Empathy Is the Missing Value:
A Conversation from Our Friends at Day1
November 18, 2026

Marthame Sanders: This is Marthame Sanders, producer of the Ministry Collaborative Podcast. On this episode, we wanted to share something from our friends over at the Day1 podcast. TMC's Executive Director, Mark Ramsey, was the guest preacher on a recent Day1 episode. Mark and Day1's host, Katie Givens Kime, had a conversation around that sermon – which was entitled "Come By Here" – and how we all yearn for a faith that goes deeper than politics.

If you want to hear the full episode or find out more about Day1, you can visit them online at day1.org or check out the links in the show notes. Special thanks to Katie and the whole Day1 team for this chance to collaborate. We appreciate you.

Now, here's Day1's conversation between Mark Ramsey and Katie Givens Kime.

Katie Givens Kime: Mark Ramsey, welcome back to Day1. We're so glad to have you specifically this week.

Mark Ramsey: Katie, it's always great to be with you and with Day1. Thanks.

Katie: Mark, you are someone who has spent your professional life helping pastors and helping congregations navigate challenges, and you've done that across twenty three denominations. What do you think the Church (big "C") most needs to remember in a moment like this?

1Mark: Whenever I'm with a group of pastors, which I am probably a half dozen to a dozen times a month in different parts of the country, the one question I ask pastors is, "What is the primary challenge you yourself are facing in your ministry right now?" And in the I've been in Pacific Northwest, in rural North Carolina and everywhere in between, and in central Illinois, lots of other places over the last couple of months, for the first time in five years, not one pastor said "politics".

Katie: They did not say politics?

Mark: No. Now, I don't think that means our divisions have gone away and we're all, you know we're all reconciled. But I do think there's a shift going on. I think there's an exhaustion with the whole political thing, except for which is so often true, say, 1 or 1% on the far left and the far right. And I understand that they have their convictions. But in the middle, where pastors are in the pastoral trenches with their congregations, trying to make sense of things and trying to integrate life and faith, I don't think politics is…we've been there. That is, I think that is running threadbare right now.

Katie: Yeah. Like a sense of "We've been there, let's please not go at each other about this anymore."

Mark: I think it's more than that. I think there's an exhaustion with that. And people may not be able to articulate it totally. I think it's not filling people up. Yeah. And they, they, they've got to go somewhere else. This summer the Cooperative Election Study, which for two decades has asked more than 700,000

people things about politics. They decided this summer to ask a question beyond politics for the first time. And it was, “What is the most important thing that happened in your life during this past year?”

Katie: Wow.

Mark: And what they found was for Trump voters in 2024, the three most common answers were a medical issue, something related to household finances and the death of a family member or friend. For Harris 2024 voters, the three most common answers to the same question were a medical issue, something related to household finances and the death of a family member or friend. Exactly the same. Three things in the same order. Now, that doesn’t mean I think that our political warfare is ended. I do think, though, for faith communities, this is a huge opportunity to go toward what we know how to do best.

Katie: Yes.

Mark: And that is tend the soul, the worries, the anxiety, the pain that folks need comfort for and need some sort of reorientation toward.

Katie: So now when it comes to preaching, well, you and your wife, Elizabeth Lynn, have written quite a bit and so beautifully about political polarization that churches are experiencing over the last few years, and about the temptation either to become partisan or to just avoid difficult subjects altogether. I mean, I just love how you’ve engaged tribalism and empathy and listening. Just all of it. So covering all of that somehow magically: how does faithful preaching work? What does faithful preaching require in such a politically charged moment?

Mark: Yeah, Elizabeth and I — I’m very lucky to have a partner in life and a partner in writing — we write a weekly blog on the Ministry Collaborative platform, our website, called “Digging a Deeper Well,” which is mostly aimed at church boards, basically begging church boards of whatever denominational stripe to quit being a board of directors and begin being a place of spiritual and faith formation and model that for their congregations. And what I’m, I’m convinced of in my years in the parish is if you do that, then all the “problems” of congregational life sort themselves much easier if you start from that base. You mentioned the word “empathy”. I think empathy is the missing value, if you will, in our cultural life right now. And I think empathy, like almost every other virtue, takes practice. It takes training, it takes reorientation.

I would much rather any pastor or faith community spend time training in empathy than training to build a better machine so their church life work works better. We’ve got to see life from everybody else’s point of view. And again, my part of that conviction is what I said earlier. I think if we if we go down a little bit, we’re going to find that we’re all struggling with the same things from a different angle. I — even as I say this, Katie, though I know the problems of politics in this country and, well, I mean…look at France right now. Look at the UK right now. Look at a lot of other global places right now…are are feel pretty intractable. But we’ve never solved anything or even started addressing important things in life by going shallow.

Katie: So one of the most difficult questions preachers face right now is how to speak clearly about the issues of justice, suffering, power, the common good, without simply baptizing or adopting the language of one political party or another. Is there a way to discern the difference, or is that just… Is it just a

doomed mission to start with, to get the perfect word so we don't offend anybody and we don't just take on a political party?

Mark: I think at its best, preaching is a long term theological conversation with a particular faith community. And which means the pressure's off in having to find the perfect word. Just like a family rarely voices the perfect sentence in the midst of some challenging moment. If it's a long term conversation that is built week after week on trust, then we share that. And I do not believe preachers…I don't think the world has rarely changed because of preaching, at least my preaching and most of my friends. With all due respect, I think preaching is very important. But I think what what is important is that we explore together what we are facing. I'm sure this has come from many other places. I first heard it from Walter Brueggemann that in the preaching act, there are three parties. There's the text, the preacher and the congregation. The danger is, as I recall, what what Walter Brueggemann said, is that the preacher takes the text and gangs up against the congregation. Or, as he said once, kind of, we use the text like a rolled up newspaper trying to discipline a dog. Whap, whap, whap. The image that is formed—my preaching is, it is the preacher and the congregation standing together with the preacher, beginning the conversation, saying, "Behold the text. What are we to say about this and how are we to understand this together?" That to me, changes the equation that the pastor doesn't need to get up in the pulpit and lead the charge. I take the congregation Elizabeth and I worship at regularly. And as I get around the country, these are smart folks. They're already they're already dealing with this. So we need to take our cues from them and not think we're going to forge new ground. The other thing is to quote another: Tom Long who's on Day1 a lot, Tom is fond of saying that we're in the news division of the church. I take that to mean the Gospel news division and not the nightly news division. And I think people are hungry for that. I think the people are are thirsty, hungry, starving, parched for the Gospel news.

Katie: Yes.

Katie: I love how you're talking about how when the church allows the world's categories of left and right to become the substance of its preaching, we risk tying Christ's promises to the fortunes of an election cycle. So what does it look like for the church to resist that while still speaking courageously about injustice and suffering?

Mark: I think sometimes as a pastor, I confused the soil from the fruit. By that I mean I think care, social justice, connection, community, you name it — those are all wonderful and needed, but they're all the fruit of rich soil, of faith formation. And what I'm seeing, and again, looking back on my own ministry, and then as I look around, I think in particularly in hard times and in strident times, we confuse the soil and the fruit, and we spend more time tending to the fruit and promoting the fruit and selling the fruit. I could extend that metaphor on out. And we do going, we need to tend this soil so that it continues to produce the richest crop of, shall we say, the fruits of the Spirit that we possibly could have.

I haven't looked back and studied it, but I'm pretty sure at least three or four times in the last 20 years, on the Sunday after a presidential election, I preached on the fruits of the Spirit. I never, I never mentioned, I never mentioned the candidate, the election, the result. What I did say was whatever's going to happen in the next four years, can we put it alongside and judge it through the prism of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, and all the rest? But I think we can only do that if we are tending to the soil of faith formation and making sure it is constantly tended well enough to produce a bumper crop of fruit. If we only rely on the fruit, we're going to…I think it's going to run out.

Katie: Okay, Mark, I loved how you do this sort of reclamation of “Kumbaya”, which has become such a stereotype, but you’ve you’ve reclaimed it from the idea that it represents some sort of cheap or superficial reconciliation.

Mark: Well, Vince Vincent Harding—

Katie: You are quoting how Vincent Harding did—

Mark: Harding praised.

Katie: Yes, absolutely. So when we think about the desperate place, the frustrated place that so many people in the world and specifically in this case, Americans feel themselves and, and then and you said something about, you know, “combat”, how they feel like they’re in combat to even keep themselves from oblivion. And then we bring that combat towards each other in some cases. So if Kumbaya is not an empty platitude, how might we remember it to when we are trying to remember how to be courageous Christians who are reconciling with one another?

Mark: Do we trust that God is present? That’s what it is: “come by here.” Kumbaya. Do we trust that God is present? And do we trust a community of faith that we can be in that will remind us when we can’t remember that? Look, I’ve been doing this for a long time. If anybody wants to make a list of the things that the church gets wrong, stand in line behind me. Okay? I mean, I can tell you, I can tell you all the things that churches disappoint; but at our best, we come together in our wounds and we remind each other that God is present. And and some days I do that and some days somebody does that for me and some, some wonderful days, we can all do that together.

Katie: Yeah.

Mark: If we can’t do that, then what’s it all worth? I don’t think anything. And that’s that’s the heart of Kumbaya. “Somebody’s missing. Lord, come by here. We’re all afraid. Lord, come by here.” That’s the call.

And that’s how I hear Paul’s words in Romans is, you know, “hope does not disappoint us.”Because this is, you know, it’s it’s God who is the…it’s the Holy Spirit pouring out his grace upon us that we don’t forget that.

Katie: Yeah. I love how you note that Paul does not say suffering is good. Yet somehow Paul sees the possibility that suffering can become this soil, soil in which endurance and character and finally hope are formed. So how do we hold that without romanticizing suffering? Because suffering is real.

Mark: Yeah, I know you’re not saying this, but I don’t think there’s anything romantic about suffering. Yeah, I think I think we often appropriate it as romantic as a way we think that’ll get us through. I mean, let’s go back to Paul. It’s suffering produces “endurance”. What a strange word to be. The next word after suffering. And then endurance produces character, and saying that something needs to be formed in us by the grace of God. And then finally character produces hope. It’s not, it’s not suffering produces hope. That’s the cheap shortcut.

Katie: Yeah.

Mark: We've got to go through the endurance and the character part, which says to me, at least as I'm reading Paul, that it takes time, it takes attention, it takes discipline to get ourselves to a point of, of understanding. The promises of God are real. There was a pretty, a hard time in my life where I read the part of the Sermon on the Mount, "Take no thought for tomorrow. Today has troubles enough for today." I read that every single morning for years. I don't think I connected it at that point, but that was me trying to give myself over to "suffering produces…"

Katie: Endurance.

Mark: "…endurance. Endurance produces character, and character produces hope. And hope does not disappoint us."

Katie: Yeah.

Mark: Look, I mean, this is trite. We've got to be full-time Christians. This isn't a hobby. I'm sorry. And I'm saying that to myself as much as anybody else. Faith faith is not a hobby. If we're going to be serious about it, we better be serious about it.

Katie: Yeah. Full-time Christians.

Mark: That sounds a little arrogant, but anyway.

Katie: No, I mean that. But but it's a it's a darn good thing to remember, if for no other reason than than we really can live fully. We really can experience hope. Yeah.

Mark: Yeah.

Katie: Mark Ramsey, thank you so much for joining us on Day1 and specifically for coming this week. You did not disappoint when it comes to bringing us a true word that helps us orient through these times.

Mark: Yeah. Okay. Thanks. It's it's great. I, I have a long history of listening to Protestant Hour on Day1, and I always appreciate being with you.