

God Happens

If you're the kind of person who wants to live life efficiently; 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're like me, then you, like me, will have a very tough time with what Jesus has to say today.

"Give to everyone who begs from you."

You mean the guy holding that sign outside of Costco every day?

"Bless those who curse you."

Including my no good brother in law?

"Lend to those who cannot repay."

Excuse me?

"Love your enemies."

In the age of Trump?

It's no wonder we have transformed Christianity into something that is all caught up with issues of sexuality and national pride and personal salvation — because all of that stuff is way easier than the true meat of our faith - which is exactly where Jesus is taking us today.

Truth be told, we are most comfortable with our own kind, our own class.

Likes tend to be attracted to likes.

We are very good at dividing friend from foe, and friend from stranger.

But here comes Jesus.

“If you love those who love you, so what?

If you lend only expecting repayment, so what?”

...As our churches remain some of the most highly segregated institutions in the country, as our economy is built on the philosophy of survival of the fittest.

And so to avoid the hard sayings Jesus has for us today we have created a barrel full of objections.

For example,

“What Jesus is saying today are things that we aspire to, but never achieve.”

Or,

“Jesus was only talking about life back then, certainly not the multinational, integrated economic complexity of today, full of violence and threats of destruction, especially from those radical Islamists!”

Or,

“Jesus is just talking about our private lives, he’s not applying this stuff to our community or our nation.”

All of which is very well and good, it’s just not true.

It seems that Jesus means exactly what he says today.

In part, because of the world he lives in.

The Roman boot is on the neck of Israel.

The Jewish people are beaten down, oppressed every day, taxed mercilessly, humiliated.

To think that somehow Jesus' words were more easily swallowed then than now is simply nonsense.

The ache in the gut of being victimized, violated and vanquished was a daily reality for the people of his time.

And in that environment, Jesus says:

“Meet physical force with soul force.”

“When you’re a guest, take the lowest seat; since she who humbles herself shall be exalted.”

Then, taking a small child and placing her in their midst, he 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; oh, and one other thing, if you want to live, get ready to die.

But this dying isn’t about renouncing things or moving into a hut in the desert.

The kind of dying that Jesus has in mind, that he himself embraces, is the dying that comes from extravagant giving.

Like the prodigal son, he takes all that he has — and blows it: on us!

He feeds the 5000 and there are baskets full of leftovers.

He tells Peter to throw the net over the the side of the boat, and the haul of fish is so huge they nearly capsize.

He praises the servant who wagers the talents his master gives on the number 5 horse in the second race, while chastising the one who, out of fear, buries his talent.

And today, he takes that extravagance into the touchy and difficult realm of human relations, and encourages us to waste our forgiveness on the enemy, to hand out coat and tee shirt, and to give to every beggar we meet.

He invites us to give up our favorite pastime: judging ourselves and others; and instead to simply let it go; discovering that the result of letting go is not annihilation – but new life, one in which we can finally feel our connection to one another, and to God.

“It is the path he himself walked to the very end.

In the Garden of Gethsemane, with his betrayers and accusers massing at the gates, he struggles and is anguished – but remains true to his course.

Don't hoard, don't cling – not even to life itself.

Let it go.

Let it be –

'Not my will but yours be done, O Lord...

Into your hands I commend my spirit.'

Thus he comes and thus he goes, giving himself fully into life and death, losing himself, squandering himself, 'gambling away every gift God bestows.'

It is not love stored up — but love utterly poured out — that opens the gates to the Kingdom of Heaven.” C. Bourgeault, *The Wisdom Jesus*, 70, modified.

Jesus is not about being effective or sensible as we understand those things.

He is not about prosperity or efficient living.

Jesus, the very being and substance of God, demonstrates who God is, how God behaves, what God is like.

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

And if we are willing to jump in with God, to become extravagant wasters of love and forgiveness and mercy, here is God’s promise:

“What you do in the Lord is not in vain.

You’re not oiling the wheels of a machine that’s about to roll over a cliff.

You’re not retouching a great painting that’s going to be thrown on the fire.

You aren’t planting a garden that’s going to be paved over for a new building.

You are — strange as it may seem — accomplishing something that will become a part of God’s new world.

Every act of love, gratitude and kindness, every work of art or music, every delight with the beauty of creation, every minute spent teaching a child to read, every act of care, comfort and support ... all of this will

find its way, through the resurrecting power of God, into the new creation that God will one day delight us with.'

Imagine if you believe this.

Imagine if every day, we behaved as if this is true.'" R. Evans, *Inspired*, 218, quoting NT Wright, *Surprised by Hope*, 208, modified.

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 desserts, 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 meals we provide from our food pantry, or Tuesday's lunch, or Saturday's breakfast.

Or with our pledge.

Each of these baby steps are a small loosening of our instinctively tight grip on our own resources, our own best thinking – and learning that, in the letting go, it is God who catches us.

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, love the enemy, not because it is immediately effective or productive or reasonable (it is NONE of these!), but because this 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 God.

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."

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

"Receive who you are.

Become what you receive."

But perhaps Flannery O'Connor says it best when she says: "You shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you odd."

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 ones who have only themselves to blame for their situation.

Something happens.

God happens.

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