

“Reverent Submission”

Message for March 29, 2009

We are working our way to the conclusion of Lent, and coming onto the week where we consider just what happened to Jesus those last days. When I look back at the story of the end of his life, I wonder how Jesus felt when he looked ahead during his ministry, knowing that at some point fairly soon, he would die. He was young – only 33 years old – and he had just gotten started reaching people, and making some headway gathering new believers for God. Jesus was *famous* – he was an *event* – he was a *rock star*. In today’s perspective, and appearance by Jesus would have filled huge auditoriums – out in the hallways, his promoter might have sold recorded self-help books and tee-shirts or specially packaged holy bread with his picture on it and made a tidy profit. He was a legend in his own time! After hearing talk about this man Jesus, people traveled great distances just to be in his presence or even more dramatically, to be healed of some nagging ailment. The word was out: a man and his small, raggedy band of friends were stirring things up and challenging the status quo and the stuffy, law-abiding holy ones - and sometimes, he demonstrated miraculous abilities to cleanse and heal plain ordinary people. In a time when Jews were second-class citizens in their own land, *anyone* who could bring some form of justice to their world would be the darling of the age – someone to look up to and respect. Someone to shadow...admire...emulate.

When I think of Jesus out among the masses, speaking with authority and strength of his beliefs, I get the sense that his delivery must have reached deep into the hearts of the people. I wonder - how did he know everything? We’ve heard that he learned some of it at the feet of rabbis as a young boy, but I get the feeling that much of what he shared with the people through his story telling didn’t come from his traditional education – another, greater source fed his mind and gave him the ability to speak words the holy ones could only hope to find in their writings and history. And he probably had an intense charisma that served as a magnet and it drew people to him, encouraging them to listen to every word. Afterward, they would feel compelled to run and tell their friends the latest installment of wisdom from “the man among the crowds.” The time and circumstances were ripe for change of philosophy and living faith differently than they’d been taught, and I imagine the people instinctively sensed somehow that this man was among them for a reason. He confidently told them he was the Son of God - the direct link to God’s purpose on earth. Jesus was special – he was dynamic – and he was smart. It seems to me, Jesus just KNEW.

Because of his fame and connection to God, and because he was, after all, human - I wonder if Jesus didn’t ever feel he deserved more – I wonder if he ever used his influence as God’s Son to his advantage? We get the feeling he was popular with everyone but the Pharisees and other church rulers. People everywhere invited him to dinner, to weddings, to gatherings of honored guests – Jesus was on the A-list in his day, the person to invite if you were anyone at all – or, even if you were no one in particular. He seemed to fit in everywhere. So I wonder if there ever were a time when his notoriety allowed him privileges he wouldn’t usually seek say, with a shopkeeper or

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innkeeper? Did he end up with whole bushels of free food for the crowds or was he given the opportunity to spend a night in a comfortable chamber with soft pillows and blankets instead of sleep on the desert floor? I bet that if there were ancient paparazzi and some way to get his image on some form of communication, his face and style of dress might be reported and imitated over and over again. And I wonder – did all this adoration and attention mean anything to Jesus? How did he integrate all the attention he received with the life he told people he had cultivated with God – a life which seemed to be much more stark and simple? Well, our readings today tell us very explicitly what he did – *Jesus turned away from the crowds and the fame, and gave it all up for God.* He said, “Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say—‘Father, save me from this hour’? No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name.”

Jesus *lived* reverent submission.

Growing up as a child of the 60s, I have a very specific sense of what it means to be submissive – to give up yourself for someone else’s benefit or comfort. When I was in my late teens, the women’s liberation movement was in high gear. I didn’t really listen much to what was going on, because I was a little young and none of the issues related to me and to my life until much later. But, one message I did get out of it was the idea of giving in and giving up yourself to someone else – and it seemed to me, it wasn’t such a good thing. As it happens, this rebellion was generally directed to the men of our species (sorry, guys); women on talk shows and in magazines spent a lot of time and energy getting the idea across that ALL people are entitled to think for themselves and do what they need or want to do. We were told that NO ONE is supposed to just blindly accept roles and responsibilities just because someone (a *boss or boyfriend or husband*) tells them to. In those days, in many younger women’s impressionable psyches, this resonated with the ring of truth.

Society took a turn - lives were impacted because of the liberation movement and psychologists and sociologists are still debating and analyzing whether the changes as a result of it were positive or not; but I definitely got the feeling that it wasn’t such a good thing to be a weak and blindly submissive person. Which brings me back to how this fits Jesus.

No matter how anyone might feel about the liberation of humankind, the fact remains that Jesus - the very same Jesus who lived among people and was so available to them – at some point must have realized and accepted the intent of his role on earth. It would not be as a popular, driving force, pushing his way into the religious and political sectors of his day, but as one who modeled submission and obedience toward an ending no rational person would want – *because God told him to do it.* Jesus may have thought about saying, “No, I won’t do that – I don’t have to do that – you can’t make me do that!” but thank God, he didn’t follow through and humanly “liberate” himself from God. Instead, Jesus set precedence for servant-hood that is a model to us all...and

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even with my slightly skewed understanding of the word "submission" I know how meaningful Jesus' surrender was.

Leonard Sweet from the United Theological Seminary in Dayton, Ohio shares this insight in a recent Leadership magazine article:

One of our students received an appointment from a bishop, and the student did not feel the placement exactly suited his abilities.

I overheard him complaining about it to another student, and then the other student said, "You know, the world's a better place because Michelangelo did not say, 'I don't do ceilings.' "

Her comment stopped me dead in my tracks. I had to admit she was right.

If you and I are going to be faithful to the ministry God is calling us to, then we had better understand that. I reflected on the attitudes of key people throughout the Scriptures and the history of the church.

The world's a better place because a German monk named Martin Luther did not say, "I don't do doors."

The world's a better place because Moses didn't say, "I don't do Pharaohs or mass migrations."

The world's a better place because Noah didn't say, "I don't do arks and animals." Or Ruth didn't say, "I don't do mothers-in-law."

The world's a better place because David didn't say, "I don't do giants." And because Peter didn't say, "I don't do Gentiles."

The world's a better place because John the Baptizer didn't say, "I don't do deserts." And Mary didn't say, "I don't do births."

And Paul didn't say, "I don't do letters."

And Mary Magdalene didn't say, "I don't do feet." You get the picture...we wouldn't be here if any of these folks chose NOT to live out their destiny with reverent submission as God intended.

So while there seemed to be an almost public mania attached to the ministry of Jesus, and it's possible he felt the pull of popularity and a conflict with what he knew to be **his** destiny, we also know that he often sought peace away from people out in the desert - I have a feeling that there was another Jesus within who craved silence, distance and the

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internal voices that come from meditation. If he had dialogue of any kind with his Father God, the exchanges must have included many questions from the Son to the Father about the duality of his life...part rock star, part monk...and all it entailed. Jesus must have understood that he was supposed to be two different people, because in order to get the attention of his world, he had to be more of a presence and personality who could do amazing things, or the people might not listen to the real message (because we people tend to be a little shallow). I believe his heart and truest self was more likely aligned to a deeply spiritual, serious thinker who longed for peace and quiet to ponder God's purpose, to pray and bring people to God in a less obvious way. But as a dutiful Son, Jesus did what he was told, and of course, we know that this included the ultimate act of reverent submission – giving his life for our sinful lives – ***because God told him that's what he was supposed to do.***

If Jesus, fresh from all the success of his amazing ministry of loving, giving and healing could allow God to direct the final actions of his days on earth toward death on the cross, how can we who live today stand before him and *not do the same* – how can we **dare to not** live our lives in reverent submission, and surrender to God's way? How can we ignore the example of that rock-star-turned-servant, and turn away from the outside trappings that make us feel important and special, that separate us from those who have so little or who are living with pain of the heart or body or mind – and relinquish the smug person inside to a patient God who is waiting outside, who wants to lead us to forever-love and eternity? Let's take these last days of Lent to consider Jesus' ultimate act of submission and our place in God's world and how we live our faith, knowing...

The world's a better place because Jesus didn't say, "I don't do crosses."

Amen

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