



MYERS PARK BAPTIST CHURCH

Inclusivity | Spirituality | Community | Justice

“We Just Talked About This”

A Sermon delivered by Rev. Tara Gibbs at Myers Park Baptist Church

On June 23, 2024, from Galatians 2:1-16

When did you last witness hypocrisy?

I know, coming out the gate strong.

If that is too strong, maybe a disconnect between deed and word, A double standard, Or an outright lie?

When was the last time you witnessed any of that? Not only a show or movie or heard about it, but witnessed it for yourself?

Was it a family member doing or saying something hurtful to one they claim to love?

Was it a politician or government completely engaging in the very activities they condemn others for doing?

Was it an institution spouting values that never manifest in their organizational systems?

Was it a friend or colleague hurting the person they said they'd protect?

Perhaps the reality is that at times we're all hypocrites.

We all sometimes fail to do what we say and say what we mean, but why is there this disconnect? Why does this happen? How does this happen?

Maybe Paul wondered the same of Peter in our text.

Paul is writing to the church in Galatia, A very common act for him. He spends most of chapter 1 affirming his call as an apostle, not one called by people but with a calling by God. And thus, the Gospel comes not from people but from Jesus Christ and that gospel or good news is not based on becoming Jewish but based on grace & faith.

This is the gospel that Paul professed and was accepted by James, John, and Peter in the first few verses but at verse 11 we learn that Peter, also known as Cephas, was having a disconnect; A disconnect between what he preached about good news for all people, including “gentiles” or non-Jewish folks and affirming their inclusion. Then refusing to eat or associate with them, especially when other Jewish folks were present. Some might say Paul noticed Peter being funny acting in mixed company. Paul noticed Peter proclaiming Jesus' inclusion and rejection of required Judaism practices but now Paul noticed Peter excluding folks based on those very same Jewish practices.

Perhaps Paul wondered like we do when we witness hypocrisy.

Why the disconnect Paul? How are you not catching this? What is going through your mind?

Again, these questions are not unlike our own. When we witness hypocrisy, I know because enslaved folks wondered why the disconnect for freedom spouting early colonists?

Pacifists wondered why the disconnect for warmongering politicians whose loved ones were never drafted.



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Many Black folks wonder why the disconnect for Clarence Thomas.
Many trans folks wonder why the disconnect for Caitlyn Jenner.
And many folks wonder why the disconnect for supposed loving Christians.

See it's easy to get riled up and think Yeah! What's up with them! THOSE hypocrites?
But perhaps we should look to ourselves this morning, At our own moments and issues with hypocrisy. Now you're about to sit here and wonder, who is Rev. Tara about to call out? Who can we judge and nod along with? Who amongst us are the hypocrites? Easy, all of us!
But maybe that isn't the question. Perhaps the more practical, helpful, or useful question: Is since we're all prone to hypocrisy, what are going to do about it? What do we do WHEN we witness hypocrisy? What do we say when witnessing the disconnect? How do we respond to false virtue? And not in some theoretical, hypothetical way...
When in our own homes, or in school, or with the government or at our workplace, or in our church, what do we do with hypocrisy?

What did Paul do? What do we do?

1. Perhaps we need to ignore it.

I mean, don't stir the pot, right?

Maybe it will go away if we ignore it long enough.

Imagine if Paul ignored Peter. Wouldn't the message of the gospel be tainted?

Irrelevant? Outright false? And as not so good news, imagine ignoring false prophets, hypocrites, and liars? Imagine thinking if we ignore it, away it goes.

Sounds silly right? But history shows us it's what we do, and worse, shows us that ignoring doesn't work.

Imagine if the Northern states ignored slavery? Wait, we don't have to imagine it, it only got worse and led to not only the Civil War but generations of my ancestors suffering. Ignoring the wrongdoing and injustices of hypocrites doesn't make it go away. In fact, when we ignore hypocrisy, we co-sign it and Jesus says in Matthew 23 We are basically shutting the door of the kingdom of heaven in people's faces.

So maybe condemning a bombing on Oct 7, rightly so and then supporting the bombing and starvation of 25x that including journalists, civilians, and humanitarian aid workers, maybe that hypocrisy just doesn't go away if we ignore it...

Maybe celebrating freedom here for Juneteenth while ignoring rights to reproductive care, affordable healthcare, housing, and a living wage won't work.

Maybe ignoring violence in Gaza And Haiti And Congo And Sudan Won't work either.

Maybe ignoring the hypocrisy at your job, and in your club and in your family, and your school, maybe it won't work either.

But what if it just feels like too much? What if the hypocrisy is overwhelming and the injustice is immense? If we don't ignore it.



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What do we do when witnessing hypocrisy?

2. Perhaps we minimize it and gaslight people.

For example, maybe Paul was making a big deal of nothing with Peter. Maybe he knows who Peter is, and maybe Peter just has a preference for Jewish folk over Gentiles? Maybe Paul needs to be ok with Peter's light discrimination and gentle bigotry.

I mean, it could be worse right?

Imagine someone saying their hypocrisy is just light discrimination, just a little gentle bigotry, just a little racism. Well, we don't have to imagine because people do say this. They see Juneteenth finally being acknowledged and say slavery was SOOOOOO long ago but never forget 9/11. Folks say, well there really were KIND slave owners, just light slavery, gentle oppression. It could've been worse. Folks say well, there's always going to be SOME violence in the Middle east but never mention before the US intervened in their politics with \$ and weapons...

Maybe minimizing hypocrisy doesn't work either.

In fact, Jesus reminds us in Matthew 18 that even caring for children, one of the lowest ranking members of society at his time, mattered. Yet today, folks cry out for the rights of the unborn but abandon them once they are born. But maybe it isn't that bad that children are starving, unhoused, sick, and abused.

Again, minimizing hypocrisy doesn't work.

So, what do we do when witnessing hypocrisy?

3. Sounds like we're supposed to do something...

But what if we hurt their feelings? We can't say anything to embarrass them, or shame them or make them feel bad. Maybe Paul needs to actually consider Peter and his feelings, his livelihood. Maybe we should center on the hypocrites, the oppressors, the participants of wrongdoing.

Imagine that...

Centering the feelings of the harmful folk, instead of those being harmed. Maybe we don't have to imagine it because maybe history has already shown us. Maybe it was the centering of white feelings post-civil war that led to the Jim Crow south.

It was centering on white feelings that led to less than acceptable conditions for Black folks, Lynchings, Segregation, and inequity all around. Maybe centering the oppressor doesn't work.

And again, taints the gospel.

Imagine going to Sunday morning worship, praising Jesus, and singing about love, then gathering up the family to attend an afternoon lynching. Don't have to imagine, it is in our history. The gospel becomes tainted when we center the feelings of hypocrites, When Scripture reveals over and over again That Jesus is on the side of the oppressed.



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So, what do we do with hypocrisy? If ignoring doesn't work? If minimizing doesn't work? If centering the hypocrite doesn't work? What do we do when we witness hypocrisy? Injustice? Oppression?

Maybe just maybe... Maybe we need to be more like Paul and say 5 simple words: WE JUST TALKED ABOUT THIS!

I love that in our text It's clear that Paul didn't ignore Peter's hypocrisy. He called it out to his face. Paul didn't minimize Peter's hypocrisy. He gave an entire essay the next verses about how it taints the gospel. Paul didn't even center Peter's feelings, He corrects him in front of everyone else and makes his critique plain. In my spiritual imagination, Paul saw Peter cutting up, walked up to him, grabbed him by the shoulder, shook him and said loudly We JUST talked about this!

Part of why I have this imagery Is because of a powerful memory I have from some of my time pastoring in New Jersey. In 2016, I was the senior pastor of a UMC church in small NJ town and in the summer, it was time for the annual regional conference. This big event that filled up the wildwoods conference center hosted thousands of UMC pastors, leaders, and congregational delegates. The keynote speaker was the very well-known Robin Diangelo, author and scholar of racism and whiteness. She offered an excellent presentation on how white people could live their entire lives without ever engaging with a Black, indigenous, or person of color. She showed stock images and explained that from birth, to schooling, wedding bridal parties, workplaces, to our highest level of office, it was not difficult for a white person to live a life and never consider being represented. Her talk received audible Wows, Oohs and Amens, topped only by a rousing standing ovation.

Then, less than 15 minutes later (Literally, I looked up the minutes from the conference to make sure) it was time for some voting. What vote on what you might ask? A recommendation to change rule 55 in the Rules of Order Specifically line 16 section C to read:

"As in all nominations, special attention shall be given to seeking diversity in opportunities to serve to (i) 17 people of diverse ages, genders, and racial and ethnic backgrounds; (ii) people with disabilities; and (iii) people 18 from all size churches."

A lone mic was placed in the center of the arena, and the floor was open to all who had a comment which comprised of white person after white person getting up to express their "concern" about emphasizing diversity. Many with prepared speeches and references to quotes to the point where I turned to my colleague who sat next to me, Rev. Dr. JJ and at the same time we sighed and rolled our eyes. Finally, an elderly white man stood up, no speech prepared. He looked around in exasperation and said those 5 words to stand up to hypocrisy: DIDN'T WE JUST TALK ABOUT THIS?



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As I close,

I hope you recognize that this message isn't to make you feel hopeless because we all have hypocritical moments, but this message is to empower you to literally say more often:

WE JUST TALKED ABOUT THIS.

What if we said that more often in meetings to our colleagues, directly in the eyes of authority figures, boldly to powerful institutions? Don't give in to the temptation to ignore hypocrisy or to minimize and write it off or to center the person in the wrong.

But like that elderly pastor in a sea of his colleagues, in front of his bosses, and boldly even though a lone voice, get in the habit of saying: WE JUST TALKED ABOUT THIS.

Like Paul to Peter, in front of their friends, declare to your peers, WE JUST TALKED ABOUT THIS.

Like Fredrick Douglas addressing folks celebrating the 4th of July freedoms while slavery was still rampant: WE JUST TALKED ABOUT THIS. We who preach justice on Sunday and then attend ministry meetings later in the week say WE JUST TALKED ABOUT THIS! When trying to deal with the rampant hypocrisy of political party governments Institutions and even churches....

Remember these 5 words: WE JUST TALKED ABOUT THIS!!!!

Let that be your rallying cry every Juneteenth as you remember enslaved folks who had to endure the hypocrisy of the 4th of July freedom celebration while shackled and tortured.

Practice with me, turn to your neighbor and say: WE JUST TALKED ABOUT THIS. There, now maybe it won't be so hard in the board meeting, in the classroom, at the dinner table, at the town hall and wherever you go. Be empowered to stand up to hypocrisy, start by declaring: WE JUST TALKED ABOUT THIS! Whether it was during Sunday sermon, Scripture or academic reading, Conference, or meeting, Private or public discourse, I implore you to say: WE JUST TALKED ABOUT THIS!

Imagine a world Where we hold people accountable. Where justice is upheld.

Where hypocrisy is stomped out. If even dreaming of that makes you smile, warms your heart, and gives you a little dash of hope, let's make that dream a reality. And take one more step to beloved community. It does no good to educate yourself, read & study all the literature, go to therapy, engage in small group discussions, attend rallies or protests, etc. if afterward we don't hold ourselves and others accountable. After all, WE JUST TALKED ABOUT IT.