

Ezekiel 18:1-4, 25-32

Psalm 25:1-9

Philippians 2:1-13

Matthew 21:23-32

Sermon October 1st, 2023

Jesus Stands with the Rejected!

The religious leaders have had enough! First, John's message, and now Jesus' message, are too controversial for their liking. Jesus is trying to challenge the religious leaders to see that Jesus' hospitality to the rejected, marginalized people in the community at large is God doing a new and wonderful thing in their faith community (**Image One**: people protesting for Indigenous rights). John had a similar message as he prepared the way for Jesus to come at the Jordan.

Yet, the religious leaders have rejected these people for what they believe are good sound theological reasons. According to the religious leaders, by showing these people hospitality, Jesus is stepping all over the religious leadership's authority (**Image One**). Creating doubt in the congregation towards their leaders.

And if this isn't enough, the crowds following Jesus are getting larger. The Roman authorities are getting more anxious about a possible rebellion. The religious leaders can see the potential for some serious problems arising in the near future if they don't find a way to silence Jesus (**Image One**).

So, they send a delegation to Jesus to try and trap him. They directly challenge Jesus' authority. "Where are your ordination papers Jesus?"

In response, Jesus first asks them a question about their thoughts on John and his teachings. If they agree with these teachings then they will be willing to listen to what Jesus has to say. But, if they disagree with these teachings then it would be a waste of time for Jesus to answer them, because they wouldn't listen.

The religious leaders are worried about starting a rebellion if they bad mouth John in front of this crowd (**Image One**). So, they try and avoid answering the question. In return, Jesus chooses not to answer their question about his authority.

Instead, Jesus goes on to reiterate his controversial message. Jesus has come to welcome the rejected people, the marginalized people back into the faith community. Jesus will not stop preaching radical hospitality with the hopes that the religious leaders will eventually listen (**Image One**). Reforming their faith community to be more gracious and hospitable.

Unfortunately, Jesus' days are numbered, as shortly after this scene, Jesus will be betrayed, arrested, beaten, and crucified for preaching this message.

But through the resurrection, through the gift of the Holy Spirit, the disciples continue to preach Jesus' radical hospitality message (**Image One**). The crowds keep growing. The message keeps breathing new life into the rejected and marginalized people they reach out to.

Of course, the leadership in the early church struggle to live out this radical hospitality all the time. James has to confront a church where people living in poverty were only allowed to sit in designated areas of the church. Paul has to challenge a church that struggles to welcome Gentiles as they are, uncircumcised and all. Christ has to bring a vision to Peter to show him that it was more important for him to show hospitality in a Gentile home than to worry about what he eats. Women like Mary Magdalene, Phoebe, Lydia, to name a few, had to fight back against challenges to their authority, because they were women.

Jesus invites us as the church to preach and live out this message of radical hospitality, and yet, over the centuries we have struggled living out this invitation. We have struggled to welcome and support marginalized groups who have wanted to be part of our community, or who have reached out for our support in the wider community (**Image One**).

Yesterday, we commemorated Truth and Reconciliation Day. We reflected on the Indigenous people of this land, and how they have experienced much rejection and marginalization from government, church, other institutions, and their non-Indigenous neighbours. Through our government policies, through their wounds that came from living in the residential school system for over a century, through our continued lack of honoring treaty rights, through the stigmas and stereotypes we have come to believe about them, they have continued to feel rejected, and out of place in the land they have lived on for thousands of years.

This is the truth we all have to come to terms with. But it isn't easy to listen to this truth. Like the early church leaders, we wrestle to be the radical hospitable community we are invited to be. We wrestle to listen to the Indigenous people of this land when they share their stories of rejection and marginalization. We wrestle to hear their anger without getting defensive. We wrestle to hear their stories without these stories being overshadowed by the many stereotypes and stigmas we have learned to believe about Indigenous people. We wrestle to stand with them for fear of being recipients of persecution from our neighbours and institutions that continue to hurt the Indigenous people of this land.

And yet, like many rejected and marginalized groups, the Indigenous people of this land are inviting us, the church, into a conversation with them (**Image Two**: Indigenous and non-Indigenous people talking with each other). Hoping we can come to a place of reconciliation with one another. They are inviting us to show the radical hospitality Jesus shows throughout his ministry to the rejected and marginalized groups in his community.

It isn't easy to be a radical hospitable community. It isn't easy welcoming rejected and marginalized people, because this hospitality sometimes comes with consequences. As those who are doing the rejecting and marginalizing start pushing back. Sometimes, like Jesus, it can lead to life-changing consequences.

How many Indigenous and non-Indigenous leaders have faced life-changing consequences for working towards truth and reconciliation?

But, as we face these life-changing consequences, Jesus breathes new life into us. Jesus breathes new life into the people we are welcoming. We see this in the church communities where radical hospitality is practiced. We see this in our walk towards truth and reconciliation with the Indigenous people of this land. Many Indigenous leaders are noticing that more and more non-Indigenous people are walking with them today (**Image Two**). Jesus' vision of radical hospitality is possible.

Let us pray, gracious God, open our hearts and our ears to listen to the pain and hurt of the Indigenous people of this land. Help us walk with them, as they share their stories, as they challenge the institutions that keep hurting them. Give us everything we need to be a radical hospitable community. Even in the face of persecution. **Amen.**

© copyright, 2023, Wallace Bornhuse. All rights reserved.