

Siding With Losers

What a contrast between what we heard last week and what we hear this week.

Last week it was well-known Nicodemus who shows up to talk to Jesus at midnight.

As a well off man in a patriarchal society, he's part of the ruling class.

Well educated and well respected.

And Jesus tears him in shreds.

This week, we have a nameless woman who is ostracized by her own community.

She shows up alone at noon, in the heat of the day, to get water, something that's normally done with other women in the cool of the morning.

She's been married five times and is shackled up with number six.

A Zsa Zsa Gabor from 2000 years ago? (For the under 50 crowd, a B list actress famous for her 7 marriages!)

The other women don't hang out with her because no one wants to catch what she has.

Even though none of it may be her fault.

Remember only men could divorce women in those days and a woman without a husband was often very vulnerable.

She's probably not formally educated and as a Samaritan, she's somebody that the Jews can't stand.

And yet here she is with Jesus.

At first, engaging him in debate.

And then quickly recognizing, unlike Nicodemus, that he has something marvelous to offer — which she quickly accepts.

Then she becomes the first missionary to the Samaritan people, and converts the whole town to become followers of Jesus.

What a remarkable contrast!

On the surface of things, Nicodemus is clearly the winner while this gal is a loser.

Yet Jesus dismisses Nicodemus — and the unnamed woman becomes the favored one of God.

Strange, isn't it??

And yet this is the way of God.

God prefers the poor, the vulnerable, the humble.

God takes a 2 x 4 between the eyes of the proud, the well educated, the know-it-all.

People like me.

These last two weeks have given us an incredible insight into who God is and what God is like.

God is gentle and caring and insightful and compassionate to those who are open and vulnerable.

God is tough and stern and cutting to those who think they have it all together.

Those who have all of the answers.

How different God's ways are from our ways.

While Nicodemus could not get past the literal level in his conversations with Jesus: (how can I enter my mother's womb and be born again?) — as he stumbles away from their conversation, having understood nothing.

Being no more enlightened after his conversation with Jesus than when it began.

Compare this with the despised Samaritan woman who, like Nicodemus, also begins her conversation on the literal level, (you don't have a bucket, how can you get water?), to quickly pivoting by asking Jesus for the blessing of the living water that he offers.

She moves from literal to metaphorical with grace and agility.

She moves with ease from the concrete to the free-flowing wonder of the spirit.

This contrast is particularly apt this week.

I don't know how much you've been keeping up on the news, but our nation invaded Iran and is now in a full-fledged war occurring throughout the Middle East and rapidly spreading elsewhere.

The Middle East is a tinder box that could easily erupt into World War Three if we stay on the current path.

Remarkably, the guy in charge of the Pentagon says this war is being waged because it will force Jesus to come again!

It will force the Apocalypse.

It will force the Second Coming.

This kind of thinking is not only theological and biblical claptrap, it is extraordinarily dangerous.

It is a fever dream of right wing Evangelicals who have misread scripture and created a civil religion in this country that is based on American power and might rather than the service and self giving the Jesus came to teach us.

And yet here we are.

With many millions supporting this nonsense of a war that is killing thousands of innocents for no good reason – with the ridiculous hope of forcing God's hand.

How on earth does anyone force God's hand?

It is beyond laughable to think that human beings can do such a thing.

Sadly, Christianity has too often been used as a cloak for those who seek simply to worship the very temptations that the devil offered to Jesus in the desert.

People who claim to wear the mantle of Christ, but who in fact, worship money, power and fame.

These are of course the great temptations for all modern Christians.

Do we follow Jesus and his way of self giving service — or do we follow money, power and fame?

For far too many of us the answer is quite obvious.

Money power and fame win out every time over lives of self-giving love and self-giving sacrifice.

And so here we find ourselves on the precipice of yet another massive war with more massive loss of life and economic disruption that harms the least among us.

We as Christians need to be able to stand up and say this is not Christian.

We need to stand up and say quite plainly that it is blasphemy to claim that Jesus supports war and terror and bombs.

We need to remind ourselves, and our neighbors, that the Jesus who will come again is the same Jesus who lived his life in peace, nonviolence, mercy, and compassion.

That Jesus is not going to be exchanged for some kind of Rambo on steroids.

Rambo Jesus is simply a right wing Evangelical fever dream with zero support in scripture, theology or tradition.

Paul's letter today underscores all of these truths.

He makes it quite plain that while we were still sinners, Jesus came to save us.

That while we were enemies of God, God reconciled God's own self to us.

So to think that somehow we deserve this reconciliation or that we are not among the sinners that Jesus came to save (notwithstanding our sin), is nothing more than a fool's errand.

It takes humility to recognize our situation is this: without Jesus we are hopelessly lost.

It takes humility to accept that we are in fact all sinners.

And when it comes to sin, while some folks may be in worse shape than others, once we find ourselves in the camp of sinners, the only thing we can rely upon is the mercy of God.

And the only proof that we are, in fact, relying on the mercy of God, is to extend that mercy to others.

To seek the mercy of God and then villainize, demonize or ostracize other people – rejects that mercy.

And to reject that mercy places ourselves outside of the loving embrace of God.

Not forever.

Because in the end God will have us all.

How God does that — only God knows.

Yet God has set out to save all of humanity, and God's will cannot be thwarted.

But in the meantime, we can make this world such a better place if only we can accept our true nature.

That we are broken human beings.

Living in a broken world.

Yet called to help create, at least in part, a glimpse of the kingdom of God.

A kingdom where the lion and the lamb lay down together.

Where swords are beaten into plowshares.

As spears are beaten into pruning hooks.

Where the mountains are made low and the valleys raised up!

Where the righteousness of God pours down like waterfalls from on high!

This is our calling.

This is our hope.

This is what that wonderful woman, whose name we do not know, discovered, when she met a thirsty man on a hot day at a well.

What wonders are revealed in giving someone a drink of water!

What joy a cup of cold water, given in love, can create!

For all of that, we can only say, thanks be to God!

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