

BELPRES CHURCH

Sermon Title: We Shall Overcome

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Scripture:

Luke 9:51-55

As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem. ⁵² And he sent messengers on ahead, who went into a Samaritan village to get things ready for him; ⁵³ but the people there did not welcome him, because he was heading for Jerusalem. ⁵⁴ When the disciples James and John saw this, they asked, "Lord, do you want us to call fire down from heaven to destroy them?" ⁵⁵ But Jesus turned and rebuked them.

Transcript:

Scripture, let's see what God's got to say in the scripture. Luke 9:51:53... 256, he says, "When the days drew near for him," that's Jesus,, "To be taken up. He set his face to go to Jerusalem and he sent messengers ahead of them who went and entered a village of the Samaritans to make preparations for him. But the people did not receive him because his face was toward Jerusalem. And when his disciples, James and John," known as the sons of thunder, by the way, "Saw it, they said, 'Lord, do you want us to tell a fire to come down from heaven and consume them?'" Hence the sons of thunder. "But he turned and rebuked them and they went on to another village," these sons of thunders. Oh my goodness.

Well, when I was a kid, I went to a Christian private school here on the east side, but I lived in Seattle and in those times it was predominantly, dominant culture, white cats at this school with a handful of us, brown and black brothers there. And most of us lived in Seattle. So we took the city bus to go home, the metro bus. And one of these times, about 1991, I'm like 13, my friends, we are all in the back and they're being loud and belligerent and I'm like, "Yo, you guys need to calm down because they're going to kick us off this bus." See, because I've told the story before here that when I was seven back in the '80s, I was kicked off a bus or my family was kicked off bus. We ended up with my cousin in handcuffs. So I'm like, "Yo, I'm not going through that again." So they were like, "Nah, they can't do anything to us." I'm like, "All right,

fine, suit yourself." So I grabbed my stuff and I walked up to closer to the front of the bus and I sat down by myself.

Well, of course right before we were going to go over the floating bridge and go into what we consider safety, Seattle, the bus driver slammed on the brakes. This cat never liked us, by the way. I don't know if he was racist. I don't know if he didn't like young people. I don't know what it was. But he never liked us. He got up and he went to the back and said, "Get off my bus." And he kicked all of my friends off the bus. And I was like, "Yo, I told y'all it was going to happen." But then he proceeded to walk up to the front and he said, "And you get off my bus." And I was like, "Yo, I separated myself. I told them to be quiet. They didn't listen." He is like, "No, I know it's you who's graffitiing all on this bus."

Because of course, right next to me is graffiti on buses, as there were on every single bus. But apparently this cat didn't know immigrant mentality because my parents taught me like, "Look, because you're brown and immigrant, you already have a bunch of strikes against you, so don't give anybody any more reasons to be suspicious of you." So I would never, nor have I ever graffitied in anything. And I was like, "No, no, no, wasn't me, this, I'm drawing comic books. This is a special marker for that." He's like, "No, I know it was you." And then I just got little flashbacks of my cousin in handcuffs. So I had a choice to make. I could either escalate this thing and plead my case, or I could concede. And I conceded, picked up my sketchbook, my bag, and I got off that bus.

Now our parents heard about this, obviously, and the school got involved, and we went to Metro and we never got to talk to the bus driver. We dealt with the, I don't know, the supervisor or whoever it was, and he was like, "No, he doesn't need to talk to you," he was like, "Because he was in the right. You guys were loud and you guys were disturbing the peace. And he has every right to kick anybody off that bus." So it was within his right to kick him off, which is true. They were being loud. They were going to get kicked off. I go, "But it seems like I was targeted though. I wasn't a part of it." But he is like, "No, it's all good. Don't talk to him," or we couldn't talk to him. So from what we know, he was never reprimanded. He was on his route the next day. We had to see him.

Well, my principal of my school, who is a Caucasian cat and white dude, apparently that wasn't good enough for him. So I don't remember if it was the next week or I don't know what it was, but he went and waited out at the bus stop with us. So when the bus pulled up, he jumped on this bus and laid into this bus driver and he is like, "Yo." And we were just like, "Yo, the principal's like standing up for us." And I can't remember what he said, "These are kids and they're minors. You can't just leave them wherever you want. They're our kids are our responsibility." But I was just so shocked that Biscuits went up there and started laying into this cat. And what was my principal's name? Mr. White. Yeah, baby. Take that. Mr. White. Go ahead, Mr. White.

Well, this incident changed my life forever. It actually changed my faith quite a bit. And I'll finish that story as we move on through this sermon series, or this sermon. So sermon series we're talking about is a story storytellers where people that Jesus invites to follow him, they all have a story of why they began following Jesus and how Jesus transformed their lives.

And listening to other people's testimony sometimes of how Jesus changed their lives can lead us into places that are uncomfortable for us, whether that's abuse or other things. But if it's their testimony of how Jesus changed their lives, then it benefits the community. So today I'm going to talk about how racism changed my life, but more importantly, how the power of someone's faith and love for Jesus changed my perception on racism and gave me more hope in Christ more than anything else I've ever encountered. But it does require me to talk about racism.

Now I've heard the phrase over and over again, "Can we please stick to the gospel? Can we not talk about prejudice and racism all the time? It doesn't help. In fact, sometimes it makes things worse." Well, I can kind of agree to that. Yeah, sometimes it does make things worse because there's unhealthy ways to talk about issues, and then there is healthy ways to talk about issues. But if we're never willing to talk about them within the church, then essentially we're telling the world something that God has given us to resolve, we're telling the world, "You know what? You figure it out." And as disciples of Christ, I don't think that's a place where we want to be.

And talked with my friend Brian, who's an African American cat who I'll be sharing a story later. We noticed something that when we went to dominant culture, white churches, he's like, "They never talked about racism from the pulpit, ever." Of all the churches I've been in [inaudible 00:05:45], they never brought it up. Which is funny to us because, or at least to me, because in my minority churches, we talked about it all the time. If we weren't allowed to talk about racism in our churches, there wasn't a lot that we had to talk about, because it was a part of our lives. And we were looking to, where does God help us in these things? So if we were to leave that out, we were going to leave out a big chunk of our lives. So it was common. But I do know that it is uncomfortable to talk about it in dominant culture churches. I understand this. I always try to be as graceful as I can with these things.

So we have this encounter that we read about, the Samaritans who reject Jesus. So he goes into this place. They don't like that he's heading off to Jerusalem because they don't like the Jews, but they were upset whether he was going to spend time in their temple or whatever. But they don't like it, so they reject him. And then his homies get all bent out of shape and try to call a fire down upon them. These sons of thunders are just out of control.

So first of all, the Samaritans don't act right, and then these fools don't act right. And Jesus's like "You SOTs, do you not listen to what I've been teaching, you sons of thunders, ignorant sons of thunders?" He said, "Do you not know what's in my scripture? Do not repay evil with evil, but

repay evil with good." Have you not been listening? So he says, "Shut your mouth and you're talking to me." So he rebukes them and then they head on.

And maybe you've heard in the Bible that the Samaritans Jews don't like each other. Well, it's interesting that the author of Luke, you can see that the feeling is mutual. Neither one of those cats acted right except for Jesus. And it's more that they didn't like each other. Maybe you don't know the history too much. I'm going to kind of bring us up to speed here because there was some serious bad blood between them. They don't even actually agree on their own history.

There's two narratives of who the Samaritans are. There's the Jewish narrative, some of it which we have in the Bible. And then there's a Samaritan narrative of who they are, who are still alive to this day. There's about 850 of them in the holy land. Well, the Jewish narrative who this Samaritans are is that about 1000 years before or so, before this encounter with Jesus, the kingdom of Israel split into two kingdoms. The northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah, which we read in the book of First Kings.

And while according to Jews, the northern kingdom were out of the pot, they were not obeying God. So God allowed the Syrians to come and conquer them and then took a bunch of Israelites away, back into Assyria. But they left a few Israelites in the land of Samaria and then they brought in foreigners to occupy the land. And then the Israelites that were there and these foreigners intermarried, which was not allowed. And they no longer became Israelites in Samaria, but now they're known as Samaritans, and the Jews did not like them, considered them unclean for doing this. Now, that's the Jewish narrative.

The Samaritan narrative is that, well the Samaritans don't agree that with this whole thing because they claim they're descendants of ancient Israelites that never left the holy land because they never went to exile. So they were always there. They have kept the traditions to this very day. The Samaritans believe that the ancient Israelites originally built a tabernacle on Mount Gerizim, where they worship in the north. And King Solomon built another temple in Jerusalem, which we read in the Bible, splitting the kingdoms into two. And the Samaritans continued to worship at Mount Gerizim for centuries. So they didn't even agree on their own history.

And on top of that, eventually the southern king of Judah, they too are disobeying God and God has the Babylonians conquer them and take them off into exile. And we read that in books of Jeremiah and Daniel. And then when they return, they want to rebuild Jerusalem, want to rebuild a temple. We read that in the book of Ezra and Nehemiah and the Samaritans come from the north and come and want to help the Israelites.

"Hey, can we help you rebuild a temple?" Because I'm pretty sure in the Bible says, "Because we worship the same God." And the Israelites like, "Dude, get your dirty Sammy hands off my temple. I don't want you touching those things." And they reject them. Well, the Samaritans don't take too kindly to that. And not only do they get upset, they reject them, but then they start to oppose rebuilding of the temple.

So now we have this deep animosity between these two tribes, these two races, these two groups of people. They don't agree on each other's heritage. They don't agree on which temple they should be worshipping at. They don't agree on religious practices, and even though they are both descendants of ancient Israel. So all that was needed to be said in the times of Jesus, are you in Israelite? Are you Jew or are you a Samaritan? And if you knew, then that was the trouble. All that was needed because they hated each other.

Essentially what they went down to is like, "You know what? You worship in your temple and we'll go worship in our temple." Or let me bring it closer today. This water fountain is for your people and this water fountain is for our people. Well, let me bring it even closer to us. This church is for your people and that church is for your people. Let's get it closer. This service is for our people. That service is for your people. That is not what God's gospel is, to be dividing people.

We have a term today that we kind of hear, and it's been kind of wrapped up in politics and now we kind of use that the phrase of woke culture, but whatever. But there's this term systemic racism. And that's not bigotry and prejudice between two people. But systemic racism is a system that's put in place in order to elevate one group or one race over the other. Now that's happening today, but here we see it in the Bible.

There's a system put in place in order to keep these two people separate. If you want to stick to the gospel, okay, let's stick to the gospel. I told you about my friend, my African American friend, Brian. And Brian, he's the nicest guy you've ever met. He's a super cool cat. And his parents, they wanted to represent Jesus best they can and live a life like Jesus. And so they didn't throw everything, throw the race card in everything, that everything was racist over bad interactions. So they taught their family to love people. And until they give you a reason to show that they don't like you, treat them with kindness and respect.

So Brian always tried to see the positive in people and he didn't tend to put up too much of a fight when he came to racist interactions because he wanted to see good intent. Well, in 11th grade he went to a Christian boarding school, which again, in this area at that time was predominantly Caucasian cats, predominantly white kids, and then a handful of black and brown brothers and sisters up in the joint. And so in Christian boarding school, you have, it's mandatory you go to chapel.

And so Brian had just learned how to give himself a fade, which is a typical African American haircut. Now I'm getting a natural fade due to my male pattern baldness, but no clippers necessary. But he gave him a fade. He got really good at it. He's like, "Yo, my hair was looking fresh. I gave myself a fade. I put on my suit and I went off to chapel." Well before chapel started, the vice principal of the school came to him and he said, "Hey, look Brian, your hair's out of school policy. Can you come with me? You need to go sit in the mother's room."

And again, Brian, who you know, didn't really put up a fight, he was a little bit in shock and confused 'cause he was like, "Sergio, I just had a normal fade. I didn't put any slits in my hair or anything fancy. It was just a normal African American basic haircut." And the reason why he was so shocked and confused, because he was sitting in the mother's room, he's like, there was these two white cats who were sitting close to the front who had completely shaved heads, black trench coats and black combat boots who straight up looked like skinheads in the church. And no one said anything to them. If there was anybody who was out of school policy, it was these two cats. But yet it was Brian who was sitting in the mother's room.

Now Brian's parents obviously got involved in this, and he is like, "I've never seen my dad so upset in my life other than this incident." But it did lead them to talking to the school board, which led them to hiring an African American teacher. And Brian loved this teacher. He was one black teacher among a bunch of white teachers. He loved this teacher. He was so engaging and loved to teach and loved to engage with the students. And he taught them all kinds of stuff. He taught them to be empathetic to other people, to Native Americans, all people. And later on in life, and it was be... I'm sorry, because of this teacher, Brian decided to be an educator. He fell in love with educating and decided to become a teacher.

And later on in life, Brian decided to connect with this teacher to tell him to thank him. Like, "Look, you were such an inspiration to me. This is the reason why I'm a teacher today." And this African American teacher was happy for Brian, but he had to be honest with him. He's like, "Brian, I never wanted to work in that school." He's like, "I was not in a place in my life where I wanted to be the only black teacher among a predominantly white kids in a white school." He's like, "But I knew that that's where God was calling me. So I stayed and I did my best to represent Christ as much as I could."

So one thing I want to say to you today is go where God calls you. Don't be heading into place head first like a dolphin where someone, where God ain't called you. Don't be going in gun blazes into places where God didn't call you because you might do more damage than good. But if God calls you into a place, God will equip you. Even though you don't feel you're equipped, God will equip you to make a change and a difference in places that you might be uncomfortable with. But if you do it on your own, it's not what we're called to do.

So Brian said, he talking about this interaction, he's like, "This interaction has given me the chance to give the same love and respect to kids because of this African American teacher and his love for Jesus and his love for Native American culture that he taught me in school." Brian said, "It's like Sergio, although I hated that this interaction happened to me, if it didn't, wouldn't have happened, maybe I would've never met this teacher and maybe I would've never been a teacher myself. It's who I am." So he goes, "In a way, I'm glad it happened."

So let me share with you why I am here. You see, on that day when Mr. White stood up for me at that bus stop, that was the first time any white person had ever stood up for me. I was 13-

years-old, never once, never once did a white person ever say anything when we were getting kicked out of department stores, when my family was not being served in diners, when I was being kicked off the bus, never once did any white person ever say, "Hey, maybe you're treating them unfairly," or, "Hey, maybe you should serve them. Clearly they were here before." So hey, "He was just sitting on his own. He wasn't a part of that." Never once did any Caucasian person ever stand up for me.

But on that day, see, I've known Mr. White since I was five-years-old. I know him to this day. And I know Mr. White loves God, and I know he's always tried to live his life in service of God. He's not perfect, but he lives his life as best as he can to be a disciple of God. And I learned on that day that Christianity was more than singing hymns. It was more than reading scriptures, more than sitting in churches and listening to sermons. I learned on that day that I that the Christianity is more than that. I had only given my life to Christ through baptism only a few years before. And on that day, I learned that a dedicated disciple of God can make a difference in the issues of the world that I thought in my years were unsolvable.

The world already showed me what discrimination was like. I didn't need that lesson. But a Christian who truly believes that all God's children are worthy of fair treatment, is willing to put themselves on the line to stand up for others who can't. This interaction taught me more and gave me more faith than anything else ever in my life.

My friends, the author of the Book of Luke's and Act Luke's, sorry, there goes is my Spanish. Hey go, pick a Luke's. No, Luke and Acts went through so much trouble to include this account, this animosity between the Jews and the Samaritans, that I think it's safe to say that God is okay that we discuss it, that actually God wants us to be a part of it, but we must be able to discuss and listen to others. Even Jesus points it out later on in Luke when he tells a parable of a Samaritan. We call it the Good Samaritan. That's not what Jesus said, but it's a Samaritan. And if you want to exercise an empathy, read that parable, but from the perspective of the Jews and see how that feels. And not only that, later on in this sermon series we're going to talk about when Jesus meets up with a woman at a well who just so happens to be a Samaritan. So the authors of Luke and Acts make an effort to point out these issue between these two tribes.

And I have a question for you. When Jesus rebukes these ignorant SOTs, why doesn't he do something about that problem right then? Why doesn't he solve the racist issues going on, or the animosity between these groups then? Why, because where was he going? He was going to his death. He was going to die on a cross to be resurrected, to offer salvation and conquer sin because he knows that this issue is a sin issue. And he knew that I could either win the battle right now, but he was more interested in winning the war. And so he didn't do anything about it then. But he said, "Be my witness."

And if you still don't believe me, then let's turn to Acts 1:8. Well, this is Jesus now speaking to disciples. He's resurrected and he's about to go back into heaven. He says, "But you will receive the power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you and you will be my witnesses." My witnesses, meaning you witness what I have done. These stories that I'm telling you will retell these stories in Jerusalem and in Judea and in Samaria and to the ends of the earth.

Let me put it in plainer language just in case you're not quite eating what I'm cooking here. You will go to my white sisters and brothers and you will go to my black sisters and brothers and to the ends of the earth to witness of what I have done, what I am bringing to you. And that's a gospel that is meant to bring people together.

So my challenge to you today is please let those who have testimony speak up without the fear of sucking the air out of the room. Or can we talk about racism with Jesus in the center of it all? Because this is still happening today. In my life, I can just recount the times in the '80s when kicked out of department stores or kicked off of buses, or in '87 and in '91, or from people not getting in elevators with me or being singled out at the airport and being searched. Or when I started working here in 2003, being pulled over for just I think being in the wrong neighborhood. Or my wife continued to answer people who look at our kids and be like, "Oh, are you their nanny?" Because they have different colored skin. Or asking them, "Oh, do they have the same father?" Because my kids look different than she does because she looks white. Or my kids coming home distraught because people at their elementary school is chanting, "Build the wall." Or my kids coming crying home because they hear at school that they're going to deport all Mexicans and they're worried about me, that I'm going to get deported. Or even up to the year before Covid, when I was in my front house trying to work on the weather ship of my door, where a Caucasian gentleman approached me, is like, "Hey, what are you doing?" Thinking that I was trying to break into my own house. I've lived in this house for six years.

Maybe you can decide not to speak about it, but I can't. And not only do I want to speak about it, I want to tell my kids, I want to speak to my kids that God can be in the center of all these things and He has a way through, but I have to be able to discuss it. So let's try to learn from each other. Let's try to empathize with each other.

Unfortunately, my friend Brian and myself, we never got to sit down and talk to these people. I never got to sit down and talk to this bus driver to ever really know. I mean, was it a racist thing? Was it a young thing? Was it having a bad day? Was he going through the divorce? I don't know. We never got to discuss it. Same thing with my friend Brian. Never got to talk to the principal. So I really didn't know what was going on. So we could only do half of really what God wanted us to do because without discussion, we can't get to reconciliation. But if we put Jesus in the center of it all, then I believe we can do what one of my favorite gospel singers sang so many times in the '60s, Mahalia Jackson, We Shall Overcome.

Bow your heads.

God in heaven, I want to thank you so much for your word. I want to thank you so much for the things that we struggle with you already knew, I want to thank you so much for people who love you, who've helped in so many different ways. Lord, I want to thank you for Bell [inaudible 00:22:16] as the people here today, as we learn from you, Lord. I want to thank you for dying on a cross for our salvation, that your no sin can conquer what you paid for us, Lord. I want to thank you that you are the way forward in all things, in your beautiful and your gloriousness. Together, we all said. Amen.

Amen.

Discussion Questions:

Read this week's scripture(s) & answer the below questions with your friends, family, or All In small group.

Ice-breaker Question: What is your favorite outdoor winter activity in the pacific northwest?

Opening Question: Looking back to last week's sermon and scripture... How did you live differently or practice what we talked about in your life this week? What did you do and how did it go?

Scripture Reflection Questions: Read this week's scripture together and discuss the following:

- What do we learn about God (e.g., traits, personality, what matters, priorities) in this passage?
- What do we learn about people, and ourselves in particular, this week?

Sermon Reflection Questions: Reflecting on this week's sermon, discuss the following:

- The tribalism, or racism, we see throughout the Bible is still very much present today. Jesus's desire is that the gospel be for all people, not just one tribe or race. If you were to replace the animosity between the Jews and Samaritans with a group you belong to and another one today, who would they be? What steps can we take individually and/or collectively to build bridges between tribal or racial divides?
- Have you experienced a racial issue, where kingdom work could have been done, through a relationship and advocacy in the past? How did you react to the situation and did you feel God had prepared you to handle it? If not, how do you think God prepares us or how do we prepare ourselves through our faith for these situations?
- Has someone's testimony surrounding prejudice ever made you uncomfortable? Why is it hard to hear?

Closing Question and Application: Given what we've discussed together today, how might God want you to apply these learnings to your life or in the life of your community this next week? Who might you share this with?

Closing group prayer: Spend a few minutes together in your group sharing prayer requests and then praying together for each other. Thank God for the time together, the conversation shared, the other people in the group, and for encouragement in the week ahead.