

# Sermon: Pentecost 17

The Rev. Mike Wernick

September 20, 2015

Year B  
Jeremiah 11:18-20  
Psalm 54  
James 3:13-4:3, 7-8a  
Mark 9:30-37

We give the disciples a bad rap... even though they're the fortunate ones... the ones who've been picked by Jesus to be insiders... to receive private teachings by the God-man... to be given cosmic secrets about how things really work... but we give the disciples a bad rap... because they can be dense... like us... and it's the poor... the marginalized... the outcasts... who tend to be the people who get what Jesus is all about... who understand what he's teaching...

I want to give the disciples a break today... a get out of jail free card... a shoulder to cry on... they didn't understand what Jesus was talking about... and they were afraid to ask...

Imagine if we met someone... and got to know them really well... traveled around the countryside with them... shared bread with them... and laughed and cried with them... and then they told us... they were from another solar system... they were an alien... and could read minds... teleport themselves... become invisible and pass through crowds... but we got to know them so well... and knew that they knew us so well... that they must be one of us... we'd wonder how any of this made sense... how could someone who shared our struggles... be from another planet... for the disciples... Jesus might as well have been from another planet... one of them... but impossibly not one of them...

But it's the outsiders... who recognize outsider-ness in Jesus... who resonate with who he is and what he teaches... I mean after all... as far as their culture goes... as far as the hierarchical structures go... they might as well be from another planet too...

I don't remember all the details... I'm sure we could look it up online... but I remember when Princess Diana used to go visit gay men... in AIDS wards... when the fairy tale princess... used to consort with trolls... with those who society rejected... with those of no value... who culture had no use for... some people were kind of scandalized because she didn't play by palace rules... the experiences she had before she married Charles... and maybe some of those she had afterwards... could have... but didn't shut her down... instead they opened her up to a common humanity... her actions were alien to her social standing... but she opened her heart to these men... and invited them to open their hearts to her... in her words and in her actions... she let them know that they were not only remembered... but loved...

And Jesus says that he's going to be betrayed... and killed... but that after three days he'll rise again... that God will love him more than human systems have loved him... and we know that even on the cross he forgives his killers as *not knowing what they're doing*... but the disciples didn't understand what he was talking about... and they were afraid to ask him... really... you've got Jesus right there... and you're afraid to ask...

But that's where I think we can relate... because some of us are like the disciples... there used to be... and still are some times... when I'm afraid to ask questions... when I don't want to appear stupid... or I don't feel important enough to draw attention to myself... when I don't want to bother a speaker who's already surrounded by others... in my first year of seminary... there were things I thought I already OUGHT TO HAVE KNOWN just by virtue of being there... but didn't want to let on that I didn't know...

And I think there are some of us who don't want to ask questions because it takes time... and we're busy... we don't want to ask questions because we don't want people to think we have an agenda... we don't want to ask questions because we don't want to appear impertinent... or to appear helpless... we don't to ask questions because we've already asked and have forgotten the answer... we don't want to ask questions because we don't want to have to deal with the truth because dancing with truth risks exposure...

Or we don't want other people to ask questions because we're busy and don't want to be impatient with them... we don't want people to ask questions because we don't want to create a disagreement... or have to share sad or disappointing news... or we don't want people to ask questions because... like me... we don't want our vulnerability to show...

But what does Jesus do... he took a vulnerable child... and said... *Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me... and whoever welcomes me... welcomes not me but the One who sent me.*

This was an egregiously scandalous statement... how could this be... children were like shepherds... the lowest of the low... no social standing... no worth... no value... you could even kill your child if they cursed you... so how could welcoming them be of any social value or benefit...

John Shea writes: Jesus explains it in terms of his own consciousness... and how this consciousness would unfold in his followers... his explanation maps a process of mystical transformation... if they embrace a least one... in Jesus's name... with his consciousness... that least one would become transparent to Jesus... but this transparency would unfold into a further transparency... Jesus will give way to the One who sent him... the disciples will begin with the last... but arrive at the first... embrace the least but welcome the Source of All... the Ground of Being...

What Princess Diana did as a representative of the royal family... what Princess Diana did... and may not have realized... was that when she visited and welcomed those AIDS patients... those outcasts into her life... she also welcomed them into the lives of the whole royal family... in her compassion... she took on their pain... because she knew it as her own... as an emissary of the royal family... she extended their healing... and she extended her own grace into lives that were torn apart... something so many others were unwilling to do...

She didn't play by the rules of the British Empire... or empire in general... in her vulnerability... in her transparency... she was not afraid to ask questions... like *Why can't I go...* and that's also why Jesus welcomed a child... you see... children are not afraid to ask questions... if they don't understand... they'll ask questions... something that would have served the disciples well... they have not taken on... as too many adults have... the baseless reasons not to ask questions...

But learning to ask the questions is only half of the equation... the other half is knowing when you know the answer... and knowing when you don't... it's not about making up something that sounds good... it's not about pointing out the splinter in my eye when you have a log in yours... it's not about minimizing issues on the economy or immigration reform or employment or the environment by trying to shine a light on far less important issues that affect far fewer people... when we do that... it's easier to see into our hearts... even though we think no one's noticing... and the people who don't see... or don't want to see... are the people who are also not welcoming children the way Jesus intended...

Please listen again to some of James' Epistle... and consider our political leaders and those who want to be... what they say... and what they don't say... *Who is wise and understanding among you? Show by your good life that your works are done with gentleness born of wisdom. But if you have bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not be boastful and false to the truth. Such wisdom does not come down from above. For where there is envy and selfish ambition, there will also be disorder and wickedness. But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without a trace of partiality or hypocrisy. And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace for those who make peace.*

Jesus always asked people what they wanted... what they needed... he trusted Emmanuel... God with them... the divine spark within them to know what they needed for healing and wholeness... he always invited them to share their story... to share their

truth... that's why true religion doesn't provide all the right answers... but teaches people how to ask the right questions... and believe me... Truth and Wisdom can certainly withstand scrutiny...

Mike+