

Jan Hus Presbyterian Church
The 19th Sunday in Ordinary Time
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Jesus and Justice: On the Edge
©2009 Rev. Ray Bagnuolo,
Stated Supply Pastor & Head of Staff

There have been times in my life when I have disappointed people. Struggling with being gay and trying to fit in, I often found myself pulling away from people, especially those who loved me, especially those I was most fearful of rejecting me. I was caught in a bind; on one hand I wanted and needed the love and support of my family – and on the other hand I was scared to death of letting them know me.

All this led to many misunderstandings, strained relationships, and perhaps worst of all –to a place where I only knew God as the ancient punishing God. It was not an easy time, and as with many of us and our different struggles for justice and welcoming, it lasted too long.

This morning's readings started me thinking about all this...

John's gospel is an example of what we call "High Christology," a carefully developed work with a two-fold goal, as he describes in the last verses of his gospel:

Many other signs therefore Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these have been written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name. (John 20:30-31)

John's listeners would have understood. Believing in Jesus the Christ as Son of God would lead to eternal life; and that belief, without change, is really not believing, at all.

As Jesus says in the reading:

"I have told you these things, because even though you have seen me in action, you haven't believed me."

In other words:

... you haven't changed. And it's starting to annoy me...

And others, as well. Jesus' changing or emerging was causing a stir and "push back":

"Isn't this the son of Mary and Joseph? Don't we know his father and mother? How can he say he came down from heaven and expect anyone to believe him?"

It's funny for me to read this, in a way. I was always concerned about coming out, in part, because of the "shame" I thought I would bring upon my family.

"Isn't that Betty and Joe's son? Oh my God, did you hear about him? That poor family, and look at him, out there living like he's normal, even talking about himself. How could anyone in their right mind even want to be in his company? Why doesn't he just be quiet like he should be?!"

Imagine telling Jesus to be quiet! I should have learned from him more – and long before I did!

We're fortunate that today there are real welcoming and affirming places such as Jan Hus Presbyterian Church for all people. **All** because of the people who have gone before with the courage of their beliefs transformed into action, creating a path, initiating the change, and helping others to follow.

That's exactly what Jesus did (and more), however it is described. Most people think that John's gospel was written several decades after Jesus' execution. Over time, the narrative developed and has been embellished, but clearly Jesus stepped out of his comfort zone into a faithful and dangerous zone. He set out to change the way people saw their relationship with God and what it meant they were to do. And that, as it often is, is threatening to many who hold onto power. It is also a risk. More and more, I have come to see Christianity as a risk-based belief and faith tradition. There's no way to care for or serve those who are on the edge other than by accepting risk. And, there is nothing like a community that is up to the call and ready for the changes believing demands of us all.

Even Jesus changed along the way...

We know little of Jesus of Nazareth before his 30th birthday, when his public ministry began. The gospels record his teachings, as well as some of his learning processes. I always point to the story of the Syrophoenician woman who sought Jesus' help. Jesus at first rejected her, saying that he had come into his ministry for the Jews, only. The woman, relentless in seeking help for her daughter, challenged him, by reminding him that even the dogs get the crumbs that fall to the floor from their master's table.

Ooops. Embarrassed? Humbled? I know those feelings...

A teachable moment for Jesus, as such things are for me. His heart was touched, and his response changed. And the change “had legs,” as we say.

Almost immediately following that event, the disciples wanted to send huge masses of people home after a day of teaching by Jesus. Instead, Jesus said, “Give them something to eat...” All of them.

Believing and being believed in – both seem to cause change and the change becomes multiplied in ways we could never know. Can you imagine the stories told by those people Jesus and his disciples fed on that hillside that day?

“You’ll never believe it, they fed us, thousands of us. Suddenly everybody was passing around food!”

I wonder how many **they** went on to feed? If there were a way, we could probably trace the loaves and the fishes right to ourselves this morning!

We all know that it is more than the bread on the table, but it starts there. We touch first at the table, and then we go from there touching and being touched by people in their lives, as we seek justice for all the oppressed, marginalized, and forgotten among us – including each other!

In a few minutes, I will be asking some of the members of the group from the Round Hill Community Church to talk about their time in the city. Over the last few days, they have helped the Homeless Outreach Advocacy Program of Jan Hus Church (HOAP) with a variety of tasks, from hauling clothing up to the 27th floor of this building for storage, to serving and being with our friends who are the homeless poor. They have attended an AA meeting, visited soup kitchens, and much more on their way to worship with us today.

In their times together, whether in the midst of Metropolis, or the quiet silence of the nights here, punctuated by the breathing and belching of this old building, you, our guests, have touched others by the action set in motion by your believing. Perhaps you yourselves were touched by a “Syrophoenecian woman,” – yet to understand what such encounters will grow to mean in your lives and relationships with others.

For a few days, you, have been our guests, sons and daughters of parents and guardians – with friends who might wonder why on earth you would be here when you could be elsewhere –

“Aren’t they so and so? We know their family. What is this they’re doing...”

For a few days you have come to know us and the struggle we face each day, doing our best to bring our mission to life; a mission that at the same time always seems too big to solve and too impossible to ignore. It is our constant action; the

action of a community in relationship with one another, incarnate with our beliefs, that reminds us we are not alone in our work. You, too, remind us of this.

In your time here, you have brought us your energy and presence and we now consider you an extension of our community. For, in those crowds of John's and others who followed Jesus, there were many more, who said,

Isn't that Jesus, Mary and Joseph's son? Look at him! Listen to him! How blessed they are to have him in their family! How blessed we are to know him and them! How great God is for us to be touched by one who is so full of God...truly he is a Son of God, a Son of us all. Come, let us follow...

Let us all follow in his teachings and examples...

There is a song by Meatloaf, you may know it: "Two out of Three Ain't Bad" The most familiar verse goes like this:

And all I can do is keep on telling you
I want you
I need you
But -- there aint no way Im ever gonna love you
Now don't be sad
cause two out of three ain't bad
Now dont be sad
cause two out of three aint bad

Well, good for Meatloaf, but in my mind and heart two out of three is not enough...not here. We are called to serve by God, in the many ways we know God and the many ways we serve. We are wanted and needed by God to work in the only kingdom we have right now, this planet earth. And we are called to love, as God loves us – however you find God.

It is knowing the want and the need of God and the want and need of others that we find our place and purpose in life and living – in belief and believing – in saying and doing.

It is the foundation of true love and courage to be who it is God has created us to be and called us to be. It is the place of Jesus and Justice, right on the edge. It is the risk and blessing of believing. Who would want to be anywhere else?