

## Crazy Jesus

If you're the kind of person who wants to live life efficiently or effectively; or who wants to help others, but only the *deserving others*; or who is self-sufficient and prudent and reasonable, or for whom prosperity is the goal of life ... in short, if you are most of us, then you will likely have a very tough time with what Jesus has to say today.

Every Sunday after Church, whenever Ida and I and the kids go home together, we get stuck at the light on Vineyard and Liliha. And every Sunday, without fail, my wife digs out a few bucks and gives it to the guy selling papers at the light.

She doesn't take a paper.

She just gives him the money.

And it drives me crazy!

"We have a paper at home already," I say.

"Just let him sell his paper to the gal behind us who needs one!," I say.

And in the midst of my complaining, here comes crazy Jesus. He has the nerve to say:

"Give to everyone who begs from you."

Huh?!

On 9/11, not long after hijacked planes killed thousands of our people, the president stood on a pile of rubble and with a bullhorn announced that those who did this to us will soon be hearing from all of us.

We cheered. We were united. We agreed.

But here comes Jesus, with this crazy advice:

"Love your enemies. Pray for those who persecute you."

Huh?!

When we get right down to it, it's pretty clear that we are often most comfortable with our own kind, with our own class of people, with those of our own race, or ethnicity, or financial status or education. Likes tend to be attracted to likes.

We are, as a people, very good at dividing friend from foe, or at least friend from stranger.

But here comes that pesky Jesus.

"If you love those who love you, so what? If you greet only your brothers or sisters, so what?"

Huh?!

Many will object to following what Jesus says today, and the barrel of objections is chock full. We've had 2000 years to come up with excuses: As in, "These are things that we aspire to, but never achieve."

Or,

"Jesus was only talking about life in his day and age, certainly not in the complicated, multinational, integrated economic complexity that we live in, full of violence and threats of destruction, especially from those crazy Muslims!"

Or,

"Jesus meant we should try our best as private persons to do this stuff, it has no bearing on our community or our nation."

All of which is very well and good. The only problem is, it's just not true.

It seems that crazy Jesus in fact means exactly what he says today. In part, because of the world he lived in. The Roman boot was on the neck of Israel. The Jewish people were beaten down, oppressed every day, taxed mercilessly, humiliated.

To think that somehow Jesus' words went down easier then than now is to think wrong. The ache in the gut of being victimized, violated and vanquished was a daily reality.

Into that very environment, Jesus says: "Stop!"

"Meet violence with non-violence; do not return insult with insult. When you are a guest, take the lowest seat; since she who humbles herself shall be exalted."

Crazy Jesus, taking a small child, and placing her in their midst, insists that in order to enter God's kingdom, you gotta be like this little one; and, by the way, be sure to wash each others feet; and, one other thing, if you want to live, you best be willing to die.

Jesus was not and is not about being effective or sensible as we understand those things. He was not and is not about prosperity or efficient living.

Jesus, God incarnate, God with us, is the very being and substance of God, demonstrating who God is, how God behaves, what God is like.

This God, who sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous; this God, who makes the sun shine on the just and the unjust; this God's ways are not like our ways.

God is peace. God is compassion. God is mercy. God is rest.

And at the heart of it all, God knows us to our core.

At our core, he knows that we are each of us good and evil. We are each of us righteous and unrighteous. The line to be drawn between the just and the unjust cuts not through this nation or that ethnic group, this religion or that country; rather, that line cuts right through the center of my body, and yours, our country and the enemy's country, our faith, and the enemy's faith.

As Gibran put it, "If you would punish in the name of righteousness, and lay the axe against the evil tree, look to its roots, and you shall find the roots of the good and the bad, the fruitful and the fruitless all entwined together in the sacred heart of the earth."

More than ever these days, we seem to be dividing ourselves between the so-called "good" and the so-called "evil." Between the so-called "deserving" and the "undeserving." Jesus beckons us away from that dangerous chasm.

In the hard sayings that he places before us today, Jesus invites us to step outside of the world as we think it is and to come to see the world as God intends it to be.

It is a world in which everything we have is **not** a result of my hard work, or of your **just deserts**, but God's generous gift, *a gift* meant to be shared with anyone who *asks*, anyone who *needs*.

It's okay to start with baby steps. Like the 2 bucks to the newspaper guy, or the meal or two we give each Sunday from our food pantry.

Or with our pledge.

Each of these baby steps are a small loosening of our ever so tight grip of relying on our own resources, our own best thinking – letting go of all of that, and slowly learning to cling to our Father in heaven, who knows your name and mine; who will never let us go.

Today, Jesus teaches us about the very heart of God. This God who loves the unlovable, who comes among us, suffering the worst we can throw at him, who is raised, who forgives us.

Turn the cheek, give the cloak, go another mile, lend, give, love the enemy, not because it is effective or productive or reasonable (it is NONE of those!), but because *that is how God loves*.

There is an old saying: “You become what you worship.”

Today, in the starkest terms, Jesus invites us to worship, with our lives, in our daily encounters with one another, this strange God; and in the worshipping, he invites us all to bend ourselves so that we may look more and more like this odd God.

Not because it agrees with how *we* would choose to do things, but because this is the way God is. And as God's image bearers, it is the way we were always meant to be.

Gene Peterson says it this way: “You are kingdom subjects. Now, live like it. Live out your God-created identity.”

Or as St. Augustine tells his congregation as they, like we, gather for Holy Eucharist:

“Receive who you are. Become what you receive.”

Something happens when we love our enemy, when we decline to follow our own best thinking. When we give, especially to the undeserving, to the dopes, to the ones who have only themselves to blame for their situation.

Something happens.

God happens.

Give it a try.

You'll never know what hit you.

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