

A friend recently lamented to me: *"I hate what cable news has done to my parents."* As leaders in the Methodist Church, we're all immersed in the same crisis - a more divisive and radicalized environment driven by our political idolatry, which is the biggest spiritual threat to our churches today.

As we begin a new Lenten journey that demands our repentance, it behooves all lay and clergy Methodist leaders to accept some responsibility for our country's growing divisiveness. For years cable news has been screaming at our parishioners 24/7- pedaling false or exaggerated narratives to monetize our fear and anger. Politicians siphoned this negativity and worked it to their political advantage. Meanwhile, we often pull our punches in our preaching, teaching, and leadership - dangerously projecting a Jesus made in our image because this image is more acceptable. This uneasiness with proclaiming the full gospel stems from our fear of offending those with different loyalties. Though we sometimes forget the long list of people who walked away from Jesus: Nicodemus, the Rich Young Ruler, nine healed lepers, nearly every Pharisee, Judas. Ultimately, it's not our place to protect people from Jesus.

We've forgotten that Christ was radicalized before our politics were. But Jesus wasn't radicalized while staring at a screen for hours. He was radicalized in the wilderness with the great tempter, under the care of angels. His burnt skin, dried mouth, and cracked lips were signs of a refining fire preparing his heart to preach an immersive grace and a radical way of love. He was radicalized by a gentile woman who insisted on crumbs from the table and radicalized by his compassion to touch and heal the untouchable leper.

We don't worship a white American Jesus who fully assimilated to our culture and agrees with our politics. Proclaim the radical that walked out of the Judean wilderness and started preaching an offensive love - a radical that died an enemy of the state. This man offers an alternative for our parishioners - *"a still more excellent way."* People may walk away, but those who remain will have an alternative way of love.

There is also the chance they may come back... like Nicodemus... with a changed heart.

Love Radically,
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