

January 3, 2021  
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John 1:1-18  
Greenland Hills United Methodist Church

Can I Say This at Church? Addiction

John 1:1-18

New Revised Standard Version

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.

He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.

And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth. (John testified to him and cried out, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks ahead of me because he was before me.'") From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known.

I have been preaching for a while and there are some things that I have never talked about. There are certain things that we think aren't okay to mention in church such as struggles that we are having or struggles people that we know are having. There are things we need help with and we want to know what to do. We wonder if the church has anything to say, and we don't know because we don't usually talk about these things in church. We wonder can I say this in church when we have questions about addiction, mental health, racism, sexuality or loneliness. Jesus didn't avoid big questions about important topics of his day.

For the next few weeks we are going to be talking about those topics that are uncomfortable because here at Greenland Hills we want you to know that this is a safe place where you can bring all of your cares and concerns to God. This place is a place that says your questions are welcome here. This is a place for conversation, for doubt, for questions. This is a place where we feel safe talking about what is on our heart.

We follow a tradition that has encouraged discussion and debate. When we read the words of Scripture, we enter into a discussion that has been going on for thousands of years across cultures and continents. Jesus responds to every question that he is asked with another question. Jesus asks people what they think.

Today is also the day when we would talk about Epiphany which is the twelfth day of Christmas on January 6. It is the day that we celebrate the visit of the wise men. This is the time of year when we celebrate the incarnation of Christ, that God came to earth as one of us. My favorite part in today's scripture is "And the Word became flesh and lived among us." I love how The Message translation puts that verse, "The Word became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighborhood." As we talk about addiction today, may we know that God is here with us, walking with us through the pain and the struggle of addiction. God's grace is always with us.

Almost 21 million Americans have at least one addiction, but only 10% of them receive treatment. Addictions can destroy marriages, friendships, careers, and threaten a person's basic health and safety. Addiction is a mental disorder which compels someone to repeatedly use substances or engage in behaviors even though they have harmful consequences. In looking at all

of the statistics this one stood out to me, more than 90% of people who have an addiction started to drink alcohol or use drugs before they were 18 years old.<sup>1</sup>

Alcohol is the most widely-abused substance in the United States, and alcoholism is often left untreated. 130 Americans die every day from an opioid overdose. No wonder since doctors issued almost 200 million opioid prescriptions every year beginning in 2006. Addiction to anything is a serious problem. If you leave addiction untreated, it could stop your life in its tracks.<sup>2</sup> To the person who is struggling with addiction, I hope that you hear that you aren't alone.

When someone you love is struggling with addiction, it can be a helpless feeling. We may not know what to do or how to help, so we avoid the issue or tell ourselves that it's not that bad. A wise person once told me, if you suspect there may be a problem, there probably is. A good place to start is by educating yourself about substance abuse and addiction to help you understand what your loved one is going through. It helps us understand that addiction isn't about a lack of willpower. Addiction is a complex disease that causes changes in the brain.

We may think that someone has to hit rock bottom before they will be ready to seek treatment for addiction. The reality is they hit the bottom, and they just keep going further down. Rock bottom is too late. Seeking treatment early is much more effective in successfully treating addiction. In our scripture today we heard about John the Baptist. Sent from God to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. John the Baptist wouldn't let Jesus go it alone. He was family for Jesus and advocated for him. If you have a loved one who struggles with addiction, or if you struggle with addiction, don't go it alone. I hope you always know that your church family is here for you, always. There isn't a quick fix for addiction. There is no shame in hitting the reset button. Relapses are common, but I hope that everyone hears the message that you are cared for, you are not alone, and we are here to help.

If you love someone who suffers from addiction, it's important to care for yourself first in order to be the best of help. You can't heal the people you love. You can't make choices for them. You can't rescue them and it is not your job to fix it. You can promise that they won't journey alone. You can loan them your map. But this trip is theirs.<sup>3</sup>

Behind me on our beautiful paraments (church word)!, you see the star. The wisemen followed the star, like we are to follow God. Sometimes in our lives we follow something else instead. The riskiest thing in your life is to let yourself be loved. To admit that we are vulnerable, that we need help, that we need a hug, that we need to breathe in God's love for us, and let ourselves be loved. Brene Brown shared a story in her Unlocking Us podcast about telling her therapist about her new boyfriend. Her therapist told her that she wished them luck but she warned, "He likes you so much more than you like you. He loves you and sees you and knows you and that terrifies you."<sup>4</sup>

Words matter, especially the words we say to ourselves. We have to remember to not answer shame with shame and blame for blame because everyone ends up in the sewer. Harriet Lerner is an expert on apologies. She says that some people will never be able to apologize because to be able to apologize you need a lot of self-worth to stand on. The people who do the greatest harm to us are the least able to apologize because they stand on a small rickety platform of self-worth. They are vulnerable to collapsing into shame. People who do a lot of harm have a lot of shame. Dr. Lerner says a willingness to apologize and make amends is a function of self-

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.addictioncenter.com/addiction/addiction-statistics/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.addictioncenter.com/addiction/addiction-statistics/>

<sup>3</sup> Laura Jean Truman found on instagram.

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.texasmonthly.com/the-culture/pandemic-turned-brene-brown-americas-therapist/>

worth. It doesn't have to do with love. It has to do with self-worth and someone can only increase that themselves.<sup>5</sup> So, the addict may love you and care about you, but their shaky self-worth makes them act in ways that seem like they do not love you and do not care about you. When you are concerned for an addict, it is not about you. It is about them. And God loves you both.

Actor Sir Anthony Hopkins recently celebrated 45 years of sobriety.<sup>6</sup> He said he was drinking himself to death and then he got a thought that said, "Do you want to live or die?" and he wanted to live. He said to keep fighting and to be bold because mighty forces will come to your aid. On Christmas we celebrate that God has set up a tent among us and will help us work together on our stuff. The Word became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighborhood. That mighty force is here with us. God's grace is always with us. Thanks be to God, Amen.

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<sup>5</sup> <https://brenebrown.com/podcast/harriet-lerner-and-brene-im-sorry-how-to-apologize-why-it-matters/>

<sup>6</sup> <https://people.com/movies/anthony-hopkins-celebrates-45-years-of-sobriety/>