

“Stop It!”

The Rev. S. Shane Nanney – February 12, 2023

Matthew 5:21-30, 33-37

Despite dwindling natural resources, massive pollution, overpopulation and overconsumption, we still love our "throwaway" culture.

Keurig was founded in 1990 by Peter Dragone and John Sylvan. Keurig seemed to go from an unknown company to a billion-dollar empire overnight. But what few people know is that “overnight” took twenty years and there were lots of bumps along the way! The first coffee maker was huge, heavy, and expensive. It was not reliable and required a plumber to install it. As Dragone and Sylvan lugged brewer after failing brewer to potential backers there were often instances of exploding K-cups, floating coffee grounds, low brew temperatures, and hot water leaks. At this point they were still making the K-cups by hand and relying on their own taste tests. As a matter of fact, Sylvan was diagnosed with caffeine poisoning admitting that he was consuming 30-40 cups of coffee per day!

Despite all these issues, this early Keurig model was growing in popularity in commercial settings. Employees loved the convenience and seldom chose to go back to a traditional drip style brewer after using this revolutionary unit. Sylvan and Dragone knew they were on to something.

It took nearly two years to develop a Keurig brewer that would fit on a kitchen countertop, contained a water tank, and did not cost an arm and a leg. It was not long after, that they became a billion-dollar company.

In the 2010, in *The New York Times*, Keurig has been publicly criticized by environmental advocates and journalists for the billions of non-recyclable and non-biodegradable K-Cups that consumers purchase and dispose of every year, which end up in landfills. In 2015, Keurig’s chief sustainability officer stated that every new K-Cup produced since 2006 is recyclable if disassembled into paper, plastic, and metal components. James Hamblin, writing in *The Atlantic*, that the

level of conscientiousness required to disassemble the cups is somewhat of a paradox to expect from people using a push-button brewing process.

This process has so disheartened the creators of the Keurig, that they have regretted inventing the coffee machine all together. According to *The Atlantic*, they reported that there were enough K-pods sold in 2014 to circle the earth 10.5 times.

We toss away more and more Styrofoam, paper, and plastic with every passing day. Only 7% of what we put into the recyclable bins is actually recycled. Not only do we casually toss those things that are designed to be disposable - takeout food containers, diapers, coffee filters, vacuum-cleaner bags - we also prefer to throw away, rather than fix, increasing quantities of our durable goods. It is just too much bother and trouble to try to repair them ourselves. When is the last time you took shoes to a cobbler to be re-sewn or re-soled? Do you bother to re-web or re-varnish outdoor furniture, or do you just run down to the discount store for cheap new lawn chairs?

But for all those things we are happy to toss away, replace or renew, there is one familiar thing we are absolutely loathe to part with - our own **old habits, behaviors, and attitudes**. We recycle and retool and return to the same **old reactions, attitudes, and practices** throughout our lives as if each one was made of the most precious resources available. Unfortunately, if the truth be told, a large percentage of our most beloved old rags should have been banished to the trash heap decades ago.

How many of us started diets as a "New Year's Resolution?" How many of us are still on them today? Eating healthy foods in sensible portions would be a new behavior for almost all of us. But the old habits of midnight snacks, chips and ice cream, extra gravy and second helpings are so ingrained in our daily eating regimes that our new, healthier commitments are quickly choked out.

In today's Gospel lesson, Jesus preaches some harsh-sounding warnings to us about the consequences we face should **we fail to practice righteousness** within every aspect of our lives. Even more graphic are the remedies Jesus prescribes as treatments for our righteousness-deficiency. We are wrong if we read Jesus' words about cutting off our right hand or plucking out our eye as just the

reflection of some ancient barbaric code of justice. Jesus' directives are violently vivid metaphors that tell us that we must simply stop doing the things that harm others or us before those old behaviors destroy us.

There is an old saying that suggests if you want to dig a new hole, you don't dig the same hole deeper! Yet that is the technique many of us are trying to use to turn our lives around, to get our relationships back on track. If you are losing touch with your spouse or your children because your work schedule is so busy - don't think scheduling more family busy-ness together is the answer. Don't stop smoking just to start compulsively overeating. If you turn off the TV just to get lost in trashy novels, you are still a flabby couch potato.

- If you want to be healthy . . . stop doing those things that harm you.
- If you want harmony in your life . . . stop doing those things that cause discord.
- If you want peace in the world . . . stop doing those things that lead to war.
- If you want a closer relationship with your children . . . stop doing those things and saying those things that build up walls between you.
- If you want to rekindle the romance in your marriage . . . stop doing those things that create animosity and boredom.
- If you want to live in a close-knit, caring community . . . stop hiding behind your front door.
- If you want a spiritual life that fills you up . . . stop pouring all your energies everywhere but toward God.

It is possible just to stop bad, destructive behavior. But it is not easy. The cornerstone of Alcoholics Anonymous has long been that alcoholics must practice complete abstinence if they are to control their addiction. Yet it takes a tremendous amount of energy to renew that dedication to stop doing that destructive behavior each day. That is why AA, and other "12-step" programs rely heavily on creating supportive communities of their peers - others who have "stopped it" and will stand by each other on those inevitable bad days. This is what Jesus calls the church to do as a community of faith.

You can have a new marriage ... a new body ... a new attitude ... a new spirit ... a new career ... a new community ... a new world - but only by **stopping** the old destructive, hurtful behaviors you have doggedly recycled for so many years.

The changes we want to come about in our lives will not happen just by wishing them to be so. We must cut ourselves off from our old attitudes and throw them away. For good. For God.

And once we turn away from those behaviors, we must turn toward Christ and become more like him. God is not finished with us. There is more that we can be. God is doing something new, and it is us! It is a one day at a time, one step at a time process. But Christ tells us, he is there to give us what we need. The church is there telling each of us, that we have the support to become a better person. All we have to do is want it and take the first step. God will do the rest. Amen.