

Sermon Note: Integrity

Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost

Introduction

We continue our **Call & Response** series with a question many of us ask without saying it out loud: does faith really shape how we live? Psalm 14 is frustrated with a world where people say one thing and do another, where words about God are easy but action is rare. It's not aimed at outsiders. It's a challenge for those who claim belief in a loving God, and yet live as if that makes no real difference. This week, we sit with that tension and listen for what it means to be people of integrity. Integrity isn't perfection. It's about choosing to live like God actually matters. That's harder than it sounds, and more necessary than we often admit.

Illustration Videos

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EKa8E1tVJk4>

In this scene from *The Post* (2017), Katharine Graham faces pressure from all sides as she decides whether to publish the Pentagon Papers. Despite the personal and professional cost, she chooses integrity.

Why This Video?

This scene gives a glimpse of integrity in the face of opposition. Katharine Graham is surrounded by pressure, doubt, and risk. Every voice in the room has a reason to hold back. Her decision comes slowly, but it's deliberate. She chooses a path that aligns with her responsibility, even though it could cost her everything. The power of this moment lies in her quiet conviction that turns into action.

Video Discussion Questions

1. What did you notice in the way Katharine Graham carried the weight of the decision?
2. Who or what seemed to hold the most power in the room—and did that change by the end?
3. Have you ever faced a decision where doing the right thing came with personal or professional risk?
4. What made this decision difficult for her? What helped her move forward anyway?
5. What does integrity look like when the right choice isn't obvious or popular?
6. Do you think her choice would have carried the same weight if she had made it more quickly? Why or why not?
7. How did others in the scene respond once the decision was made? What does that tell us about leadership and courage?
8. How might this scene help us consider what it means to live as if God matters?

Psalm 14 (NRSVue)

¹The fool says in his heart,
“There is no God.”

They are corrupt, their deeds are vile;
there is no one who does good.

²The Lord looks down from heaven
on all mankind
to see if there are any who understand,
any who seek God.

³All have turned away, all have become corrupt;
there is no one who does good,
not even one.

⁴Do all these evildoers know nothing?

They devour my people as though eating bread;
they never call on the Lord.

⁵But there they are, overwhelmed with dread,
for God is present in the company of the righteous.

⁶You evildoers frustrate the plans of the poor,
but the Lord is their refuge.

⁷Oh, that salvation for Israel would come out of Zion!
When the Lord restores his people,
let Jacob rejoice and Israel be glad!

Scripture Study Questions

1. What part of the psalm stood out to you? What did it stir in you?
2. How does the psalmist's tone shift throughout the passage?
3. Like the psalmist in verses 1–3, have you ever felt tempted to give up on people or believe that no one is good?
4. The psalm suggests that God is a refuge for the poor and the righteous. What does it mean for God to be a refuge?
5. What makes it difficult to trust that God is a refuge, not just for the poor or righteous, but also for you?
6. As the psalm progresses, the psalmist seems to move from a cynical condemnation of all, to a self-righteous judgment of some, and finally toward a softening that recognizes God's graciousness and commitment to redemption. What's one small way you could soften your heart toward someone this week, even if they've made mistakes?

Additional (Optional) Questions

1. What do you think the psalmist means in saying, "Fools say in their hearts, 'There is no God'"?
2. Why do you think the psalmist views those who profess faith but live contrary to it as "fools"?
3. Would it be fair to use the word "hypocrite" in place of "fool"? Why or why not?

4. Do you think most people in your life would agree with the psalmist?
5. How does the psalm contrast despair with the hope of God's refuge?
6. What causes feelings of despair?
7. What does the psalm say about how God relates to marginalized or oppressed people?

Weekly Action

Choose a moment this week to read Psalm 14 again. When you do, read it slowly, without rushing past the uncomfortable parts. Pay attention to what challenges you and what offers hope. Take time to talk with a trusted friend, family member, or spiritual partner about where your life lines up with your faith, and where it may not yet. Allow your faith and commitment grow through honest, grace-filled conversation.

Prayer

God of justice and mercy, when the world seems filled with disappointment or corruption, remind us that you are still our refuge. Help us to see others as you see them, not as categories, but as beloved children. Soften our hearts and strengthen our hope. In Jesus' name, Amen.