'll send you the information on the video you just saw, you heard some of the things that we're going to be talking about, some of the things that we say, like everything happens for a reason or God helps those who help themselves or God said it, I believe it.

That settles it or love the sinner, hate the sin. So these are things that we say sometimes without even thinking about it. But we're going to talk about how it might sound to somebody inside the church or

outside of the church and what it says about our understanding of God's character. Here is one example. Sometimes we say this phrase to comfort someone, Maybe going through a difficult time sometimes will say to them, This too shall pass, and that it comes from an old English poem, not from the Bible.

But there is a scripture that kind of supports it. It's found in First Peter Chapter Five, says, After you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, the one who called you into His eternal glory in Christ, Jesus will himself restore, empower, strengthen and establish you so it's kind of true. It will pass.

That's that part is true. But this verse is calling us to Jesus. That's the whole point of the good news of Jesus that it not only will it pass, but we will be granted these things that will restore us and empower us, and it will happen eternally. So I wrestled with what was the best way to start this sermon series.

What's the best thing to do when we might wrestle with scripture or some of the things that we say we might wrestle with? What do we believe about God's character? And so I decided that the best way to start is with the foundation, the beginning of our Christian journey at our baptism. Now, the United Methodist Church recognizes two sacraments, Holy Communion and baptism.

Most Protestant churches also recognize only those two sacraments. Our brothers and sisters in the Roman Catholic Church recognize seven Sacrament course. The United Methodist Church believes that baptism marks the beginning of a new life in Christ Jesus, and we baptize in the name of the Trinitarian God, the God, the Father, God, the Son, God, the Holy Spirit. And we believe this is sort of an initiation into the body of Christ.

That is a lifelong journey. Baptism is dying to oneself and being made new in Christ through the Holy Spirit. It's something God offers to us and we're kind of passively active in the process now. We are we are mainly passive in the baptismal process. God is the one that is moving through the process. But our role in baptism does require a response, and we must respond to the Holy Spirit and our new life in Christ.

Or as parents, we respond to the new life of our child. Now, this is not always an immediate response. Sometimes we don't act right away after baptism, but as John Wesley would say, this is a means of grace, which just means it's a way for us to move toward discipleship. So we're baptized and our journey begins. Now, some Christians believe that after baptism, right?

You profess your faith in Jesus and you are saved and your journey is done right, you're in. But we believe that the journey just begins. There. We believe that Jesus also started his ministry after his baptism. And so our ministry also begins in the same way. So we have this new life in baptism that that's true. We do at the moment.

We are baptized. We have this new life. But if we stop there, it's kind of only half true because we still have to respond to the Holy Spirit. So when we take time to remember our baptism, that comes with a great opportunity for us to to restore or to restart, to renew our commitment to God. Now, Jesus's own ministry began at his baptism, and we read that as Jesus was coming out of the water, it says in scripture that the heavens opened up and the Spirit came down.

Now, if we look at the Old Testament meaning of the idea of heaven, heaven was not some little door miles away, up in the sky that opened up. That's not what heaven was about. Heaven in the Bible also often refers to God's reality beyond ordinary reality. God's dimension is partly revealed. When we are

baptized, our reality opens up and we see beyond mind just the beauty of the flowers and the trees and the star in the sky and the sunset and the people and all of the rest of creation.

But instead we see creation how God intended creation. We go back to that Garden of Eden, and through baptism we see something new. We become part of God's new creation. So we understand heaven because of scripture, because what we read in Scripture, the Bible, again, is an important, essential part of our faith. But there is a specific purpose for the Bible, and N.T. Wright puts it this way: The Bible isn't there simply to be an accurate, accurate reference point for people who want to make sure they've got things right.

It is there to equip God's people to carry forward his purpose of a new covenant and new creation. That's what the scripture reveals to us. That's what baptism reveals for us. It's the recognition of this new creation in a gift that God has given us, that we are new and we become one with each other and one through Christ.

At the time of our baptism, either as a child or as an infant, as an adult. Whenever it happens, in first Corinthians Chapter 12, it says, We were all baptized by one Spirit into one body, whether Jew or Greek or slave or free. And we were all given one Spirit to drink. See, there's more to the story. There is more to our story as a follower of Christ, because it's a commitment that we take daily to take up our cross.

It's a commitment to deny ourselves and suffer with and for Christ. It's a commitment to have nothing of earthly importance. It's a way for us to recognize that maybe we don't have everything figured out. And God is still working today. And when we learn from one another through Bible study together, or these life groups or small groups that meet, when we meet with someone, we may have form relationship with others.

We grow to know God's character. Now, in a moment, I'm going to ask you to come forward to touch the water that is up here in our baptismal font. And it's not just an insignificant ritual of cleanliness, but it's a symbol of new life in Jesus. Now it's an invitation, not an expectation. If you have been baptized before, this is a time for you to renew your covenant.

And we don't re-baptize in the Methodist Church because we believe although people stray from their commitment to following Christ, we believe that God does not fail on His part of the covenant. God works the first time in baptism. Now you can renew your baptism any time as many times as you would like. And if reaffirming your baptism through immersion is would be a significant an important part of your journey at this time.

I would love to hear your story and support you on that. Now, if you have never been baptized, if you weren't baptized as an infant or you weren't baptized as a youth or an adult, you are still invited but not expected to come forward to this. This might be the start of a new life for you. And if you have never been baptized and you are ready to make that commitment to to be open to God's grace in your life, to leave your old life behind, to become new, talk to me.

I would love to support you on that journey. So would you join me in this baptismal renewal covenant? Now, there are going to be some times for you to respond that will be on the screen. Sisters and Brothers in Christ through the Sacrament of Baptism. God's Spirit has been poured out upon the water, water poured over and immersing us in water that flows freely for all Who will receive it.

Water from the streams of God's saving power and justice. Water that brings hope to all who thirst for righteousness, water that refreshes life, nurtures growth and offers new birth. And today you are invited to the waters to renew your commitment in each other's presence in the presence of others, your commitment to Christ who has raised us, the Spirit who has birthed us, the Creator who is making all things new.

So join me in the responses of renunciation of sins and profession of faith. I ask you, Will you turn away from the powers of sin and death? We renounce the spiritual forces of wickedness, reject the evil powers of this world, and repent of our sin. Will you let the Spirit use you as prophets to the powers that be?

We accept the freedom and power God gives us to resist evil, injustice and oppression in whatever forms they present themselves. Will you proclaim the good news and live as disciples of Jesus Christ, His body on Earth? We confess to Jesus Christ as our Savior, put our whole trust in His grace, and promise to serve Him as our Lord in Union with the Church which Christ has opened people of all ages, nations and races.

Will you be living witnesses to the Gospel individually and together, wherever you are? And in all that you do, we will remain faithful members of Christ's Holy Church and serve as Christ's representatives in the world. Will you receive and profess the Christian faith as contained in the Scriptures of both the Old and the New Testaments? We affirm and teach the faith of the whole church as we put our trust in God.

The Father Almighty. In Jesus Christ, His only Son, and in the Holy Spirit. One God now and forever. The Spirit of the Lord is with us. Even so, come Lord Jesus, Would you join me in prayer? Almighty God, the life you birthed in us by baptism into Jesus Christ will never die. Your justice never fails. Your mercy is everlasting.

Your healing rivers flow, Your Spirit blows where you will You can. We cannot stop you, God. And we pray that the Holy Spirit would be poured out on these waters. Amen.

And invite you to come to the waters. And you just come as you feel led. You can come from the sides or from the middle. There's going to be some instrumental music, and then we're going to have a song.

So. So take your time. And as you feel led to come to talk toward the waters, may you come toward the waters and feel the presence of the Holy Spirit in this place and within you

was born to the room, whose name to be free. But I was born God with the to use so I got inside the rules.

The rules You I regarding I can rule with all your. Yes, we can. Oh to to dance first all things where every sin can the only Oh, said that to the right Take me back in love with me for all your friends So give that to your to take me back here Your be to was to be free.

So this is the beginning Now this we renewed our covenant. But in order for us to grow, we have to be willing to lay aside our prejudices, our opinions, our thoughts. There is a Wesley Covenant prayer that allows us to lay it all on the table. I mean, invite us to to say this prayer together, say it today, but you can find it if you Google Wesley Covenant Prayer.

It's also on the U. Version app that we use under events. You can find it on the website and you listen to these words as you speak them and you might have to come back to them this week because these are some pretty powerful things that we're going to or we're about to ask God to do. So would you join me in this prayer?

I am no longer my own, but yours put me to what you will place me with whom you will put me to doing. Put me to suffering. Let me be put to work for you or set aside for you. Praise for you or criticize for you. Let me be full. Let me be empty. Let me have all things.

Let me have nothing. I freely and fully surrender all things to your glory and service. And now a wonderful and Holy God, Creator, redeemer and sustainer. You are mine and I am yours. So be it. And let the covenant which I have made on earth. Let it also be made in heaven. Amen. These are kind of some jarring words, if you think about it.

We're asking God to let us suffer, to let us have nothing, to let us be empty. But if we want to follow Jesus, Jesus tells us in Luke 9:23 that if you want to be my follower, you must deny yourself. Pick up your cross daily and follow. So may we follow with that kind of boldness in the days to come, in the years to come, and forever.

So may the God that brings renewal with refreshing waters. Bring us down to the river and back to the garden. Go in peace to love and serve the Lord. Amen.