

TRAUMA AND INCARCERATION***Locked in Solidarity – 2023***

Rev. Dr. Kevin Riggs and Rev. Kevin Burns

PREACHING / TEACHING GUIDE

CW: This guide includes stories about violence, imprisonment & abuse.

[Find the manuscripted sermon here.](#)

THE BIG IDEA: *The church should be in the middle of trauma prevention instead of allowing it to happen and stand by as children and families become numbers in the criminal legal system. The church should be in the middle of every aspect of our criminal legal system, from prevention through juvenile detention through rehabilitation through incarceration and through re-entry. The Church should be in the middle of the entire process: fighting for justice, reconciliation, and restoration.*

(My approach to this sermon was to prepare it as if I would be preaching it. The manuscript was prepared like I do all my sermons, except it is a little longer than a normal sermon. I tried to add extra material so you could adjust it to your group and your setting. Please feel free to add and subtract and pick and choose what to use and what not to use. It is hoped this preaching/teaching guide will assist you in preparing to share with your community. The Scriptures listed below are in the order they appear in the manuscript.

NOTE #1: This sermon was a joint effort between myself (Kevin Riggs) and my good friend Rev. Kevin Burns. Rev. Burns is presently incarcerated on Death Row in Tennessee. A few years ago, my church ordained him. He is now considered to be one of our church pastors.

NOTE #2: The idea behind this year's sermon was to have a broad topic and then leave room for others to apply it to the situations of prevention, juvenile detention, mass incarceration, re-entry, recidivism, etc. The broad topic is *trauma, from juvenile detention through re-entry*.

SCRIPTURES REFERENCED: (Scripture references are in the order they appear in sermon manuscript.)

Hebrews 13:3
Ezekiel 34:1-6, & 16
Mark 4:35-41
Mark 5:1-20
Luke 4:18

THE BASIC OUTLINE: *The church should be in the middle of trauma prevention instead of allowing it to happen and stand by as children and families become numbers in the criminal legal system. The church should be in the middle of every aspect of our criminal legal system, from prevention through juvenile detention through rehabilitation through incarceration and*

through re-entry. The Church should be in the middle of the entire process: fighting for justice, reconciliation, and restoration. Sources to information below are [cited in the manuscript sermon](#).

- 1) Introduction.
 - a) 97% of juvenile offenders have experienced some sort of early childhood trauma.
 - b) The more traumatic experiences a child experiences early in life, the increased likelihood of negative behaviors and outcomes later in life.
- 2) Juvenile Incarceration. (This section is full of statistics, with sources listed in the footnotes.)
- 3) Where is the Church?
 - a) Where is the church in trauma prevention?
 - b) Where is the church in the juvenile legal system?
 - c) Where is the church when it comes to ministering to our loved ones behind prison walls?
 - d) Ezekiel 34:1-6 and 16.
 - e) Three Applications:
 - ✓ God's people are expected by God to search out and find those who have experienced trauma, bringing them back into the fold.
 - ✓ If we do not search out those who have experienced brokenness and trauma, God will discipline us severely.
 - ✓ In all things we are to seek justice.
- 4) The Demoniac (Rev. Kevin Burns)
 - a) We find meaning, purpose, inspiration, and self-worth in the *Imago Dei* in us all.
 - b) Pastoral prayer from Rev. Kevin Burns.

Introduction:

- Discussing childhood trauma and abuse can be sensitive. Assume there are people in your group who have experienced such trauma. Be sensitive, but be honest.
- Early childhood trauma, if not dealt with, can result in all kinds of physical, mental, and spiritual problems as an adult.
- Please use warnings before talking about sensitive content so as to not re-traumatize or trigger anyone and consider if openly sharing or discussing the experience or story is necessary. Often trauma information can be shared without sharing sensitive information or traumatic experiences.

Juvenile Incarceration:

- There are lots of stats in this section about juvenile incarceration with links for you to go and read more.
- A topic that could be discussed in this section is the “*school to prison pipeline*.” It would be easy to research that topic with a google search.
- Consider spending time with your group researching juvenile detention statistics in your area.

Where is the Church?

- This section asks the very serious question, “*Where is the church?*”
- This would be a great place to discuss with your group what your church is doing when it comes to being involved in prison ministry from prevention through re-entry.

- If your church is not involved in prison ministry, discuss ways you could be involved.
 - [Utilize our LIS toolkit here for next steps.](#)
 - [Find advocates in your area that you can partner with.](#)
- Three applications are drawn from Ezekiel 34:1-6, 16.
 - (1) God expects the church to find those who have experienced brokenness and trauma and bring them back into the fold.
 - (2) God will discipline the church for not searching for those who have experienced brokenness and trauma.
 - (3) In all things, the church is to seek justice.
- Discuss the three applications, asking which one you think is the most important and why.
- Ask, “What do you think about the following statement?” – *“The Church should be in the middle of the entire process of our criminal legal system; fighting for justice, reconciliation, and restoration.*

The Demoniac (Rev. Kevin Burns)

- This section was written by Rev. Kevin Burns, an inmate on Tennessee’s Death Row.
- Ask, “In what ways do you imagine that everything in prison is a mental struggle.”
- A follow up question to discuss could be, “Imagine you are in prison, what do you think your greatest hardship would be?”
- Read then discuss Mark 5:1-17.
- The main lesson Pastor Burns makes from Mark 5:1-17 is as follows: *One encounter with Jesus changes everything.* Take time to discuss this vital lesson and encourage your group to give personal stories about how Jesus has changed them.

Conclusion:

- Make copies of Pastor Kevin’s prayer and hand it out to your group.
- Close by reading Pastor Kevin Burn’s prayer:

*Gracious and Eternal God:
You are the God and Father of our Lord and Savior,
Jesus, the Christ.*

*Lord God, I thank You for Your grace and Your mercies;
And I thank You that Your faithfulness is everlasting;
enduring the tests of trials and tribulations that
we must endure because of life’s challenges,
and the subtle oppositions that we face throughout our lifetimes.*

*Lord God, and I thank You, that Your love does not vacillate.
Your love remains steadfast, unmovable,
and always abounding,
unchanged by the multitude of our faults.*

*Father-God, I lift up those among us that are afflicted with mental illness,
and even demonic possession.*

*Though we ourselves may not be able to discern the difference,
Your Spirit can!
I pray for these, O Lord God,
that You will loose them from these binding and tormenting oppressions,
and that You will deliver them back unto their families and communities,
free and clothed in their right minds.*

*Father-God, and I pray for men and women, boys and girls,
that are incarcerated everywhere.
That there will be reformations and restorations
and that this mass incarceration machine may be brought down!
And that this wicked industry, and this vile business,
will be stopped!*

*I pray also, Father, for those of us that are on death row,
the most crucial of this vile business because of politics.
I pray that You will make a full end of it, O God, and bring to pass your own Word,
“...to deliver those that are appointed to death...” (Psalm 79:11)*

*Finally, Father,
I pray for Your people (the Church)
that You will stir up in us, O God,
a fire and a compassion for the incarcerated,
and those of us on death-row.
That being led by Your Spirit;
the Church and the Pastors,
may take their place, “the lead,”
in the charge for reforms and restorations.
For so have You ordained for us to do.
That Your compassion and Your mercy, and Your glory
may fill the whole earth.
In the name of Your Holy Son, Jesus,
I pray and I thank You Father,
Amen and Amen.*

(Friday, January 6, 2023)

MISCELLANEOUS HELPS:

- [Utilize our LIS toolkit here for next steps.](#)
- [Find advocates in your area that you can partner with.](#)
- Suggested Books
The New Jim Crow (Michelle Alexander)
Beyond Bars (Jeffrey Ian Ross and Stephen C. Richards)
Rethinking Incarceration (Dominique DuBois Gilliard)

Executing Grace (Shane Claiborne)

- Rev. Kevin Burns loves to receive cards and letters. You can write to him at, Rev. Kevin Burns (#234315), RMSI, Unit 2, B-211, 7475 Cockrill Bend Blvd. Nashville, TN 37209.
- Rev. Dr. Kevin Riggs can be reached at kevin@franklincommunitychurch.org, on Twitter @pastor4justice, on Instagram, @pastor4justice, or (615) 440-7553.