

Jesus Christ – Trouble Maker

I like to think of myself as a bit of a counter-cultural guy. I have long hair, I was a stay-at-home-dad for a while, I like to dress up like a pirate in the summer (if any of you didn't already know about that, it's true!). When I was in my 20s it was even more pronounced, in the early 2000s, long after punk had ceased to be a real social movement and had become more of a fashion statement, I used to wear combat boots and leather jackets and be generally weird in public.

Back then there was this story that went around, about an old punk and a young kid meeting on the street. The young kid asks the older punk, "what really is punk rock?"

So, the old punk walks over, and kicks a trashcan into the street, "that's punk rock."

The young kid sees this and walks over to another trashcan and kicks it into the street, "that's punk rock?" he asks.

The old punk shakes his head and says, "Naw man, that's conformity."

The message sometimes gets lost in the hearing ...

When we look to the beatitudes for instance, it's easy to look at them as a list of qualities to obtain... a sort of checklist of righteousness, or a series of job descriptions for the faithful...

Who's going to be poor in spirit this week? What about meek and humble? I know some people who are really good at showing mercy...

This isn't what Jesus is talking about here,

He's easing his listeners into the sermon, encouraging them to recognize how they are already being God's people, and affirming God's promise to bless them, all while laying the groundwork for his counter-cultural message to come.

Those listening could have recognized the coded language of an oppressed and marginalized people, the First Nations Version of the New Testament decodes this in an indigenous context as:

The Poor with broken spirits...

Those who walk a trail of tears...

Those who hunger and thirst for wrongs to be made right...

Jesus is building an understanding in his disciples, preparing them gently for what is to come.

Then he kicks a trashcan into the street.

He tells them outright that if they follow him, they are not going to be popular...

You are going to be persecuted,

You are going to be lied about,

People are going to say mean things about you on Twitter and Instagram...

The message of Jesus is not one that is good for the status quo at any level.

Paul talks about this too,

In his letter to the church in Corinth he is trying to get the readers to recognize that what they understood as wisdom and power before coming to follow Christ, is not what it seemed, but will only confuse and confound in the light of the Good News.

We know that the wisdom of the world continues to have a lot of influence in the Church...

Our Anglican and Episcopalian tradition is inextricably tied to the history of colonial power structures in England and the US, and we have been part of oppression and exploitation throughout history. Just ask anyone participating in the Sacred Ground sessions, they know where the receipts are.

So how do we move forward, closer to Christ?

When confronted with our own failure to live into our created calling to make the Kingdom of Heaven known in the world what do we do?

Do we come to God with burnt offerings?

Do we bring thousands of rams? Ten thousand rivers of oil?

Shall we give the fruits of our bodies for the sins of our souls?

The prophet Micha, a counter-cultural thorn in the side of the status quo himself, wrote down some advice on this almost three thousand years ago... you've probably seen it on the campus if you ever leave via Lake Otis...

Do justice...

Love Kindness...

Walk humbly with your God...

Or, as Rev. Israel said last Sunday, we follow Christ...

But don't be surprised when Christ leads you into conflict with the status quo.

In 1982 the South African government, a government that explicitly identified as Christian and claimed that “all the people of South Africa acknowledged the sovereignty of Almighty God,” instituted the Eloff Commission to investigate the anti-apartheid work of the South African Council of Churches and Bishop Desmond Tutu. The Bishop confronted them with these words, “We are what we are in obedience to God and in response to the gracious Gospel of His Son, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. We owe ultimate loyalty not to any human authority however prestigious or powerful, but to God and to His Son our Lord Jesus Christ alone from whom we obtain our mandate.”

The Bishop, who some called an Apostle of Ubuntu, was placing at the center of his ministry the understanding that we are all created in the image of God, and that anything that diminishes one of us, diminishes us all.

The South African Apartheid government never gave up trying to silence Bishop Tutu, even as he was elected Bishop of Jamestown they tried to prevent him from preaching the good news of a Christ who walked with the oppressed.

Today we see it when the Poor and Broken in Spirit have even their access to clean water taken by corporate interests and courts... when those who Mourn the epidemic of gun violence in our communities are slandered and silenced... or when those who Hunger and Thirst for Righteous Justice are called thugs and rioters.

We see it, and we will not be deceived.

I give thanks that I am part of a faith community like St. Mary's...

Rev. Michael has spoken at length about the work you have done to walk along side the Poor in Spirit, to give space for those who Mourn injustice and oppression, to amplify the voices of those crying out in Hunger for Righteousness. You have been Merciful, you have supported the Peacemakers, and you celebrate the Pure in Heart.

You have also seen that the wisdom of the world just can't get on board with this message of radical love. You have seen the lies and disinformation that is spread about people advocating for peace, for freedom, and for human dignity. You may have even gotten to experience some of it yourself.

Today I don't want to get up here and encourage you to go kicking trash cans... that would be conformity after all... but I do want to encourage you to continue to be a force of counter-cultural good in the world. Remember that we follow Jesus of Nazareth, Christ, the Lamb of God, who walked boldly to the cross. He may not seem like a punk rock icon,

but his mission, that he calls us to continue, was socially disruptive and challenges everything the power structures of the world recognize as status quo.

Rejoice and be glad, while you do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly following Jesus Christ together into the Kingdom of Heaven.

Amen