

Inside Out

February 15, 2026

One of my five-year-old's great joys in life is getting dirty. The more mud, the better.

Last week after school, she and my husband Scott were the last people on the playground, and she asked if she could do *one more thing*. He said yes. And she made a beeline for the only mud puddle in sight and did a full-on belly flop. I can laugh about it—mostly because the laundry from this little adventure was already in the dryer by the time I got home from meetings here at church.

This same child is also obsessed with slush. She and her classmates delight in finding any liquid water on the playground and mixing it with snow and ice. She owns several pairs of mittens, but there is *one* favorite pair. They're allegedly "waterproof," which is adorable, because every single day they come home completely soaked.

Early on in this slush-making season, Scott taught me a trick: turn the mittens inside out before putting them in the dryer. Before that, they'd come out after an hour still wet and unusable. But once we started turning them inside out—voilà. Warm. Dry. Functional.

That image has been tumbling around in my head this week as I've been praying with our Gospel reading. Because what Jesus is doing in this section of the Sermon on the Mount is essentially telling us: *You can't just keep the outside dry. You have to turn the whole thing inside out.*

Our reading from **Sirach** begins with a striking claim, "If you choose, you can keep the commandments." Sirach insists that life and death, flourishing and diminishment, are not arbitrary. They are shaped, again and again, by what we choose—by how we live, how we relate, how we orient our hearts.

And then Jesus picks that thread up and pulls it all the way through our interior lives. "You have heard it said, 'You shall not murder.' But I say to you—if you are angry, if you insult, if you nurse contempt—pay attention. Something is already breaking."

Jesus is not lowering the bar here. He is digging deeper. He is radicalizing the law—getting down to the *root* of what God has always wanted. And what God has always wanted is not just rule-following. God wants *human flourishing*. God wants lives that are whole, healed, and capable of love.

Here's the thing: most of us are pretty good at not murdering. We show up. We follow the rules. We keep our hands clean—at least in public.

But Jesus isn't impressed by a life that looks fine on the outside while the inside is soaked through with resentment, contempt, anger, or fear. Because soaked mittens don't work. And soaked souls don't either.

Scott Hoezee from Calvin Theological Seminary then asks, “So what is the point? The point is that the Law of God was meant to foster human flourishing at every level, including at the deepest levels of our hearts and minds. God wants us to respect each other, to love each other, to see God’s own image residing deep within one another. Human life is not supposed to be some giant game in which you scheme to get ahead for good old #1. We are not to use people as pawns, as objects of our lust, as receptacles for our scorn, as the targets for our desires, as things to manipulate, and then discard.”

He goes on, “It’s not enough that all of this does not show up on the outside of our behavior. Hypocrisy is everything it’s cracked up to be and sooner or later it has a way of brutalizing the hypocrite, too. … Unremitting resentment and deception and greed rots us on the inside: it weighs us down, saps our joy, and sooner or later really will show up on the outside in how we treat others, talk to them, regard them.”

Years ago, I learned this the hard way. I had signed up to volunteer for a political campaign I believed in. The office was in Milwaukee’s Third Ward, and I was scheduled to make phone calls from 5 to 7 p.m.

What I had *not* thought through was that it was opening day of Summerfest. If you ever went to Summerfest back in the day, you can imagine what came next. I drove around for close to an hour looking for parking. Twenty minutes late, frustration building, I was just about to give up when I spotted a space.

I pulled over, turned on my blinker, and pulled forward to parallel park—driver’s ed style. And from behind me, a car full of suburban women dressed to go clubbing nosed right into the spot.

Something in me snapped. And I did something I do not recommend: I got out of the car. Even more astonishing: they rolled down the window. I looked at them—perfect hair, short skirts, laughing at my misfortune—and I asked, “Are any of you mothers?” They all nodded. And I said, “Do you know what your curse is going to be? Your kids are going to turn out as thoughtless and selfish as you.”

And then I walked away.

Friends, I followed the rules that day. I did not commit a crime. But my interior life? That thing was *soaked*. And Jesus would say: *That matters*.

This is where our gospel reading presses us—especially now. Because we are living in a moment when the gap between exterior righteousness and interior rot is on full display. We see leaders who speak endlessly about law and order while trafficking in cruelty. We see public performances of faith that coexist with policies that dehumanize immigrants, terrorize communities, and treat human lives as disposable. We see hospitals having to suspend gender affirming care because self-righteous zealots hold the purse strings, and would rather have their biases stroked than reduce the suicidality of trans people.

And if we're honest, this hypocrisy is not just "out there." The danger Jesus names is that when our interior doesn't jive with our exterior, we begin to mirror what we oppose. That anger calcifies into contempt. That justified outrage curdles into dehumanization. That we start calling people "idiots," "animals," "monsters"—and convince ourselves it doesn't matter because we're on the right side.

Jesus says: *Stop. Turn it inside out.* Not because anger is never appropriate—it is. But because anger that is not examined will eventually erode our capacity to love. And love is the whole point.

Jesus even says something astonishing: If you're bringing your gift to the altar and remember that someone has something against you—*leave the gift.* Go. Be reconciled.

There is no private spirituality here. No "me and Jesus" that bypasses our relationships. Our worship, our justice work, our resistance—it all depends on what's happening inside us. Because a soaked mitten cannot keep anyone warm. And a heart soaked in contempt cannot bear the kingdom of God.

The good news—because there *is* good news—is that Jesus doesn't name this to shame us. He names it because God wants more for us, and because, as Sirach says, we can choose. God wants us free from the heavy garments of resentment and bitterness. God wants us light enough to move, to love, to repair what has been broken.

This is Epiphany work. Light shining into places we'd rather not look. God-with-us—not just in our actions, but in our thoughts, our reactions, our gut responses.

The invitation is not to perfection. The invitation is to courage, the courage to turn things inside out, to tend to the inner life that makes outward faithfulness possible.

So may we choose life—not just in what we do, but in who we are becoming. And may God, who desires our flourishing, keep drying out what has been soaked for far too long.

May it be so. Alleluia and Amen.

Rev. Bridget Flad Daniels
Union Congregational United Church of Christ
Green Bay, Wisconsin
Sirach 15:15-20; Matthew 5:21-26
February 15, 2026