

How to Make the Right Kind of Trouble

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Date: 28 June 2020

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[0 : 00] Hi everyone, happy Sunday. My name is Angela. I'm one of the pastors here at the table. It's been quite some time since any of us have seen each other, and it's possible that some of you may have never seen me before or have no idea who I am. So I wore my pastor uniform just in case there were any questions about my position within the church. I'm so excited to be sharing with you today. This is my first sermon by myself, talking to myself. Rosie, my dog, is here, but you know, she doesn't have the best feedback all the time. So it is my first time doing this. I'm really excited about it, but please bear with me should it be a little weird. I'm already a little weird on stage, so who knows what's going to happen over the next few minutes, but I'm excited to do it with you. Last week, Pastor Anthony took a look at Jesus's first miracle, which we all know was having more than one friend in his 30s and keeping them, and really just overall how to be people of invitation and how we as Christians establish those friendships through invitation and then through those relationships instill some challenge to make us as a whole better. And so last week was week two of our series of Don't Be a Jerk, and now we get to continue that. We get to continue the idea of being a people of God who are meant to calibrate both invitation and challenge to help change the world, exactly what we're supposed to do. So now we, you and I, get to look at how we deepen those relationships with challenge. I don't know why they thought the Enneagram 8 would be good for this, but whatever. And when I say challenge, I mean difficult, but not in a negative way.

At our best, relationships really push us to be better versions of ourselves for all parties involved. We speak up within relationships because we care about them precisely for that reason. We seek resolution on issues past the point of the moment happening because we want our connections with each other to be authentic. And in Luke, the gospel that we're going to look at today, Jesus shows us not only how to bring high challenge to our relationships to make them more authentic, but also how to bring high challenge to the world to make it more just. And in both situations, it is precisely because he cares that he acts. So before we get into it, let's say a quick prayer because you all know my sermons always need a lot of prayer. So please pray with me. Father God, I just thank you for this opportunity. I thank you for the ability to still meet and do church and be a part of your community, Lord, and your people here on earth during this wild time. I just pray that you just speak through me today, Lord. You speak through me. You speak through this phone. You speak through this connection. You speak to people wherever they are so that they can hear you clearly and not me.

I thank you for allowing me to share your word and I appreciate you trusting me with it. In your mighty name we pray. Amen. Okay, so let's get started. Good trouble, right? I'm here to talk about how we make good trouble within our relationships and within the world. Now, this sermon is about good trouble, but what do we mean when we say that? I know the Bible has many translations and styles, but I'm fairly certain none of them contain. And then Jesus said, go into that town and give him some good trouble, right?

But if we know anything about Jesus, he loved good trouble. He loved it, like loved. And he got into it often. But it was never trouble for trouble's sake, right? It was always with purpose, always with a much greater purpose, always with the intention of love. And so before we look at how Jesus caused some good trouble and how we can and should do the same with our lives, we need to briefly discuss the reasons why what he does and what he embodies and what he calls us to do is considered trouble in the first place.

When Jesus appears on the ministry scene in his 30s, one of his first recorded acts is what we call the Sermon on the Mount. It's found in Matthew 5. And so I will go to that. Y'all can if you are able and have it. But no worries, I will read it. Matthew is the first gospel in the second half of the Bible.

[4 : 40] Look at this gorgeous big Bible. I have it as my name on it, too. And I'm going to read you the Beatitudes. And it was this moment where Jesus was starting his ministry and all of these people gathered and they really wanted to hear something from him. And what did Jesus say? When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up to the mountain. And after he sat down, his disciples came to him. And then he began to speak and he taught them, saying, Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy. And blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called the children of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. And blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecute the prophets who were before you.

Now, I don't know about you, but any time in Scripture when I see a mention of how we humans can be recognized by others as belonging to the kingdom of God, as being a part of that group, my mind immediately always goes back to Genesis. And specifically to Genesis 1.26, where Scripture tells us that the Trinity is deciding basically all of these pieces of creation that they're going to make. And then they say, some versions say God, some versions say Holy Spirit. Let us make humankind in our image and in our likeness. Then the next verse, verse 27, when the actual act happens, all it says is, then we made mankind in our image. The likeness piece was dropped. It was left out of the actual creation. Image is our birthright. Likeness is our choice. So whenever I see mentions of the things in Scripture and what we can do, the ways we can live to identify us with the kingdom of heaven,

I take notice. And what identity piece do we see in the Beatitudes that I just read that identify us with God's likeness? Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called the children of God.

Peacemakers will be known as the children of the Most High. Peacemaking is an identity indicator. Absolutely. You'll notice it doesn't say peacekeeping, peace believing. It says peacemaking, being peacemakers, which indicates two things. One, that peacemaking requires action. And two, in order to bring peace into a situation or make peace, that means that there was not peace in that place before, right? Perhaps there was strife. Perhaps there was conflict in some way. Perhaps there was anger. Perhaps there was hate. Perhaps there was even loneliness or indifference. But whatever it was, it wasn't peace. Absolutely not. And if we want to be called the children of God, we have to bring peace to places. We have to bring peace. We have to be the peacemakers in and around our lives. So rightly so, at this point, you may be wondering what I'm talking about because I told you that this sermon is about causing good trouble, right? And sometimes we don't always connect peacemaking with troublemaking, but I swear there's a connection. And I don't know if you all know Shane Claiborne. He's an author and all around holy troublemaker in general. And I love what he says about peace. He says that peace is not just about the absence of conflict. It's also about the presence of justice. True peace does not exist until there is justice, restoration, and forgiveness.

[8 : 46] That's really important. So knowing that we are called to be peacemakers and bring about justice, what does that look like in a world that is constantly trying to tear us away from God? A world where the forces of evil stand in defiance of that peacemaking.

This is why Jesus tells us his kingdom is nothing like the kingdom of this world. It's different. It turns this world upside down and shakes out all the injustice found within it.

And when we see that beatitude of blessed be the peacemakers for they will be called the children of God, and we decide to take on that peace of God's likeness, our peacemaking on behalf of Jesus will often be seen from a worldly perspective as troublemaking, as troublemakers.

You want to change a system that's been working for generations and disrupted for the purposes of justice? How dare you, troublemaker?

And maybe this means that some people will not think we're nice. Well, joke's on them because I don't really want to be known as nice. I don't. I don't want to be known as a nice person. I want to be known as a kind person.

[9 : 53] Niceness ignores justice for the sake of fake peace, but kindness disrupts the status quo for the sake of love. Every time. We talk about hard things precisely because we care about those issues, precisely because we want to move it past the moment in which we're in.

Kind people aren't always nice people. Niceness is a pleasantry. Kindness is a virtue. So know that our pursuit of peace, our pursuit of bringing God's kingdom to our streets, will be absorbed by many as a pursuit of trouble.

It just will. And since we can't control what other people say about us, our focus has to remain on our calling, on what God has told us to do. That's it. Because if we want to be known as the children of God, we have to do our part to bring peace.

The deep, justice-seeking, love-abiding peace that will wreck our egos but restore our souls. And if that looks like trouble to some people, so be it.

And thankfully, us troublemakers are in great company on this one. Jesus, like I said, is just the biggest troublemaker, especially in Luke.

[11 : 02] Have y'all read it? I mean, like, I know you've read it, but like, have you read it? Because, whoa, I feel, I can only speak for myself, that, you know, Luke and the Gospels in general are, you know, a group of books that we, I think I know so well because we use so many stories from them.

And we quote them often. We mention them often. They're a part of our Christian culture. And, go lay down. I love you. Go lay down.

Rosie. But, do we really know them? Because when I went and read Luke, I was so surprised at Jesus. Whoo! He is so intense and so angry.

And I loved every moment of it. I loved his sass. Now, when people tell me about my sass, I'm going to be like, Sorry, I got it from Jesus. Take it up with him. Like, it's so intense.

And he's so wonderful and wild. And I adore him. And so, re-reading this was important. Re-reading this was important for me because it made me want to high-five Jesus.

[12 : 13] And so, we're going to look at the good trouble that Jesus starts in Luke. And where we pick up the story in Luke, Jesus has already called his disciples and begun his ministry.

So, that piece of it has started. So, he's going around speaking and healing and sharing parables that typically go directly over his disciples' heads. He has so much patience. He has so much patience for them.

And today, we're going to look at pieces from Luke 9, 10, and 11. I wish I could read them all with you. But if I do that, I probably will not be able to speak at church again.

So, I won't. But I encourage you to go back and read all of 9, 10, and 11. But I'm going to go through them and highlight just a few parts for us as we walk through.

So, let's talk about Jesus' kind of troublemaking. Now, in general, Jesus does, honestly, like a lot of yelling in Luke. A lot. And it makes sense to point out those instances, which we will.

[13 : 15] You know, that's great troublemaking. But he also does some really sly troublemaking. Stuff that I never really noticed before when I read it.

Like right in the beginning of chapter 9 in Luke. He says, It says, And then Jesus called the twelve together and gave them power and authority over all demons and to cure diseases.

And he sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal. Now, he sent them. He's this new leader. He's healing people, number one. And now, he is giving that power to other people to go and heal.

And not in the name of the king of the land, but in the name of the king of heaven. That is not going to sit well with the king of the land, who is Herod. This should not be happening.

And healing outside of the temple, outside of religious practice, what are you doing, Jesus? Right? This was a direct piece of shade to Herod. And Jesus knew it.

[14 : 19] And he did it anyway. And he just said, Go. I give you this power. Go. Go and do this thing. That, in itself, is revolutionary. Going against the powers that be was very, very dangerous.

And Jesus knew it would stir things up. And it did. And we see that because his disciples started cruising around on behalf of the kingdom of God. And Herod started asking questions. Scripture legit says in that same chapter, chapter 9, verse 7, that he heard about this king Herod and that he was perplexed.

He legitimately said, I beheaded John the Baptist, thinking that he got rid of whatever movement John was starting. But who is this now? He's like, I thought we got rid of these guys.

I thought they were done. I thought this movement was over. And as soon as the disciples returned from their journey that Jesus sent them on, all of these crowds form around Jesus.

And they gathered and he spoke to them. He spoke to them in a large group. You know what really upsets people in power? Large gatherings of people learning a better way of life.

- [15 : 28] Sound familiar? Jesus didn't care about people in power getting upset. He cared about people hearing the good news of his kingdom, the good news of freedom in his love.
- And one more sly troublemaking act before we get to the yelling. In chapter 9, verse 14, we see that roughly 5,000 people gathered to hear Jesus. 5,000 people. Can you imagine?
- 5,000 people. Herod and the religious elites of that day must have been on fire with rage. Not only did 5,000 gather, Jesus fed those 5,000.
- He fed them. He gave them food. They were not clean. They didn't go through the ceremony of cleaning before they were sitting down to eat. And he fed them anyway. How dare he?
- Right? And over the next chapter and a half, we see Jesus continuing to heal, continuing to call, continuing to speak in parables, in hopes that at least one of his disciples catches on to one of them. I feel like the disciples always have the hardest time figuring Jesus out.
- [16 : 28] I imagine there were multiple times in the road where Peter would look at Matthew and he'd be like, this is right, right? This is legit. We should be following him. And Matthew does like this very unconvincing.
- Mm-hmm. Yeah, I think so. They're just always two steps behind everyone else, it seems. But Jesus loves them so much. And these crowds, they're still gathering. These crowds of people from all different backgrounds, including people like the Pharisees.
- And the Pharisees were essentially the religious elite of Jesus's day. And as Jesus is talking to all of these crowds who are gathering, because they want to know who this healer is, they want to know what this new way is, they want to know what this movement is.
- And a Pharisee comes up and says, hey, do you want to come have dinner? And Jesus, to my surprise, said yes. And this is where it gets exciting, everyone.
- So we're going to go to, if you have your Bible, go to chapter 11. Chapter 11, it starts in verse 37.
- [17 : 31] So chapter 11, verse 37. And I'm going to read all of this straight because it's that good. Okay, here we go. So imagine this. Jesus is out speaking. All of these crowds are there. People are gathering.
- Everyone's loving it. A Pharisee walks up and says, hey, do you want to come over for dinner? And Jesus is like, okay. So they go. So it says, while he was speaking, a Pharisee invited him to dine.
- So he went in and took his place at the table. The Pharisee was amazed to see that he did not first wash before dinner. Remember when he fed the 5,000? This is an issue for the Pharisees.
- Then the Lord said to him, Now you Pharisees, clean the outside of the cup and the dish, but inside you are full of greed and wickedness. You fools. Did not the one who made the outside also make the inside too?
- So give for alms those things that are within and see everything will be clean for you. But woe to you Pharisees, for you tithe mint and rue and herbs of all kinds and neglect justice and the love of God.
- [18 : 37] It is these that you ought to have practiced without neglecting the others. Woe to you Pharisees, for you love to have the seat of honor in the synagogues and to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces.
- Woe to you, for you are like unmarked graves and people are walking on them without realizing. Best part, a lawyer probably in the kitchen says, Teacher, when you say these things, you insult us too.

Jesus says, Woe to you also, lawyers, for you load people with burdens hard to bear, and you yourselves do not lift a finger to ease them.

Woe to you, for you build the tombs of the prophets whom your ancestors killed, so you are witness and approve of the deeds of your ancestors, for they killed them and you built their tombs.

Therefore, also the wisdom of God, I will send them prophets and apostles, some of them they will kill and persecute, so that this generation may be charged with the blood of all prophets shed since the foundation of the world, from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah, who perished between the altar and the sanctuary.

[19 : 52] Yes, I tell you, it will be charged against this generation. Woe to you, lawyers. I really shouldn't have gotten involved. For you have taken away the key of knowledge, you did not enter yourselves, and you hindered those who were entering.

When then Jesus, I imagine, you know, he's exhausted at this point, right? He just like drops the mic and walks out, and there's, again, a crowd.

But also, do you think he ate dinner? Because the Pharisees were rich, and I imagine they had some really good food. Reading this, one, I always read over the part that he was invited in for dinner.

I just imagined this interaction on the street. I didn't imagine this in this very, probably intimate setting with people all around feasting together. And I also didn't realize that Jesus is the reason we have the dinner table rule of no politics or religion.

Like, this right here was it. This is where it was decided. This was a bad idea for people. Look what he did to the religious leaders and the lawyers. Destroyed them. And then he walked out, and there were crowds gathered to see him again.

[21 : 07] And the Pharisees walked out, and they were trying to get him. They were trying to figure out what they could pin on him. They tried. They gave, all it took for Jesus to go off on them was the look of judgment for not washing his hands, for not cleaning himself before he ate.

That's all it took, and Jesus was ready. He was waiting for them to do something, and he could see directly to their hearts, and knew where they were going with all of this. So he stepped in before they did. Before they had a chance to call him out, he went after them.

Just lays into them. Because the thing is, they hated him. Because Jesus had been living and eating with the people they rejected, with the people that Jesus just yelled at them about.

About ignoring. About not focusing on. About not caring about. With the people that God instructs us to love. Those are the ones they ignored. So when Jesus comes and actually does what we were supposed to do, it makes them mad.

No wonder he was considered a troublemaker. He destroyed their egos after one glance. That's all it took. He makes political trouble with religious leaders, and also the king, King Herod.

[22 : 16] He makes religious trouble by healing outside of the temple, and he makes overall trouble by starting this movement, by filling the streets with thousands and thousands of people.

So if we're going to cause good trouble like he did, we have to learn how to decipher the difference between an injustice and an annoyance. Perfect example. Same book in Luke.

Luke 9, verse 49. The disciples, you know, throw away like two steps behind on things, and they are always very concerned about who's in and who's out, and who's with Jesus and who's not.

And Jesus has this moment with them, because John sees this person healing. He sees someone outside of their group healing, and John says, Master, we saw someone cast out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him because he doesn't follow with us.

But Jesus said to him, Do not stop him, for whoever is not against you is for you. John wanted to step in and do something simply because this person wasn't a part of the twelve or a part of the group that Jesus had formed.

[23 : 20] Meanwhile, Jesus had been giving power to other people throughout his ministry with them already. And meanwhile, this guy that he tried to call out and tried to rebuke, he probably could have been surrounded with him as Jesus was teaching.

He could have been right next to him, learning alongside, and then all of a sudden, No, no, no, you're not in our group. You can't do the same things we do. What? That's so silly.

Jesus gives power to whoever he wants to. And we get caught up in this annoyance. And here's the thing. Secret. People are really annoying sometimes.

Like, really annoying. And there's going to be points when you're like, Why are they doing that? They shouldn't be doing that. Oh, God, no. And, you know, when we get wrapped up in annoyances, because people are annoying, we get confused on how to decipher between what is worthy of some holy trouble and what is only worthy of an eye roll and possibly a shake to get the dust off our feet like Jesus instructed his disciples to do for the towns that rejected them.

Right? The disciples were annoyed that someone, someone who they most likely gathered with, someone who Jesus had very well given powers to, was doing what they were doing, just not in the same club. Good thing Christians aren't like that anymore.

[24 : 42] Whoever is not against us is for us. We cannot let annoyance distract us from our holy troublemaking. That is not what it's about.

And the more we involve ourselves with pettiness, the more dust of the towns that rejected us we keep with us. We need to kick it off and move on. Or more importantly stated, there's a difference between an annoyance and an injustice.

There's a difference between selfish ambition and holy work. There's a difference between religious control and spiritual freedom. For instance, we have lots of examples of Christians just causing regular trouble, not holy trouble.

Right? Christians who brought war through their crusades to generations of people. Christians who have invaded other countries and cultures with missional efforts to make people more like them instead of more like Jesus.

Christians who have supported and were active perpetrators through the enslavement of people. Or present day issues like Christians pushing the agenda that God's love for us is based on who we decide to love or how we decide to express our identity.

[25 : 50] Or the issues of white Christians who refuse to acknowledge that our faith is rooted in white supremacy. All of those actions describe general trouble. Definitely not holy trouble.

Those two things, two things all of those things have in common are selfishness and control, which is exactly what Jesus would rage about. Exactly. The difference between causing regular trouble and holy trouble is the source of our troublemaking.

Right? Where that comes from. Why we want to cause trouble. We can't be like the Jesus in Luke 11 if we are not following the Jesus in Luke 11. Because I guarantee in the past and I can confirm in the present that many Christians who have caused local and global harm to God's people believed they were in the right.

Absolutely. Believed they were following the will of God. Now I'm not making excuses for people who cause harm in the name of Jesus, but in many ways we've set ourselves up for it. For instance, for all of us who are raised charismatic, we have probably lost count of how many times we've heard the sinner's prayer during service to bring more people to Jesus.

And what does that prayer center around? Hmm? Accepting Jesus into our hearts. Now, I've said it more times than I'd like to admit because, well, the Left Behind series made me think that the rapture was around every corner.

[27 : 09] So that rapture pressure really make you want to recite it multiple times throughout the years just in case you didn't get it right.

You can't be left behind, you know? And on that sinner's prayer, one, it's not found anywhere in Scripture. It's not biblically rooted at all.

It's nowhere. And also, we invite Jesus into our hearts? That's cute. Even our decision to love God is built on an inherently selfish approach.

The invitation is for us, not Him. Right? We are invited to become a part of His kingdom, not the other way around.

It's not about us. Because what does Scripture say becoming a Christian is like? Jesus says it multiple times throughout Luke. Deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow me.

[28 : 16] Now, here's the thing about Jesus mentioning taking up our crosses. Present-day Christians look at the cross as a sign of the greatest act of love in all of history, which makes sense to us, right?

Because that's how Jesus expressed His love for us and saved us. But, and now we even wear jewelry and tattoo our bodies with it because we want to remember that great sacrifice of love.

But to the people Jesus was speaking to, it meant only one thing. Death. There was no other meaning for the cross but death. So when He says we need to pick up our crosses, He is not saying that we are picking up our greed, lust, and selfishness to be weighted down by it throughout our walk with Jesus.

No, no, no. He's saying you are picking up your greed, your lust, your selfishness, and anything else that separates me from you. And you are to nail it to your cross so that it can die and you can actually follow me.

The point is not to be weighted down. The point is to be free. Following Jesus is not about opening a door to our heart to let Him in. It's about searching ourselves for anything that doesn't match the likeness of our Creator and putting it to death and then stirring up holy trouble with the One who calls us beloved.

[29 : 41] Holy troublemaking is twofold. First, we verify the source, right? We verify that our desire to act, to step in, to potentially cause conflict comes from our command to usher in the Kingdom of Heaven to this Earth so that we can make some good trouble.

But if we determine that source is our own selfishness, our own ambition, our own pride, our own biased heart, our own desire to control, or just general annoyance with other humans, then we need to kick the dust from our heels and move on because there's no holy trouble to make there.

Now, I have two things for you. One invitation and one challenge. Now, we are all called to be peacemakers and as noted, peacemaking also looks like troublemaking in this broken world.

And to do that, the invitation is to connect with the source. Root yourself in Christ. Absolutely. Accept this invitation on a daily basis.

Wake up and say, you're going to do it again. There is not a sinner's prayer and then it's over. It is, I wake up, Jesus, and I'm going to follow you again. I'm going to pick up all the things that separate me from you.

[30 : 49] I'm going to nail them to this cross. I'm going to put them to death so I can see you clearly and follow in your steps. Pick up your cross every morning and follow him.

So that is the invitation that we all have, right? And then the challenge, I challenge all of us to pay better attention.

What's that saying? The devil doesn't need to get us to sin. He just needs to distract us enough. Right? It's not always about what we're doing.

It's about what we're not doing, what we're missing, what we're avoiding, simply because we're not paying enough attention. When we're not intentional about where our attention goes or who or what holds it, we will soon find ourselves colluding with people or systems we would never intentionally support if we were paying attention.

The world will try to distract us from doing good at all times. Don't let it. Mm-mm. No, no. Reread the stories of Jesus and how he was always mentally, physically, and spiritually present and learn how to bring that attention to every aspect of your life too.

[32 : 06] And in closing, if you are a Christian and you're still waiting for your invitation, your call, your right moment to step in and start causing some good trouble, wait no more.

because every day you wake up and you make the conscious decision to follow Jesus again because don't let anyone fool you. It needs to be a daily exercise.

If we are not making the decision to do it every day, we will soon be following who knows what before we know it. So when we wake up and say, yes, Jesus, I'm in. I'm in again today.

That's as much as I know. And Jesus is right there and thrilled that you want to do it again. And then he says, okay, you have accepted the invitation and now the challenge begins again.

And just like he did with his disciples, he looks at each of us and says, great. Now pick up your cross and follow me. We've got some work to do. The time is now and holy trouble is yours to make.

[33 : 12] Let's pray. Lord, I thank you for this space. I thank you for your sassiness and all the things that you want to instill in us so that we can decipher what is injustice and what is annoyance, what is following you and what is following the world.

Lord, I pray that you put a holy fire in all of us to see things the way you see things, to want to make things right the way that they should be, the way that your kingdom is not the kingdom of this world. Let us see your ways, Jesus, every single day.

Let us commit to you every single day. We love you and we thank you. Amen.