

The Call

Holy God, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts be faithful and pleasing unto you, for you are our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

When I was teaching ethics at Kettering University, I usually taught an article that examined the fallacy of sunk costs. In corporate terms, sunk costs are those costs—money, time, effort, human-power, anything and everything that we put into a product before we sell and make money from it. The more costs a company sinks into a product, the more likely they are to want to make sure that the product gets to market and gets sold because they feel that they put in too much into it to go back. I taught this concept in an ethics class because this thinking—that since we’ve put so much time, effort, money, etc. into a product, we HAVE to produce it no matter what—is often the cause for unethical behavior. If a product is shown to be unsafe after the company has progressed pretty far in its production, they will often just go ahead and produce it anyway, thinking that the punishment for producing something defective is not as significant as the sunk costs, or thinking that they have gone too far to turn back.

What’s interesting is that this concept of sunk costs is even stronger and more powerful when it comes to ideological and moral sunk costs, because our morality and ideology are connected to our sense of self. What I mean is this: the more we invest our time, effort, thinking, and especially our discussions and

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arguments with family and friends in a belief, the harder it is to give up that belief. Especially if we have had arguments regarding that belief, posted about it on social media, or said or done anything else publicly, it becomes incredibly difficult to change that belief, even if it is proven to be untrue, because we've invested too much of ourselves into it to give it up.

I believe that this is something that we're seeing right now in our country. On January 6<sup>th</sup>, a mob of insurrections stormed the capital in Washington DC. They brutally attacked Capitol police officers and guards, and vandalized the building. They wore shirts that said, "40 million isn't enough," referring to the idea that the Nazi concentration camps didn't kill enough Jewish people, and waved the Confederate flag—a flag of civil war, white supremacy and secession. And yet, somehow, they have not been universally condemned. In fact, so many people in this country support what that group of thugs did that every state capitol in our nation is currently prepping for violent protests starting today and running at least through the inauguration. There have even been credible threats made against liberal churches, such as ours.

There are many reasons for this lack of condemnation, but one of them seems to be the persistent *false* belief that the presidential election in the fall was rigged and the persistent *false* belief in QAnon conspiracies. As Christians, we are

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called to speak and stand up for the truth, so let me be 100% clear when I say that there is absolutely no evidence that there was significant voter fraud in the last election. On the contrary, there is a great deal of evidence that the election was free and fair. Moreover, the QAnon conspiracies are completely wrong and dangerous. The core of the conspiracy is that high level democrats and wealthy Jewish people run a pedophilia ring, and that President Trump is the savior of the nation, rounding up and stopping them. There is no evidence to support this antisemitic conspiracy. In fact, whenever QAnon members raid a place where pedophiles are rumored to be, they find nothing. Worse, these members have been flooding legitimate child trafficking hotlines with false information, making it harder for those hotlines to find real perpetrators of child trafficking.

So why? Why do so many people believe these lies, especially after so many top Republicans have recanted and insisted that the election was free and fair? Some of those folks planning violence, like the self-identified white supremacists, believe in violence as a core tenant of their philosophy. But many, many others who plan to protest or who quietly support the protests from home, have been sucked in by the lies being told them. Part of the reason for that is the fallacy of sunk costs. For four years, people had to defend their support of a president that others were condemning as deeply immoral. As the arguments got worse and

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worse, they dug into their ideology more and insisted on following media that continued to present them with lies. Friends and families split over these arguments, so A LOT has been invested into them. So now, when the lies have led to terrible violence and might lead to more, they are faced with a very difficult situation: They either have to admit that they were wrong or they need to dig in even deeper.

But both of these lies—that the election was fraudulent and the QAnon conspiracy—play on some people’s deepest ideological and moral beliefs: our sense of fairness and our desire to protect and preserve innocent lives. They also play on people’s deepest fears—our terror that something bad could happen to our children or that our freedoms are being removed. And if we combine terror and such motives with the fallacy of sunk costs, well, what we get is a large group of people who are unable or unwilling to slow down and really examine their understanding of reality. Why? Because accepting that they have made mistakes, when they’ve put so much effort into those mistakes, could shatter their sense of being a moral, good person.

I don’t know how many of you watched former Governor Schwarzenegger’s speech this week. If you haven’t, I suggest you find it and watch it. One of the many things that stood out to me was his comment about how his community in

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Austria reacted after World War II. He said that many of them had been lied to and had believed and acted on those lies by supporting the Nazi regime. Once they learned the truth, they were shattered, many of them turning to addictions and becoming violent to the people around them. And this is the problem with placing our sense of self in an ideology or in the truth told to us by politicians or social groups. When faced with even the possibility that we could have been wrong, we can't accept it and we won't change, or we hang onto that false belief for so long that it causes a hatred that eats away at the soul.

So here's the thing we need to remember: We are not defined by our ideologies, our political affiliations, or our social groups. We are defined by who we are at the core of our being, which is a child and image bearer of God. As I said last week, our hearts are jewels that we simply need to find and re-find throughout our lives. And, since that is the case, we lose nothing by admitting when we are wrong. The truth won't shatter us. In fact, just the opposite is true. When faced with truth, we gain everything by admitting that we have been wrong because we reconnect with the truth of God.

In today's scripture, Mark tells us that Jesus started the calling of his disciples by saying, "the kingdom of God has come near. Repent, and believe in the good news!" He then asked fishermen to drop their nets, leave the lives that

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they have known, and become fishers of people. What sunk costs they had to ignore and leave behind!--A life, a job, a religion, and an ideology. But when faced with truth, that was what the disciples did. They were able to see the jewel at their hearts and turn towards something good.

Our Old Testament lesson also helps us understand what this call to repentance and to following the good news—our call as Christians—looks like. The prophet tells us that God despises festivals and the way that so many religious people go through the motions of faith, without living out their faith. Instead, our God expects action, and specifically action that is based upon truth and that brings about justice: Hate evil, love good, and let justice flow down like an ever-flowing stream!

In the last week, there have been a lot of calls for healing, but I wonder if maybe that's not what we need right now. In my prayer last week, I showed you an image of a broken jar and suggested that it represented our nation and our hearts. I also suggested that we can see the light of Christ inside better through those cracks. I wonder if, instead of rushing to fill up those cracks, we should sit for a while and meditate upon that light and what it's calling us to do right now. Perhaps our call to follow Christ and seek justice requires us to examine the cracks in the jar and their causes, and to let go of any sunk costs that are causing the jar to crack further. Part

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of loving others, part of bringing about justice in this world, is giving people the space they need for self-examination and repentance. So perhaps in order to even start repairing the jar, our nation needs to start as the disciples did, by throwing away our commitments to any sunk costs, repenting, and following Jesus. Amen.