

SERMON TAKE-HOME NOTES — September 14, 2025

I attended a Zoom Conference yesterday to learn about “gentle action.”

What is gentle action? I think it’s related to nonviolent action, though it’s not quite the same. In the 1950’s, for example, African Americans undertook nonviolent actions like sitting at all-white lunch counters in the South. This was bound to provoke some angry responses. My sense is that “gentle action” is what is needed in response to the anger. It is a kind and humble disposition which seeks to disarm the anger.

In Matthew 11:28-30, Jesus says this of himself,

“Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am *gentle* and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

Jesus also speaks a beatitude about being gentle: “Blessed are the gentle, for they will inherit the earth.” (Matt 5:5)

Examples of Jesus being gentle:

- John 8: Scribes and Pharisees bring a woman caught in adultery to Jesus and ask him if it is lawful to stone her to death. The first thing Jesus does is doodle in the dirt with his finger, disarming some of the tension. Then, he gives his famous response: “Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her” (John 8:7).
- Today’s Gospel Reading: The scribes and Pharisees are grumbling about Jesus welcoming sinners and even eating with them. Jesus doesn’t rant against them — so common in today’s political climate. He indirectly responds to them by telling stories, parables, of celebrating the finding of lost things. A lost sheep. A lost coin. We know what comes next: a lost son. But these stories end with the older brother of the lost son refusing to celebrate. Like the scribes and Pharisees who are grumbling against Jesus?

Stories, parables, are essential to gentle action. Humor can also help, if the aim is to laugh at ourselves on the way to forgiveness and reconciliation. I conclude today by offering the following cartoon

version of the Lost Sheep by LGBTQ+ cartoonist David Heyward:



This poignant cartoon appropriately offers the lost sheep as the scapegoat, because Jesus himself will offer himself as our scapegoat on the cross. He is the lamb of God who comes to take away our way of peace by expelling scapegoats.

Siblings in Christ, we need to follow in the ways of such gentle action. We live in a time of ranting against the perceived other which creates a climate of violence against the other. We need to follow Jesus in responses of kind, gentle actions, learning to tell stories and use humor to circumscribe our common humanity. For in the economy of God’s reign, no one is to be left out. Not one sheep. Let us hold out hope for even the elder brothers among us who resist joining the party. After all, that elder sibling may sometimes be us. So, even when we are, he hosts this meal each and every Sunday with the gentle invitation that we might join the party of God’s whole family forgiven and reconciled.