

This is a transcribed copy of the sermon given at All Saints' Church in Princeton, NJ on 10/16/22 by the Rev. Jane Milliken Hague.

How would you identify a Christian walking down the street? How would you know that one person is a Christian? And perhaps another is not, what are the defining characteristics of a Christian? How do you see yourself walking in the world and want to be identified as a Christian? Part of the issue that we have as Christians is we don't present ourselves perhaps in the best light. We don't act like Christians. And so people look at those of us who are followers of Jesus, those of us who are engaged in a church community and they look at us and say, Why would I want to be a member of them?

Recently, yesterday, I read in The Washington Post, that they have done a whole series of research on how Jesus is presented to Americans in this world and in how Jesus is presented to Americans. And those of us who are identified as Christians, I want to get this right so that I get the numbers right. As the movement is, it is the fact that we are more encouraged to be like Jesus. But for most people who do not identify as Christians, they look at Christians as not a group of love. Not a group of joyful people. But as a hate group. In the research that has been throughout the United States, this group identified four different categories of Americans, non Christians, those who identify as perhaps belonging to another faith, are 16%. Those who identify as spiritually open, meaning they kind of believe in a higher power of some name of some elk, but do not identify necessarily as Christians is 20%. Those who identify themselves as Jesus followers are 34%. Now, these are people I suspect who think that Jesus is a pretty good example and a wonderful person but do not identify with a specific church denomination or religion as Christianity is known. And then 30% are those who are engaged as Christians. And I know I am preaching to the choir because we are part of the 30% We are the engaged Christians and yet if you look at the 70% of Americans, who identify either as non Christian, spiritually open or followers of Jesus, they look to those of us who are engaged as Christians as a group that is judgmental, harmful, and divisive.

And you wonder why people don't come to church anymore and in fact, our behavior as engaged Christians are considered a barrier to people walking into the door of a Christian church. Now, granted, we had a pretty high bar of behavior as Christians. We want to act as Jesus did. But then again, a lot of us as we act as we think Christian is, how do we know how do we know who this Jesus is? Is it because we listen on Sunday morning to a preacher? Is it because we read the newspaper about what Christians are saying? In our readings this morning, we heard from the author of Second Timothy, writing to a group of people who were struggling as early Christians, and they were going astray if you will. So the author said be careful who you listen to be careful that the person who you are listening to is according to the doctrine, and that, frankly, is one of the reasons why we are in a community is that we can begin to parse out what is what is the doctrine what is that that we believe, but the other thing that the author of Second Timothy says is, read your scripture. What is the scripture of the day? Is this what you're hearing, identify with the same Jesus that you heard in the Bible? Is that the Jesus that you are emulating and following? In our Gospel lesson, we have this amazing story about a widow who's gone to the judge and wants justice.

The parable itself is a little complicated, but in essence, it is Jesus telling us that we are to pray unceasing and be like this widow, who is demanding justice of the world. And if you look at this widow, she is bold as all get out. She's tenacious, she's persistent. She is not what we think of as a pious, humble woman. She is out there pushing that judge for justice. For that

is the Christian that we are to emulate. How is it that you are known as a Christian? And when you walk down the street do people say there

is a Christian. After I was ordained, and I started wearing the uniform, or the costume, if you will, of a priest. I realized that I dress like a Christian. I mean, it's a pretty good safe bet. That someone with a collar like this that wears the black is a Christian. Right? So I'm kind of this poster child for what a Christian looks like. And so I realized that I have to act like a Christian. That I can't when I'm out on the highway and somebody cuts me

off and I'm wearing my collar, that I can't go up to their bumper and ride it and make all sorts of faces. One Easter I was on my way to church, having very little sleep the night before, and this woman rear ended me at a stop sign. I got out of the car. I was so angry. She was probably you know, not paying attention. And I marched down to her and I was like how dare you? And then I realized I had my collar on. So I had to back off and say, do me a favor next time. Watch the red light green light, please. She didn't do any damage and we drove off. Now I have the privilege and the opportunity to look like a Christian. But what about you? What about me when I go to the grocery store and I don't have my collar? Do I act and pretend to be Christian? Or am I incognito? Am I not the official looking Christian? When people see you walking down the street do you look like a Christian? Do you act as a Christian? When people walk into All Saints' do they find a Christian community? Do we act like them? One of the great opportunities and it really is an opportunity right now for All Saints' is this ability to look and this openness and freedom to say who are we, as All Saints'? What is it that we want to stand for? How can we stand tall and say we are Christians, come visit us at All Saints' because this is who we are. You have a blank slate, along with a fantastic history. And I encourage all of us to stand back and say where do we want All Saints' to go? In the next couple of months, we will be doing this whole sort of internal look. This prayerful understanding and hope of who All Saints' will be now. It is an opportunity that you cannot deny right now.

And it's not up to the priest. It's up to you. Because it will reflect who your next priest will be. It is a time of challenge? Yes. But it's also a time of joy. It's a time of prayer. It's a time of challenge and expectations. As we continue to pray as we continue to be Christians who walk in this world with tenacity with boldness, holding up the fact of what did Jesus look like and teach us through the Bible? Through the doctrine through our community? Will people know that we are Christians?

Amen.