

A Three Striker. Pastor Fritz Wiese. 8 September 2024

Little league baseball. Some you played it. As parents or grandparents, some of you watch it. For me, my favorite year was 5th grade when Mr. O'Brien was coach and I got to play first base. For baseball, I was probably middle of the road player. Which meant on a good day you might get a hit or two. Every blue moon, a homer, if a kid in the outfield let my hit squeeze by.

As some of you know, it never feels good to strike out. And if you don't know the rules of what some call the American past-time, there's a song we can sing that reminds us. Let's sing it together: "Take me out to the ballgame. Take me out to the crowd. Buy me some peanuts and crackerjack. I don't care if I ever get back. For it's root, root, root for the home team. If they don't win it's a shame. For it's one, two, three strikes you're out, at the old ball game!"

Three strikes and you're out. Why is that the way song ends? The peanuts and crackerjack part of the song is fun. But why not keep the positivity going, and sing, a great throw home everyone will cheer, or try to steal a base and it will be exciting. Why, three strikes and you're out?

You might not be watching as much baseball as you used to since they're making everyone pay for subscriptions. But if you do, you see how a player returns to the dugout after striking out. No one talks to him. If you homer or score, high fives form everybody. But strike out, everyone leaves you alone. As a kid, I still remember that frustration of striking out. Actually, there might have been a horrible game or two when it wasn't just 3 strikes and you're out. But 3 strikes 3 times in one game. Aggh!!

Sometimes, people ask if I've ever tried to preach the same sermon twice. And my response is, it doesn't usually work. When I have looked at old sermons, usually they are tied to an event, or movie, or persona, or congregational moment so specific that they can't be applied to years down the road. But the CONCEPT of a three-striker is a metaphor I've used before and would like to use again today.

Because the lady Jesus confronts today in Mark's lectionary assignment, which pops up every 3 years, is a 3-striker. She's a person in his culture

who most people consider down and out, void of respect, because of not just one, not two, but for three issues of concern.

(Pick up a bat and hold it). First of all, the person yelling for Jesus' help in our gospel today, she's the wrong gender. Strike one. (Take a swing.) Let's remember that in Jesus' day, women were second class citizens. Couldn't own property, weren't involved in village or religious decision-making, and had very little rights outside the influence of their father or husband. Here we are in 2024, where one of our presidential candidates is a woman and many universities and leading corporations are presided by woman. But certainly not back in the day.

Secondly, this un-named woman is a foreigner. Strike two. (Take a swing.) From the border district of Tyre and Sidon, the woman's a Canaanite. Even though there is some blood-line, DNA overlap with Canaanites and Jews, she is from, she lives, she looks like she is from the wrong side of the tracks. She's wasn't "one of them."

Thirdly, there is sickness in her family. Strike three. (Take a swing.) Her daughter is mentally and spiritually ill, tormented by a demon. You remember the story of the Good Samaritan—the traveler who was beaten by robbers was bleeding, so the religious leader has to pass by on the other side, because blood and illness were off-limits. Lepers were moved to the fringe of the village. The mentally ill just as far.

So, sorry lady. Jesus' disciples size her up. She's a 3 striker. She's OUT. And when she keeps yapping, beggin' for Jesus to interrupt his itinerary, the disciples advise him: "Jesus, send her away. She's a bother!"

Who is a bother to you these days? Who are the 3 strikers? Are we ever the 3 strikers?

After the disciples' harsh assessment, Jesus says something to this three-striker that shocks us. Makes us grimace. How many of you ever had your mouth washed out with soap growing up? For me, at least twice I can remember. (I also got spanked a bunch until my parents figured out I'd rather take the spanking than the grounding—that's what really killed me).

Anyway, I bet if Jesus' mom Mary had been there, she might have put the soap in Jesus' mouth on this. For to this woman, who is not asking anything for herself, but begging for the welfare of her daughter, Jesus

says: “It is not fair to take the food for the children (meaning his group, the Jews) and throw it to the dogs.” (Her and all the other 3 strikers)

Ouch. Have you noticed that Jesus does that every once in a while? To use our baseball analogy, he throws out a curve-ball to see how people respond. Remember his first miracle? Initially when the wedding wine runs out at Cana, his mom asks for help and Jesus responds, “Woman what concern is that you or me? My hour has not yet come.” But in the end, Jesus takes action. And that’s what happens here. Maybe Jesus would have blessed her anyway, but clearly, Jesus cannot help be moved by this foreigner’s magnificently clever and faithful response: “Yes Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master’s table.”

What a line! All of us with dogs at home knew exactly what that woman was talking about! Our dogs hoping something will fall from the table. And do any of you remember Ida the dog, who would come to Palmetto Road events a few years ago? Can you see that Ida only has 3 legs? But she trusts that people are gonna love her and that she’ll have a great day. Somehow, some way, that lady from Tyre also had faith in the one she heard was master of all. She wasn’t a 3-legger, like Ida, but she was a 3 striker. Wrong gender, wrong health status, wrong nationality. Yet somehow, she would not let Jesus go, trusting that he would show mercy and connect her daughter to his pathway of healing—and joy and life.

This woman puts me to shame. Because far too infrequently do I turn to Jesus with her kind of passion pleading for the sake of my family, the sake of the church, the sake of our beloved creation. How about you? Can you learn anything about how you reach out to Jesus from this 3-striker?

A few weeks ago, I was listening to a lecture from Rabbi Sharon Brous who tells the story of an ancient and obscure practice. Recently discovered in an misplaced text is a ritual for Jews during the pilgrimages to the temple mount. We all remember how the young boy Jesus traveled from Nazareth with his parents to Jerusalem for the Passover, as all faithful Jews who could financially and physically make the journey. Similarly, today, one of the five pillars of Islam is that Muslims at least once in their life should try to journey to Mecca for the Hajj. (spelling?)

Many of you know the thrill singing at a concert with thousands of others or rooting for your favorite sports team in a stadium filled to the brim with other die-hards. So, we can imagine what it feels like to enter into the climax of a rare religious experience you've been anticipating for months if not years.

The Jerusalem festivals were packed. That the boy Jesus would get separated from his parents amid the throngs was somewhat understandable. But at one festival, the Rabbi shares that a special discipline of community care was practiced. Standard procedure called for the joyful Jewish pilgrim to make their way up the steps to the Temple Mount, (steps that our Holy Land trip will never forget ascending last June) and turn right to walk around the temple in a circle. Thousands of pilgrims walking together, celebrating. Unless . . . If you were someone who made the journey, but carried a broken heart. Then, you were invited to ascend to the mount. But when you entered the gates, you were to turn to the left.

Now listen to what this ancient and obscure ritual calls for. As a joyful celebrant moving to the right, if you saw the rare person, flowing to the left, but now in front of you, you were to ask them in ancient Hebrew, "malach." Or "what happened to you?" Then the person grieving--with maybe one, two, or even three strikes of sorrow--would be expected to actually be vulnerable and share their grief or worry. "My heart is broken because my father just died, or we lost our home, or the sickness has grown, or the job has fallen apart."

Whatever the bereft shares, in turn, would be met with a blessing. "May you be held with love in this place. May you feel the presence of the Holy One, of friends and family as you walk through this dark chapter." And then they would go on their way.

Now think about the power of this holy call and ritual. None of the parties engaged in the conversation actually want to be in that conversation at all. Think about this. Think about a time when you were a three striker. You were broken-hearted. You didn't want to get out of bed. But you got up—maybe you were force to—and you were in the midst of mostly strangers. How vulnerable you would feel to be surrounded by that many people. And then to be challenged to share your heart honestly when engaged.

Likewise, think about the people coming from the other direction. They're trying to enjoy themselves. It's the Braves at the World Series. It's front

row seats for your favorite band. It's the best part of the movie. You don't want to be interrupted. So, we can understand when the disciples try to avoid the sorrow of the mother. Jesus, you're on a roll. We're going places. Let's not get dragged down and stop for this sad story.

What must it feel like to hear as a pilgrim, "Now remember folks. While celebrating is great, you have one other mission that is even more important. To keep your eyes open for a straggler with puffy red eyes, who has been crying over a 3-strike moment in their lives. Someone who is mourning, fearful, or struggling."

What if this is something Jesus teaches us today? That it's precisely when we want to retreat from each other that we need to engage one another? And when we do, we turn to each other with compassion, curiosity and care. It's the beauty of congregations like COS isn't it? It's the beauty of Jesus' followers who are called to show light in a world where loneliness, anxiety and divisiveness are on the rise. When we want to turn away, we instead turn toward. When our human impulse is to avoid eye contact, rush out of church before the last song ends, to avoid any awkward conversation, how do we accept the Holy Spirit's nudge to be a bit vulnerable to engage just a bit?

In our gospel, as Jesus is walking this way, but stops to listen to the woman walking that way, as he is curing his daughter, he offers a blessing perhaps just as precious. He tells her, "You may go." Go to see your daughter. All your problems aren't solved. It's no guarantee pain won't find you again. But GO into your future. Go to your home which is new. Go into new possibilities where I'll continue to be with you.

So often, with the games we play with each other in life, we're seen as 3 strikers. And so often we're called OUT. But with Jesus, we're told to GO. And when we get going, in joy, let's always be willing to stop for a moment to offer some love and hope to people going the other way. So, my fellow 3-strikers, let's get going. In Jesus' name. Amen.

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what we have, as people of faith, we're a little disturbed by the access and economic implications for many of our fellow Americans when it comes to quality health resources. What is our call as Christians on this front? It's a mystery, but it seems Jesus did NOT start well with this special woman. But he finished well. We too, often don't start well with our assessment of others. But may we be like Jesus, who goes a little deeper, and discovers a marvelous treasure, a gift of great faith. In Jesus' name, let's take some swings. Amen.

James 2:1, 8-10, 14-17

¹My brothers and sisters, do you with your acts of favoritism really believe in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ? . . . ⁸You do well if you really fulfill the royal law according to the scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." ⁹But if you show partiality, you commit sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors. ¹⁰For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it. . . . ¹⁴What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but do not have works? Can faith save you? ¹⁵If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, ¹⁶and one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill," and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? ¹⁷So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead.

Mark 7:24-37

²⁴[Jesus] set out and went away to the region of Tyre. He entered a house and did not want anyone to know he was there. Yet he could not escape notice, ²⁵but a woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit immediately heard about him, and she came and bowed down at his feet. ²⁶Now the woman was a Gentile, of

Syrophoenician origin. She begged him to cast the demon out of her daughter. ²⁷He said to her, "Let the children be fed first, for it is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs." ²⁸But she answered him, "Sir, even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs." ²⁹Then he said to her, "For saying that, you may go—the demon has left your daughter." ³⁰So she went home, found the child lying on the bed, and the demon gone.

³¹Then he returned from the region of Tyre, and went by way of Sidon towards the Sea of Galilee, in the region of the Decapolis. ³²They brought to him a deaf man who had an impediment in his speech; and they begged him to lay his hand on him. ³³He took him aside in private, away from the crowd, and put his fingers into his ears, and he spat and touched his tongue. ³⁴Then looking up to heaven, he sighed and said to him, "Ephphatha," that is, "Be opened." ³⁵And immediately his ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly. ³⁶Then Jesus ordered them to tell no one; but the more he ordered them, the more zealously they proclaimed it. ³⁷They were astounded beyond measure, saying, "He has done everything well; he even makes the deaf to hear and the mute to speak."

Clip about dog and God

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H17edn_RZoY

Also crazy story of the flu in New York. There was a fire. Then they redesigned water system. Not only did it help prevent fires but it brought Health to the city and helped the flu. Are you open to possibilities that's why we need to take care of the planet because sometimes there are venomous or lotions etc. that solve other problems

Last week's gospel reminded us about how, in Jesus' hands, two fish and five loaves could feed 5000 families. This poem by Kevin Burden and updated along the way by some friends gives me hope for these days when, as Pastor Miriam said in her sermon, we feel like we're in the Land of Oz, shouting "O My!" to a lot more worries than just lions, tigers and bears.

WHOSE HANDS by Kevin Burden, edited by friends

*A basketball in my hands is worth about \$25.
A basketball in LaBron James' hands is worth about \$120 million.
It depends whose hands it's in.*

*A golf ball in my hand is worth about \$1.
A golf ball in Rory McElroy's hand is worth \$5 million.
It depends whose hands it's in.*

*A tennis racket is useless in my hands.
A tennis racket in Serena Williams' hands is a Wimbledon Championship.
It depends whose hands it's in.*

*A rod in my hands will keep away a wild animal.
A rod in Moses' hands will part the mighty sea.
It depends whose hands it's in.*

*A sling shot in my hands is a kid's toy.
A sling shot in David's hand is a mighty weapon.
It depends whose hands it's in.*

*Two fish and 5 loaves of bread in my hands is a couple of fish sandwiches.
Two fish and 5 loaves of bread in God's hands will feed thousands.
It depends whose hands it's in.*

*Nails in my hands might produce a door stop - and it may take a while for me to get it done.
Nails in Jesus Christ's hands will produce salvation for the entire world.
It depends whose hands it's in.*

*As you see now it depends whose hands it's in.
So put your concerns, your worries, your fears, your hopes, your dreams,
your families and your relationships in God's hands because ...
It depends whose hands it's in.*

Instead of trying to hold on to God, let God hold on to you!

Short sentence. Packed with meaning.
Warm up with logos. Packed with meaning and connection.



The 2nd and 3rd "T's" are two people sharing (or fighting over) a tortilla and a bowl of salsa.

August 2020

Dear partners in ministry,

Tomorrow will mark one year since the ELCA Churchwide

Assembly adopted “[A Declaration of Inter-Religious Commitment: A Policy Statement of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America](#).” It was an extraordinary day, made precious because of the presence of many of you, our ecumenical and inter-religious partners.

Over the past year, we have worked to support the interpretation and implementation of this document across the church. Recently, a new ad hoc committee was appointed by the presiding bishop to develop pastoral guidelines for ministry in a multireligious world, as called for in the document. I frequently receive (and gladly accept!) invitations to participate in events that equip people to live out the commitments articulated at the heart of the document. All of these developments remind me that what happened on Aug. 8, 2019, was not a static action of the church but a dynamic witness to the church’s long-standing work — as well as future potential — in this vital area of ministry.

Next year will be the 30th anniversary of the church’s first declaration: “[A Declaration of Ecumenical Commitment: A Policy Statement of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America](#)” (1991). This document has stood the test of time because it established policy that was ahead of its time. The goals and stages it sets forth have supported major developments in the ecumenical landscape since, including and especially the dialogues, discourses and full communion partnerships that have become so critical as a sign of Christian unity, but also for our self-understanding as Lutherans.

Though it is clearly focused on relations among Christians, “A Declaration of Ecumenical Commitment” laid the foundation for all of the major developments in ELCA inter-religious relations since. By acknowledging “the distinct responsibility for the church to enter into conversations and reach greater understanding with people of other faiths,” and by calling for a “separate, official statement” in the future, the policy statement accomplished two significant theological and relational tasks:

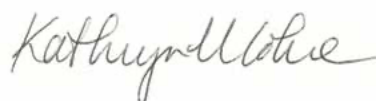
- 1) It claimed the ongoing vocation of the church in inter-

religious relations, and 2) it articulated the necessity of giving that vocation further definition. Here we find ourselves — living into and seeking to further define our God-given inter-religious vocation.

When I think back to Aug. 8, 2019, my mind goes immediately to what it felt like to be on the stage with our 50-plus partners and the members of the ELCA's inter-religious task force as the assembly deliberated, debated and adopted this text. I recall feeling at once the palpable gift and task of our mutual accountability to one another as people made in the image of God. I treasure the fond memories of what it feels like to gather in the flesh — to hear the breath of those around us and to sense the presence of one another in shared space, as companions in seeking unity, justice and peace.

For now, our vocation is to serve together primarily in virtual spaces — the most rapidly changing dimension of our ecclesial, ecumenical and inter-religious landscape. It is my hope that our new ways of thinking and working together in this time will lead us into deeper and broader commitments that 30 years from now are seen by those who come after us as both timely and timeless.

In peace,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Kathryn M. Lohre".

Kathryn M. Lohre
Assistant to the Presiding Bishop

***The Freedom of a Christian* study guide now available**

The ELCA recently published a [study guide](#) to mark the 500th anniversary of Luther's treatise *The Freedom of a Christian*. In it, he offers his most compelling summary of the Christian life. In Christ we are completely free and at the same time completely bound in love and service to our neighbors. The

study guide supports Bishop Eaton’s invitation to engage with this text as individuals and in groups. In addition to the study guide, a series of case studies is being curated at ELCA500.org to help us encounter the diversity of voices that represent the vitality of the Lutheran movement today. You can also download a free copy of the treatise through the end of 2020, compliments of Fortress Press. Read Carmelo Santos’ reflection on being freed in Christ to love across religions in his blog post titled “[The Freedom of a Christian to Love Interreligiously.](#)”

