

Speaking Truth to Power: What Real Mercy Looks Like

Of all the activities surrounding the inauguration of Donald J. Trump as the 47th president of the United States, the one that generated the most discussion about the essence of Christianity was the homily by Mariann Edgar Budde at the National Cathedral. Budde is part of a denomination that denies biblical authority, the exclusivity of Jesus, or that homosexuality is a sin.

With President Trump and Vice President Vance sitting in front of her, she confronted the new administration and called them to be compassionate to immigrants and LGBTQ children.

Many reacted negatively to her message. They thought it was inappropriate, disrespectful, ill-timed, and politically motivated. Others commended her as if she were the reincarnation of John the Baptist calling out King Herod's adultery. They praised her for showing courage and "speaking truth to power."

Those who loved what she did criticized those who disagreed with some version of this argument, "If your Christianity causes you to be offended by someone asking the most powerful person in the country to be merciful towards the powerless and vulnerable, then you have deeply misunderstood the teachings of Jesus Christ."

Is that true?

Simply put, "No!"

It's ironic that those who loved the message praised both "speaking truth to power" AND the call to be "merciful." Yes, Christians are called to show mercy to everyone, especially the most vulnerable. Yes, Christians are called to speak truth to everyone, including those in power. But Christians are called to hold both truth AND mercy together! Not either/or but both/and. You cannot be merciful if you are not truthful. You cannot hold to truth without being merciful.

The problem is that we live in a world that has re-defined "love" in a way that wants compassion without truth. "You do you!" "Live your truth!" Condone the actions of everyone regardless of how they live! That is not the way of Christ. That is not the truth of the gospel. Christians speak the truth in love. Why? Because that is who our Savior is. He is the one full of grace and truth (John 1:14). He is the way, the truth, and the life (John 14:6). There is no truth outside of Him and His Word. Nor is there mercy.

If your toddler wants to run out and play in traffic, you do not love him if you allow it under the deception that it would be hateful to stop him from living his truth. No. Love demands telling him the truth that his path is headed toward destruction. We are not merciful to

sinners if we give them some amorphous, re-defined compassion that does not lovingly tell them rebelling against God's design leads to death.

It is not loving to call sin righteousness or righteousness sin. We call sinners to repentance. Moreover, we hold out the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ to all who turn from their sin to Him!

Yes, we are called to love everyone, even those we disagree with, but love does not require refusing to call sin, sin. Yes, there are verses in the OT that call for Israel to love the sojourner in their midst. The NT people of God is the church not the USA. We as the church should love the sojourner in our midst in both word (evangelism: speaking truth in love) and deed (meet needs). But those realities do not contradict the biblical mandate given to government to protect its citizens (cf. Rom 13).

With such a big platform and crowd (both in-person and virtually), Mrs. Budde could have shown great courage if she would have challenged the lost to call on the name of the Lord for salvation. I encourage every minister of the gospel I have ever trained to proclaim it and give people a chance to be saved no matter the context (wedding, funeral, graduation, etc.). Of course, in Mrs. Budde's case, that would have required her to have a biblical understanding of the gospel and the necessity of soul-winning. Instead, she chose to score political points (after all, to my knowledge, she never called out Biden's position on the abortion of the most vulnerable among us or even Obama when he was nicknamed "the Deporter-in-Chief").

May we, as the church of the Lord Jesus Christ, love everyone enough to speak the truth in love by sharing the gospel. After all, the gospel perfectly combines truth (God shows that he is just in the crucifixion of Jesus because he does not allow sin to go unpunished) with grace (God justifies sinners; cf. Rom 3). Only as gospel people full of grace and truth will we truly be able to show real compassion and speak the truth in love to power. We live in a world that wants one (love) without the other (truth), but we as the people of Christ know the world desperately needs both!