

<i>Date Preached</i>	28-Feb-2021	<i>Date Initiated</i>	16-Feb-2021
<i>Where Preached</i>	SAK	<i>Appointed Readings</i>	Lent 2, Yr B

" 'If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves  
and take up their cross and follow me.' "



I have to admit: I have never been particularly trendy. The latest fads in clothing and music usually pass by me without much notice. I spend little time on social media. And I probably could not identify by sight most Hollywood actors and actresses who were born after, say, 1980. I do, however, take pleasure in reading the comics in the daily paper, and it is thanks to the strip called "Zits"—an unfortunate name, I fear<sup>1</sup>—that I got to know about today's "cancel culture" trend. In a recent story line, Jeremy, the teenager who's the main character, is cancelled, by friend and foe alike, on social media because of a post he made several years ago in which he observed that "penguins walk funny." In essence, no one will have anything to do with him because he disrespected penguins.

Now, you may or may not find this amusing as a plot for the funny pages, but it awakened me to a moment of cancel culture going on in my own life that I simply hadn't realized. In a nutshell: The dean of the National Cathedral in Washington, D.C., recently invited Max Lucado, the pastor of a huge megachurch in San Antonio, to preach at the cathedral's principal Sunday service. Lucado was asked to, and did, preach about the Holy Spirit, because the dean had found some of Lucado's writings on the subject very meaningful. Unbeknownst to the dean, however, was Lucado's stance on the Christian morality of homosexuality and same-sex marriage. In fact, in 2004, Lucado had compared "same-sex marriage to legalized polygamy [and] bestiality " and suggested that "homosexuality is something that can be changed [through] pastoral care."<sup>2</sup> Very quickly, the LGBTQ community within the Episcopal Church and its allies—including some friends, seminary classmates and colleagues of mine—were in an uproar. They demanded that Lucado's invitation to preach in the Episcopal Church's most prominent pulpit be rescinded. They didn't use the word, but they were, in effect, "cancelling" Max Lucado: shunning him for his views and demanding that access to his thoughts be shut down.

As a member of that LGBTQ community myself ... and as the beneficiary of this Church's only-recent (and still tender) reformed teachings on the ordination of gay people and same-sex marriage ... I was sympathetic. But still, something didn't sit quite right with me. We are a Church that values and encourages the diversity with which God imbues creation; that preaches the Way of Love; that seeks to build bridges of grace and dismantle barriers of judgment. Was cancelling Max Lucado, rather than engaging him, I asked myself, really the way of Christ?<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Charles Schulz called it the worst name for a comic strip since "Peanuts." ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zits\\_\(comics\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zits_(comics)))

<sup>2</sup> Episcopal News Service, "[Max Lucado apologizes for past comments on homosexuality after outrage at National Cathedral](#)" (11 Feb 2021).

<sup>3</sup> I must comment: I feel competent to ask this question *only* because I am a member of the community that Lucado had previously excoriated. I would defer to members of other communities (*e.g.*, racial, ethnic, religious, etc) if it were they, and not I, who had been denigrated. I must also point out that knowing Lucado had been invited to preach specifically

In the midst of this internal debate, I turned to the readings appointed for today, and I found them surprisingly helpful. On the one hand, we have the beautiful, uplifting, grace-filled story of God's making God's eternal covenant with Abraham (and by extension, Israel). There is nothing but good news and abundance: Abraham, God says, you will be "exceedingly numerous" and "fruitful" ... the "ancestor of a multitude of nations" ... the progenitor of kings. And, to be sure, the abundance God initiates with Abraham has carried on through the ages, encompassing Jesus and the Church we sit in today every bit as much as it does Moses and David and ancient Israel. The ongoing experience of divine abundance is a hallmark of Christian faith and practice.

On the other hand, we have the shocking, acerbic story of Jesus' calling Peter "Satan" when Peter says Jesus must be wrong—insists that Jesus, the long-awaited Messiah, cannot have come into this world to be put to death by those who reject Him. Jesus' response is crystal clear: Such thinking is according to human ways and not God's way. To follow me, Jesus continues, means being willing to sacrifice everything—your cherished notion of the Messiah's mission and identity; even your life—for my sake, and for the sake of the Good News I bring. We shy from talking about it, but today's lesson is unequivocal: A co-equal hallmark of Christian faith and practice is self-denial; is willingly taking up one's cross and *sacrificing* what we have for the good of others ... and for the good of God's creation.

This juxtaposition of Abraham's enjoyment of abundance and Peter's lesson in sacrifice seems clear and quite Lenten in character: Abundance and sacrifice are not two opposite poles of Christian life. Faith is not zero-sum proposition, with a goal of minimizing our sacrifice and maximizing our abundance. Rather, our work is to accept ... perhaps *embrace* ... sacrifice, just as Jesus did, because we *already enjoy* God's abundance. Holy sacrifice and holy abundance are not oppositional, but complementary—exquisitely and divinely intertwined: an intertwining that Christ Himself embodies during His earthly life.

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And seeing this intertwining helped me resolve my own internal struggles about the would-be cancellation of Max Lucado. As a community, LGBTQ people in the Episcopal Church have, over the last fifteen or twenty years, enjoyed increasing abundance: first, of basic safety; then of welcome and respect and inclusion; and, finally, of equality. Opinions still differ, and the Church is still in need of healing and reconciliation. But my sisters and brothers and I belong to and labor in a Church that has radically transformed itself—has been radically transformed by God—on these subjects over the last few decades.

As the recipients of abundance, however, our mission is not to preserve or hoard it, but to *sacrifice* it for the greater good. When we seek to cancel anyone who's ever spoken out against us, we are locking up our abundance—claiming it as our right or privilege, rather than knowing it as God's grace. When, instead, we respect our erstwhile opponents' human dignity, open ourselves to them and engage in dialogue, we risk sacrificing some of our well-being—our accumulated abundance—so that the Church might learn God more deeply and serve God more fully. And sometimes, in unexpected ways: In the immediate aftermath of the cathedral cancellation controversy, Lucado publicly acknowledged, in writing, that his previous views had wounded

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about the Holy Spirit—that he had been given a 'topic,' and one fairly tangential to LGBTQ-identity-in-the-eyes-of-God—gave me a much greater sense of optimism in terms of the anticipated content and tenor of his sermon.

LGBTQ Christians in a devastating way, and he apologized for this, saying, "I was disrespectful. I was hurtful. I wounded people in ways that were devastating. I should have done better." He sought Christ's forgiveness for having long ago used "God's holy Word as a weapon to wound others."<sup>4</sup>

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As Christians ... as the direct heirs of Abraham ... we can never *but* live in Christ's abundance. And because we enjoy His abundance, it behooves all of us to take some time this Lent to examine what ... and *whom* ... we may be tempted to cancel; and to explore, instead, how we may be called to *sacrifice* the comfort of own opinions ... our beliefs ... our blinkered interpretations ... our prejudices ... for the good of others and the good of all God's creation.



*The Rev Douglas S Worthington  
St Andrew's Parish  
Kent, CT*

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<sup>4</sup> Lucado still opposes same-sex marriage on theological grounds, but in an open letter of apology issued after he preached during the cathedral liturgy, he said of his former writings, "I was disrespectful. I was hurtful. I wounded people in ways that were devastating. I should have done better. It grieves me that my words have hurt or been used to hurt the LGBTQ community. I apologize to you and I ask forgiveness of Christ. Faithful people may disagree about what the Bible says about homosexuality, but we agree that God's holy Word must never be used as a weapon to wound others." (<https://www.episcopalnewsservice.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Max-Lucado-Letter-WNC.pdf>)