

Sunday, July 28, 2024
The Tenth Sunday After Pentecost

Solemn Eucharist
11:00 am

+

A Sermon by

The Rev. Preston Gonzalez-Grissom, *Assistant for Children and Family Ministries*

on

John 6:1-21

+

Jesus Will Not Be Used

There is a video going around you may have seen, of a mom asking her young child, maybe 4 years old, what she learned in school that day. The young girl replies “I learned about *Marther* Luther King Jr.” The Mom asks, “Oh really? What did you learn about *Martin* Luther King Jr.?” The child replied confidently, “He died for our sins!”

I hope your grade school education on the Civil Rights Movement was as affirming as this girl’s was, if not more accurate. It is understandable why she or anyone would also be confused about Jesus, especially given the public discourse about who Jesus is. Some say a great moral teacher, (love your enemy, do unto others...). Maybe a miracle worker? Though, many of us may be uncomfortable with that word. Many say a prophet. After all, he was controversial, spoke truth to power, and dies rejected by his people just like a prophet would.

Understanding Jesus may be confusing. In my view, this is one of the best things about the Episcopal Church—that it can be a welcoming place for those who are not quite sure what to make of Jesus. Maybe you have seen some signs that he is important, and aren’t sure, but you are here today hoping you will hear something, to see something, to feel something.

The crowd following Jesus came “because they saw the miracles he did for the sick.” They had been trained, through their reading of the Jewish Scriptures, to look for a True Prophet to come that would do signs or miracles like heal the sick. This Prophet would be the one raised up to lead the. So, after Jesus heals the sick he feeds them all, and they have seen all they need to see. This is the True Prophet, and they are right. Jesus is the Prophet that they had hoped for.

In his seminal work “the Prophetic Imagination”, Walter Bruggeman says prophets are so important to us because they are “unbought... not tied down by any human power.” Doesn’t this feel like a time where we are yearning for someone who is unbought, who won’t back down to human power? Someone who is not being used by others just to meet their own desires. We need prophets.

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. is perhaps America’s most recognized prophet, unbought by the powers that be. He was able to organize and speak against White Supremacy, Segregation, Jim Crow, Militarism, the War in Vietnam, the ills of Capitalism, and of course, retaliation of violence with more violence.

But King's legacy has experienced what happens to most Prophets. We use our prophets for our own gain. And now, every 3rd Monday in January, you will see proponents of the very same type of violence he rejected making him into a caricature of "love" or "meritocracy", poorly defined. We use our prophets for our gain – They are powerful forces of unbought truth-telling, and we abstract them and repackage them to fit whatever agenda we may have.

It is not hard to see how this has happened to Jesus. How the non-violent, truth-telling, joy-granting Jesus of Nazareth has been abstracted and distorted into a ploy for political power, or a people-pleaser for a love so generalized we no longer know what love requires. This abstraction is not new to Jesus. He knows we use our prophets.

After Jesus had fed the 5000 on a hill around the Sea of Galilee, the crowd said (same diction) "This is the truth, that the prophet has come into the world." And Jesus "perceived that they would *grab* him by force, to make him King." They would use him as a violent military leader to overthrow the Romans, and we hardly could blame them for this impulse, We use our Prophets.

But, Jesus will not be used.

Instead, he went himself up a mountain overlooking the Sea and eventually he sees the disciples in a boat, caught in a deadly storm and he walks to them. There Jesus reveals why he went away, why he will not be used like a prophet tends to be used. He meets them and says the most controversial prophetic word he could possibly utter "Do not be afraid. *Ego Eimi*" I AM, I AM.

They know what this means, in case we missed this. When God appears to Moses (the first prophet) and Moses asks what is your name God, the voice he hears back says *ehyeh asher, ehyeh*, "I AM that I AM."

They were not wrong to see Jesus as a prophet or the True Prophet, but they were wrong to try and use him as one because he is more than a prophet, he is God.

My friends, we may be able to use prophets for our ends, or manipulate their legacies, but Jesus will not be used. Even his most public act of helplessness was an intentional act of his own will, as he says in his death, "no one takes my life from me. I lay it down willingly"

He will not be used by us, but he does give himself to us, when we receive Jesus as he is. And we do not need to make him into something else to get what we desire. For, "he is able to accomplish in us, more than we can ask or imagine."

When Jesus declared his identity to the disciples (Do not be afraid, I AM) it says, "They were willing to *receive* him into their boat," and immediately they made it to where they were going. Jesus will not be *grabbed* and used for what he is not, but he will be *received* as he is, because he longs to give himself to us.

"For in the night in which he was betrayed, he took bread; and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and *gave* it to his disciples, saying, *Take*, eat, this is my Body, which is *given* for you. Do this in remembrance of me.'" In the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. Amen.
