

21 June 2026

Sermon by Isaac De Jongh.

**The Lord be with you beloved.**

May I speak to you in the name of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Fourth Sunday after Pentecost

**Readings:**

Genesis 21: 8-21; Psalm 86: 1-10, 16-17; Romans 6: 1b-11; Matthews 10: 24-39

**Genesis 21: 8-21**

Today's first reading is a deeply moving narrative of human frailty and divine grace. It follows the expulsion of Hagar and Ishmael into the wilderness of Beersheba. It highlights how God hears the cries of the outcast and provides living water in moments of absolute despair.

The banishment of Hagar and Ishmael is the painful fruit of human attempts to force God's promises. Sarah's jealousy and Abraham's compliance remind us that ignoring God's timing often leads to fractured families and tragic consequences.

The wilderness is a recurring biblical motif. For Hagar and Ishmael, it represents a place of extreme vulnerability, loss of control, and impending death. It mirrors the spiritual, emotional, or physical "wildernesses" we experience when our resources run dry.

The name *Ishmael* means "God hears". Despite being pushed to the margins by the covenant family, Hagar and her son are not abandoned by God. God hears the boy's cries and meets them exactly where they are.

Hagar sits away from her son so she does not have to watch him die. In her overwhelming grief, she is blinded to the provision right in front of her. God opens her eyes to see a well of water. This is a beautiful metaphor for how God's grace often breaks through our panic to provide exactly what we need.

**Psalm 86: 1-10, 16-17**

The verses chosen for today's Psalm is a profound prayer of a believer crying out to God in distress, yet finding unshakable confidence in His sovereignty and steadfast love. It teaches us how to anchor our faith in God's character during times of trial, moving from honest lament to bold praise and petition.

When the struggles of life mount, it is easy to feel small and overwhelmed. Psalm 86 beautifully models how we should process our difficulties. Instead of hiding our pain or running to false comforts, we are invited to bring our "*poor and needy*" souls directly to God.

The turning point of this passage is verse 10. No matter how large our problems seem, God is greater. The psalmist reflects on God's unparalleled track record and His abounding love, which fuels the courage to ask for God's strength. When we face opposition or hardship, we too can ask for a "sign of His favor"—a tangible, comforting reminder of His presence to help us endure.

### **Romans 6: 1b-11**

The apostle Paul quotes to his would-be accusers, "What should we say then, should we continue in sin so that grace may increase?" Paul emphatically responds, "May it NEVER be! How can we who have DIED to sin continue to live in it?"

How have we died to sin? I certainly don't feel like sin is completely dead in me?

Paul doesn't say "try harder to become dead to sin." He says "consider yourselves dead to sin". This is an objective reality to step into, not an achievement to earn.

What "old self" habits (anger, pride, worry, selfishness) are you still tolerating as a master? The cross broke the chains; you no longer have to obey them.

The goal isn't just a sinless life, but an alive life. Ask yourself daily: Am I living actively for God in the grace I've been given?

Paul connects to the metaphor of baptism as being united to Jesus' death and resurrection to the mystic path and process of spiritual growth.

### **Matthews 10: 21-39**

The Gospel reading for the fourth Sunday after Pentecost presents a selection from one of Jesus's extended teachings in the Gospel of Matthew, usually called the missionary discourse. He speaks of the hardships his disciples will face, the divisions his message will bring, and the radical nature of loyalty to him. This passage invites reflection on what it means to follow Jesus with full commitment.

"Everyone therefore who acknowledges me before others, I also will acknowledge before my Father in heaven; but whoever denies me before others, I also will deny before my Father in heaven. Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword."

I don't remember struggling more with the gospel than I have in the last few weeks. And I don't mean struggling to interpret the truth of the gospel. I mean struggling with that truth in my life, struggling with what that truth reveals about us and our country, struggling with what that truth is asking of us, and struggling with that truth in what I say and do.

Don't you sometimes just want an easy, feel-good gospel? I do. Sometimes I want a gospel that affirms our life as it is and leaves us alone. I want a gospel that's easy to preach, easy to hear, and easy to live.

None of that, however, is likely to happen today. Jesus has taken his sword and drawn a line in the sand.

Paul speaks of that line in today's epistle (Romans 6:1-11) when he asks, "How can we who died to sin go on living in it?"

Jeremiah felt the cut of that sword in his own life. "Whenever I speak," he says, "I must cry out, I must shout, 'Violence and destruction!'" He can no longer ignore or turn away from what is happening. He cannot hold it in. (Jeremiah 20:7-13) He knows what he must do and where he must stand.

The line Jesus draws is a line between acknowledging him before others and denying him before others. This is not about whether we read the Bible, go to church, say the creed, or post bible kind of stuff on our social media. It is about how we live, what we say and don't say, what we do and don't do, the policies we enact or support and the ideas behind them. It is about where and with whom we make our stand today.

There are, however, other lines in the sand. Jesus isn't the only one who draws lines. Some we have drawn for ourselves and some have been drawn for us by others. They're not hard to see.

Look at the lines that have been drawn about racism, across the world about Black Lives Matter, and the xenophobic, immigration problems in our country. Think about who is and who isn't welcome in South Africa and why. Lines that run through poverty, violence, criminality and injustice. And they run through the lack of equality, education, and healthcare. There is even a line running through decisions to wear a mask in public and keep social distance.

What does the line that Jesus draws have to do with these situations or any other situation where you see lines being drawn? What do those situations look like when we acknowledge Jesus in them? When we deny him in them?

I wouldn't be surprised if right about now some of you feel that I have crossed a line, that I've gone from preaching to meddling, that I have left behind the gospel for politics. I wish it were that easy to avoid the gospel but it's not.

If Jesus can say, "Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me;" might he not also say, "Whoever loves our president or political party more than me is not worthy of me, whoever loves his or her own position, opinion, or agenda more than me is not worthy of me?"

The line Jesus draws with his sword cuts through every one of the issues I raised and more. It cuts through the lines you and I see being drawn in our country today. It runs through your life and my life. It runs through our country. It runs through our thoughts, words, and deeds.

For Jesus there is only one line that matters. That's why I so struggle with today's gospel. It holds before us a set of values, a way of being, a truth that we either acknowledge or deny. We

cannot straddle that line – one foot here, the other there. There is no middle ground on which to stand. And we can't favor the line to make our life easier.

Jesus' sword cuts through everything. The line he draws runs through every single grain of sand in our life. That line reveals and calls us into a greater priority, a higher authority, a truer identity. Where we stand in relation to that line will determine who we are, the values we hold, and how, or even if, we love our neighbor.

If you want to know where Jesus stands, what he stands for, and with whom he stands look for the places of brokenness and dis-ease; look for love, justice, compassion, peace; look for people who are hurting, marginalized, oppressed, devalued. That's where we see Jesus drawing a line in the sand and taking a stand.

“Blessed are you who are poor ..., you who are hungry now ..., and you who weep now.” “But woe to you who are rich ..., you who are full now ..., you who are laughing ..., and you when all speak well of you.” (Luke 6:20-26)

In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus stands with the poor in spirit, those who mourn, the meek, those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemakers (Matthew 5:3-9). “You have heard that it was said ... but I say to you ...” (Matthew 5:21, 27, 31, 33, 38, 43)

After his temptation in the wilderness Jesus went to the synagogue in his hometown and took a stand “to bring good news to the poor ... to proclaim release to the captive and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free.” (Luke 4:18)

When Jesus was only forty days old Simeon prophesied that Jesus would draw a line in the sand. “This child,” he said, “is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed.” (Luke 2:34-35)

What line is Jesus drawing in the sands of your life today? What is being revealed to you? And what is being asked of you? Are you acknowledging Jesus? Are you denying him?

Those are the questions I ask myself. I think we all need to be asking ourselves those questions everyday of our life because we all stand somewhere. We all take a stand by our actions and inactions, by our words and our silence, by our thoughts and intentions.

When you look and know the line Jesus has drawn in your life – what is response?

Where do you stand? For what do you stand? With whom do you stand?

Perhaps the most difficult part of this passage is Jesus's declaration that he has not come to bring peace, but a sword (10:34). He speaks of divisions, even within families, as people respond to his call. In the first century, these tensions were often intensive. Jewish Christians often faced backlash from the wider Jewish community, something we see in the book of Acts and elsewhere. Non-Jewish Christians also faced these tensions, and at the same time the

Roman society worshipped and honoring the many gods. The honoring of the gods was a civic and moral duty, and Christian refusal to participate was deeply offensive, resulting even in the charge of being atheists.

Jesus concludes this passage with a profound challenge: “Whoever does not take up their cross and follow me is not worthy of me” (10:38). This statement, made before his crucifixion, foreshadows the cost of discipleship. To take up the cross is to embrace a way of life marked by sacrifice, service, and faithfulness. Jesus’s words affirm that discipleship is not about personal gain but about embodying God’s love and justice in the world.

This is a tough pill to swallow, especially in the modern day when comfort, convenience, and safety are so highly prized. And the final verse offers a paradox: “Whoever finds their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life for my sake will find it” (10:39). This teaching calls believers to release their grip on self-preservation and embrace the deeper life found in Christ. We will find abundance in life if we take up the life of Christ. True life is found not in accumulation or personal achievement but in living in right relationship with Creator, with community, and with creation. Jesus’s words invite his followers into this reality—where life is defined not by status or security but by faithfulness to God’s call.

Jesus is straightforward in warning to His followers: true discipleship demands absolute loyalty. It acknowledges the inevitable suffering and family divisions that come with standing for Christ, while grounding that costly obedience in the profound assurance that the Creator intimately knows and values every single believer.

Amen.