

SERMON JULY 5, 2020

Jesus was frustrated.

Jesus had just talked to some of the followers of John the Baptizer. John was sitting in a prison cell, discouraged, and had sent some of his students to ask if Jesus was really sent by God to change the world.

Jesus told them to go back and tell John that the blind were receiving sight, the lame were walking, the deaf could hear, the dead were raised and the poor were being told good news.

After John's disciples left, Jesus noticed all the people who had gathered around and listened to what he had said. Maybe it was something in the way they stood, with their arms crossed, maybe the questioning look in their eyes...something conveyed what they were thinking: "Well, so what...that's great for some people, but there are a lot more blind and deaf and lame, and the poor need more than good news that God loves them...they need food on their tables"

And Jesus said, "My goodness, what am I going to do with you. You're like children in the marketplace. Someone plays a flute and says let's dance and you say, "who feels like dancing when times are so tough?"

Then someone else thinks, "Yes, times are tough" and so begins to wail and moan, and everyone says "Cheer up, things aren't so bad."

John lived in the wilderness, ate locusts, said people and societies need to be more just and compassionate...and everyone said "that would be a great message if John wasn't such a killjoy and so weird."

So Jesus came along and told the poor and the ostracized that their lives matter, and he ate and drank with all sorts of people because God's system includes and welcomes, and what did people say..."nice guy but he needs to be more careful about the company he keeps, and he should spend less time at dinner parties."

Heads I win, tails you lose!

Dorothy Sayers, an English mystery writer, playwright, poet of the last century, once said that any stigma would do to beat a dogma. Any stigma – any stick, any accusation, criticism, cutting remark - could be used to beat, discredit, undercut any belief, any vision, any idea. Once you can label – be that label socialist or be it conservative -you can discredit it in someone's opinion, you can release the fear lurking in someone.

"We're all for this kingdom of God stuff, Jesus, just so long as this kingdom ends up looking like what I want it to look like, so long as I get pretty much what I want to get out of it, so long as everyone can be my neighbor but I don't have to associate with 'those' neighbours."

Jesus must have shaken his head – he said life is about wisdom. In the book of Proverbs, Wisdom is the name of God's spirit loose in the world. Wisdom, says the writer of proverbs, raises her voice at the street corners, asking how long the scoffers, the people waving stigmas, will delight in their scoffing, will feel justified as they beat on the dogmas and the beliefs and the bodies of those calling for a more loving and generous and affirming world.

Wisdom today calls out that Black Lives Matter and that Indigenous Lives Matter; that we should not be content to be shaped by history; we are here to shape history -to shape a new history today and to create tomorrow's new history.

Our history today, being shaped by the world's experience of COVID-19, can shape tomorrow's history into a story of how we are all related, a story of how we must care for and about one another, a story of human beings being in relation with all of creation.

The Black Lives Matter and Indigenous Lives Matter movements are reshaping our stories of identity into a story of just and respectful relations.

This story we are now creating as a global community, should be a story of relationship, a story of new relationships: for Christians a story of being receptive to discovering far more depth and diversity and grace in God than we have previously acknowledged.

No one knows what the world will be like in the coming years; no one knows what the church will be like in the coming years.

Susan Beaumont, a spiritual director and consultant, suggests that in a time when you don't know where you are going, you have to move from attitudes of knowing to that of unknowing (from being sure of the answers and solutions to discovering what is emerging); to move from Advocacy to Attending (from trying to impose your agenda to attending to, listening to, the stories and hopes and pains of others); and from striving to surrendering (from having to succeed and win others over to letting go of one's need to control outcomes and trusting the spirit of wisdom calling to us).

Jesus' disciples didn't know where they were going, didn't know what this 'kingdom of God' was supposed to be – they certainly didn't think that they were going to a place called Golgotha to watch their Savior be executed.

But they came to know that wherever they were going, they were not going alone, they were going with God, that the Jesus who had been their companion was still their Christ, wisdom, presence of God companion.

We don't know where the world is headed, where the church is headed, where societies are headed in this moment of history, of our story, of God's story, but we can head there as people of unknowing, attending, surrendering...trusting in God's love, cooperating in God's creating, people anticipating God's ever-new story of healing, people rediscovering Wisdom calling us back to relationship, calling us back to God; people who know that God is always doing a new thing, and writing anew His story, Her story, God's story, creation's story.