

Salt and Light

Just a couple of days ago, the President of the United States issued a video meme that depicted former president Barak Obama and former First Lady Michelle Obama as apes.

The only thing missing from this racist trope is that Trump did not dress up in the white sheet and pointed hat of the Ku Klux Klan.

That's because these racist tropes are exactly that, vicious racism heralding all the way back to the evil days of chattel slavery.

And while a few of his followers had the common courtesy to denounce his post, it was amazing to me how many of his hard-core supporters continue to back him, often by referring to Jesus and the Christian faith to make their point.

Twisting the Scriptures into knots trying to justify obviously unacceptable behavior.

Why is it so much easier to be consumed with being right about our ideas of God than actually living the challenges of our faith, with its call to human solidarity?

Perhaps because actually living our faith brings us face to face with our fellow human beings, on their terms, not ours.

And truth be told, our fellow human beings are very often — a royal pain in the neck!

I have a hard enough time hanging around with MYSELF most days, let

alone the myriad of Evangelicals who spend their days telling all who will listen that everyone but them – are bound for hell.

There are days when I find myself muttering along with Linus from that
Peanuts cartoon:

“I love humanity, it’s the people I can’t stand!”

Thankfully, none of this is new.

Our first reading has crotchety Isaiah, spouting off 2700 years ago about the vast difference between looking good in the exercise of our faith rather than doing the hard work that our faith actually requires.

Faith, Isaiah insists, isn’t about following rules for rules sake, nor is it about beating ourselves up or feeling miserable.

Faith is about sharing our bread with the undeserving hungry.

Clothing the willfully naked.

Sheltering the houseless, even when drink and drug causes the problem.

In short, it’s not so much about believing some correct doctrine, or avoiding those who are different, as it is about doing our best to improve the lot of our fellow human beings on this good earth.

But why?

Not because it feels good.

It often doesn't!

Not because it's something we're naturally inclined to do.

We aren't!

We do this stuff, quite simply, because Jesus tells us to.

You are salt!

You are light!

NOT — you WILL be — you COULD be — you MIGHT be — salt.

You ARE!

And what does salt do?

It seasons everything it touches.

It doesn't discriminate between the just and unjust, the deserving and the wicked.

It simply seasons.

You are salt!

And — you are light!

Deitrich Bonhoeffer, the Lutheran minister who was arrested and executed for plotting to assassinate Hitler, thought deeply about these truths while sitting in a Nazi concentration camp.

He says:

“The followers of Jesus are not faced with a decision.

The only decision possible is already made for them.

Now they have to **be** what they **are**, or they’re not following Jesus.

The followers are the visible community of faith; their discipleship, a visible act which separates them from the world -- or it’s not discipleship.

Discipleship is as visible as light in the night, as obvious as a mountain
jutting up from the flatlands.

To become **invisible** — is to deny the call.

Any community of Jesus that wants to be invisible, is no longer a community of Jesus.” Bonhoeffer, 2001, 134 paraphrased.

Just as salt is indiscriminate in what it seasons, so light shines everywhere!

On everything and everyone!

No one is left out, no matter how odd or egregious or weird.

Which is maybe why Jesus wraps up today’s lesson by insisting that the
Law and the Prophets remain.

He’s not here to end them.

He's here to complete them.

Many of us think of the Law as something to keep people in line,
but
that's not its purpose.

The law's purpose is to create a just society.

The commandments are all about how to live in right relationship
with
God, and with each other.

We worship only God because God is the only reality worthy of our
worship - even though we often find ourselves worshipping football
or
Beyonce or our new car.

A few years ago, when the Kansas City Chiefs were being touted as
the new football dynasty, the headline read: "Thy Kingdom Come!"

The law says: "Don't go there!"

We don't steal, lie or engage in fraud with each other, because
when we
can't trust each other, we can't live with each other.

And then there's the part of the law we never dared try.

The Jubilee year.

Every 50 years, everyone starts over.

All wealth is redistributed.

Every debt forgiven.

Everyone begins anew.

From the same starting line.

And what about the prophets?

They show up when the people forget to live justly with each other.

They remind everyone that faith in God is not about pie in the sky
in
the sweet bye and bye, but about the here — and the now!

This isn't me saying so; it's God, speaking through Isaiah, saying:

“Is not this the fast that I choose:
to loose the bonds of injustice,
to undo the thongs of the yoke,
to let the oppressed go free,
and to break every yoke?”

Is it not to share your bread with the hungry,
and bring the homeless poor into your house;
when you see the naked, to cover them,
and not to hide yourself from your own kin?”

Jesus knows that the will of God is to restore God's creation to its
original beauty and innocence and wonder.

And yet, fear and a desire for power and insecurity and ego and
pride

and greed too often turns us from followers of Jesus – into mere admirers of Jesus.

We instinctively fear loss, abandonment, death.

But when we follow, rather than simply admire, Jesus, we can leave all of that, particularly the fear, behind.

Because in Jesus, death is defeated!

The absolute faithfulness of God is proved – Christ is risen!

So we can be brave, especially as we come face to face with one another.

Especially when “one another” means the houseless, the sick, the addicted, and yes, the Evangelical too.

And when we meet these folks not on our terms, but on God’s, what we find is that they too are human beings.

Afraid.

Alone.

Fearing abandonment, loss, and death.

The truth is, “Jesus doesn’t call us to love suffering, but to love **those who suffer.**”

To live vulnerably in solidarity with them.

To alleviate and end suffering — by overcoming evil, with grace.

Sharing in the sufferings of Christ means joining him in loving others
deeply,” especially the least.

Even when it’s hard.

Even when the love isn’t deserved.

Because that’s how God loves me, and that’s how God loves you.
Flood, Healing the Gospel, 84.

“In the suffering God we meet the protesting God — who wants us
to
weep, to question, to resist.

The cry against injustice is planted deep within the human soul
precisely
because God pushes us to question suffering and injustice.

Our faith isn’t so much about high brow discussions concerning the
nature of God, nor is it about a passive acceptance of suffering or
wallowing in guilt.

It’s about joining with our protesting and suffering God to end
human misery, to end injustice.” Id. at 85, paraphrased.

Perhaps the cross stands at the center of our faith — so that one
day,
because of our faith, there will be no more crosses.

Is it worthwhile?

Just listen to Paul:

“No eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the human heart conceived,
what
God has prepared for those who love him.”

You are the salt of the earth!

You are the light of the world!

So go, and **be** who you are!

+amen