



Bishop Urges President to "Have Mercy"

The Wired Word for the Week of February 2, 2025

In the News

At an interfaith service that concluded the presidential inauguration ceremonies, the preacher urged President Donald Trump to "have mercy" on immigrants and transgender children. Said Episcopal Bishop Mariann Edgar Budde, during her sermon at the National Cathedral, "In the name of our God, I ask you to have mercy upon the people in our country who are scared now." Trump and Vice President JD Vance sat in the front row, alongside their families.

"There are gay, lesbian and transgender children in Democratic, Republican and independent families, some who fear for their lives," Budde said. Referring to immigrants, she said, "Our God teaches us that we are to be merciful to the stranger, for we were all once strangers in this land."

Budde also said: "The people who pick our crops and clean our office buildings, who labor in poultry farms and meat packing plants, who wash the dishes after we eat in restaurants and work the night shifts in hospitals -- they may not be citizens or have the proper documentation, but the vast majority of immigrants are not criminals."

"I ask you to have mercy, Mr. President, on those in our communities whose children fear that their parents will be taken away, and that you help those who are fleeing war zones and persecution in their own lands to find compassion and welcome here," Budde said.

According to *USA Today*, the bishop's remarks came after the first day of Trump's second term in office. He began his work with a number of executive actions which focused on transgender Americans and immigrants who are in the country illegally. Trump declared that under his presidency, the federal government will recognize only [the sexes male and female](#). To advance his immigration agenda, Trump declared a national emergency at the southern border and launched an effort to end birthright citizenship.

Reaction to the sermon was swift. According to the *National Catholic Reporter*, some of Trump's evangelical Christian supporters condemned Budde. The Rev. Franklin Graham dismissed the National Cathedral as having been "taken over by gay activists" on a podcast. In a separate interview, he said that he believes the bishop should have approached Trump privately.

Rep. Mike Collins, a Republican from Georgia, wrote a post on X that suggested that Budde should be deported (a tongue-in-cheek comment). Detroit pastor Lorenzo Sewell, who was in the National Cathedral congregation, said, "she, quite frankly, took a political agenda, superimposed it, and acted as if she was speaking for God."

Others offered support for Budde and her sermon, according to *Fox News*. "Bishop Mariann Edgar Budde's words reflect the values held by a majority of American Christians," Guthrie Graves-Fitzsimmons of Interfaith Alliance wrote in an op-ed. The sermon "was beautifully said," according to *CBS* host Stephen Colbert. "Not only was it beautiful, it took courage to stand up there and say something so simple, something so kind, something so true to the example of Christ." Said the editors of *National Catholic Reporter*, "What she did was something she was obliged to do as a disciple of Christ preaching the Christian message."

Writing in *The Atlantic*, Caitlin Flanagan said that Budde "was exactly the right person to say it in exactly the right place. These vulnerable [immigrants], now with the full powers of the American state readied against them, aren't just a Christian concern; in a sense they are *the* Christian concern. Christ is always on the side of the outcast, the stranger, the prisoner, the leper." But Flanagan criticized Budde for preaching a sermon that she labeled as "Christ-lite," one that presented the world "not as it is but as [Budde] would presumably like it to be: diverse and unified in the strength of its religious belief, although not any particular religious belief, which is a really strange position to hold."

Even Budde's detractors may find themselves to be in agreement with some of the broader concerns she raised. *National Catholic Reporter* notes that during an interview about Budde's comments, Franklin Graham said he was unaware of Trump's executive order largely freezing the federal refugee program. This is a program that, according to faith-based refugee resettlement groups, also welcomes persecuted Christians. News of the executive order caught Graham by surprise. "I wasn't aware that this is under Trump, but if it is, I certainly will speak to that issue -- privately," he said.

More on this story can be found at these links:

[Pastor Tells Trump to 'Have Mercy' on Migrants, Transgender Children at Inaugural Service. *USA Today*](#)

[Bishop Who Lectured Trump Launches Media Tour, Emerges as First 'Resistance' Darling of Second Term. *Fox News*](#)

[After Eyebrow-Raising Sermon to Trump, Bishop Budde Beset with Criticism and Praise. *National Catholic Reporter*](#)

[Detroit Pastor Lorenzo Sewell Slams Bishop Who Lectured Trump for 'Theological Malpractice.' *Fox News*](#)

[Editorial: Addressing Trump, Bishop Budde Did What a Christian is Obligated to Do. *National Catholic Reporter*](#)

[A Christ-Lite Sermon. *The Atlantic*](#)

[Inauguration Week Was a Collision of Two Christianities. *Red Letter Christians*](#)

Applying the News Story

Rabbi Edwin Friedman was an expert in systemic family therapy, and he wrote insightfully about how families and communities can build resilience in a time of change. Responding properly to challenges is important when we are facing any kind of change, including the beginning of a new presidential administration. Currently, we are way too trapped in either/or thinking driven by a focus on "noxious" personalities.

In his book [*Generation to Generation*](#), Friedman wrote, "There is a general tendency to assume that the harmfulness of an environment is simply proportional to the strength of its noxious components." Depending on political views, people will have a variety of opinions about the "noxious components" of our environment. In this lesson's news story, some have put that label on the president, and others on the bishop.

Systems work like a mobile, whether they are families, organizations such as churches, or even nations. When part of it is moved, the other parts move as well. We tend to respond to the most noxious part or member of the system, reacting in equal or even greater force through either/or thinking, feeling like a helpless victim, or withdrawing entirely. More helpful responses are what Friedman calls "transformation" and "modification." The scriptures in this lesson will give us suggestions about how we can do this work together.

As a Christian community and a nation, we need to build resiliency, which is the ability to adapt to and recover from difficult situations. Either/or thinking, which usually involves a lot of name-calling, is not a good way to become more resilient. Instead, we can put effort into transformation and modification, which can be done at every level of society, from our families to our congregations to our nation as a whole.

The Big Questions

1. When have you faced a controversy and been drawn into name-calling and either/or thinking? What was the result? How could the outcome have been improved?
2. Free speech and freedom of religion are part of what make America great. What limits, if any, should be put on the content of sermons, and the selection of preachers? What sermons are most inspiring and instructive to you?
3. What has helped you, as an individual, to become more resilient -- able to adapt to and recover from difficult situations? How can our church communities become more resilient? How can our nation?
4. Who are the most vulnerable members of your church or community? What responsibility do you feel toward them? How can you help them with the challenges they face? In what way is such work connected to your faith?
5. How would you like to see your church transformed, if at all? What modifications would you like to see in our local, state and national government? What role are you willing to play in this work of transformation and modification?

Confronting the News With Scripture and Hope

Here are some Bible verses to guide your discussion:

Leviticus 19:33-34

[God said to Moses,] "When an alien resides with you in your land, you shall not oppress the alien. The alien who resides with you shall be to you as the native-born among you; you shall love the alien as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God." (For context, read [Leviticus 19:17-37](#).)

The book of Leviticus contains the legal and ritual laws that indicate Israel's covenant with God. The 19th chapter contains regulations about what it means to be holy, as individuals and as a community. The Lord says to Moses, "You shall not hate in your heart anyone of your kin; you shall not reprove your neighbor" (v. 17). Refraining from hatred is clearly part of what it means to be holy. You shall "love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD" (v. 18). Love is at the heart of holiness, which Jesus knew and included in his great commandment.

The chapter moves on to regulations about animals, sexual relations, farming, witchcraft, Sabbath-keeping, honesty in business, and the treatment of immigrants. "When an alien resides with you in your land, you shall not oppress the alien," says God. The reason for this is that the Israelites themselves were once "aliens in the land of Egypt."

Questions: When have you shown hatred toward a family member or reprovved a neighbor, and what was the result? How are outcomes different when you find a way to love your neighbor as yourself? When, if ever, have you seen evidence of aliens being oppressed? What modifications would you like to see to the treatment of immigrants around you? How does the legal status of an immigrant change what you believe is an appropriate treatment, if at all? What, if anything, are you willing to do to make societal change happen?

Matthew 25:40

[Jesus said] "And the king will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did it to me.'" (For context, read [Matthew 25:31-46](#).)

The popularity of the gospel of Matthew was well established during the early years of the church, leading it to be selected as the first book of the New Testament. One of the stories unique to this gospel is the parable of the sheep and the goats, which reflects Matthew's emphasis on the importance of actions as well as words. Jesus describes a future judgment scene in which he, "the king" (v. 34), will separate people into two groups, "sheep" representing those who have shown compassion to the needy, and "goats" representing those who have not.

In this judgment story, those who are welcomed into the kingdom of God are those who fed the hungry, welcomed the stranger, clothed the naked, and visited the prisoner. They not only served the needy but served Jesus, who says, "just as you did it to one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did it to me." Those who failed to act in this way are thrown "into the eternal fire" (v. 41).

Questions: When have you taken action to feed the hungry, welcome a stranger, visit a prisoner, or perform some other deed of compassion? How did it affect you and change your view of the world? In what ways did you encounter Jesus in the experience, if at all? What can your church community do

to expand its ministries of compassion? How does such work make the church more resilient, able to adapt to difficult situations?

Luke 4:18-19

[Jesus said,] "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." (For context, read. [Luke 4:14-21.](#))

On the Sunday after inauguration day, TWW Team Member Henry Brinton was worshiping at a church in London, England. The preacher read this gospel lesson, which was also read in many American churches, and then said, "This is Jesus' vision statement." Indeed, it is. Jesus begins his Galilean ministry by reading these words from the book of the prophet Isaiah, and saying that "this scripture has been fulfilled" in him (v. 21).

Jesus says, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor." He understands that the Holy Spirit has "anointed" him -- in Hebrew, the word *messiah* means "anointed one." Jesus understands the work of the messiah to be the bringing of "good news to the poor," as well as proclaiming "release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind," and setting free "those who are oppressed." Although the initial response to this teaching is positive, Jesus predicts his hometown will turn against him -- and it does (v. 29).

Questions: Who are the poor, the captives and the oppressed? How do you, as a follower of Jesus, work to bring "good news to the poor"? Why should this be important to you and to your church community? How would you like to see your church transformed, to better align with the vision of Jesus? What role will you play?

Romans 13:3-4

For rulers are not a terror to good conduct but to bad. Do you wish to have no fear of the authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive its approval, for it is God's agent for your good. But if you do what is wrong, you should be afraid, for the authority does not bear the sword in vain! It is the agent of God to execute wrath on the wrongdoer. (For context, read [Romans 13:1-7.](#))

In his letter to the Romans, the apostle Paul urges the followers of Christ in Rome to "be subject to the governing authorities" (v. 1). He wants believers to engage in godly behavior and to follow the laws of Rome, saying that "rulers are not a terror to good conduct but to bad." Paul may have had sincere respect for Roman law, or he may have been offering a survival strategy for believers who were awaiting the coming of God's eternal kingdom. In either case, he says that the ruler "is the agent of God to execute wrath on the wrongdoer."

In our democratic society today, we have much more power to shape our civil government than Paul did. As such, we should certainly pay taxes and follow the law. But we can also work together to change laws or policies that we consider to be immoral. Such modifications have been made in the past, such as around voting rights for women and civil rights for African- Americans. TWW Team

Member Bill Tammeus reminds us that the first creed of the church was "Jesus is Lord." That means, of course, that "Caesar is *not* lord."

Questions: What responsibility do you feel to be subject to governing authorities? How do you show respect for elected leaders, if at all? When, if ever, have you worked for change in your community, and what was the outcome? How can the Christian community be a positive force for transformation, especially around moral issues?

For Further Discussion

1. TWW Consultant James Gruetzner lives in New Mexico, where there are a large number of legal immigrants (many now citizens), including many who have family in other countries. He says that "the current problem of illegals makes it more difficult for them to visit family," and notes that immigrant gangs prey not only on Americans but on illegal aliens, "both in order to gain control and to recruit." He notes that "the most vociferous *anti*-illegals voices I have encountered are among my Hispanic colleagues and acquaintances, including those with family in Mexico." After deportations of illegal aliens, he hopes that President Trump will "propose some laws that will provide for some cases for quick citizenship (e.g., a child brought illegally into the United States as a toddler, who's never really been elsewhere)." What changes would you like to see in U.S. immigration policy? How should churches and faith-based groups be involved in these modifications? How do we handle significant disagreements around such issues? Is it "my way or the highway"? Is it compromise? Discuss.

2. Bishop Budde "is a priest called to speak the gospel and explain how to apply it here and now, writes TWW Team Member Mary Sells. "She did her job. Jesus made lots of people uncomfortable with his truth." When the gospel is uncomfortable to hear, what are our responses, and why? Exactly what is the heart of the gospel message? How does it comfort you? How does it challenge you?

3. Although "we don't want to be partisan," writes TWW Team Member Heidi Mann, "we can't be a ministry of the true Jesus Christ without being political." How has your church community struggled with this challenge of being political without being partisan? What are the differences between being political and being partisan? Where have problems arisen? What approaches have been successful? Why is this an important challenge for the church today?

4. John D. Roth, head of the "Anabaptism at 500 program," recently gave a speech witnessed by TWW Team Member Frank Ramirez. "500 years ago, a small group of Zwingli's former students met to discuss questions of faith," said Roth. They set about to live a faith founded in love, to receive baptism, and to remain steadfast until death. "They gave witness with their love and their lives," Roth said, practicing a faith based on the Sermon on the Mount, based on "an ethic of love, a refusal to swear loyalty oaths, and an alternative version of human relations." Roth asked, "What does it mean to do something courageous for God's sake today?" Discuss.

Responding to the News

In your personal life and church life, look for ways to build resiliency, which is the ability to adapt to and recover from difficult situations. Try to avoid either/or thinking or name-calling, which is not a good way to become more resilient. Instead, find a way to put your energy into transformation and

modification, which can be done at every level of society, from your family to your congregation to our nation as a whole.

Prayer

Almighty God, you have created all the people of the world in your holy image and likeness. Help us to honor each other in our words, and to find ways to work together to transform the world as it is into the world that you would have it be. In Jesus' name. Amen.