

Sermon: "Teacher, What Are You Thinking?"

Now, after all that... imagine that Jesus takes us out into a park to rest and figure all this out. So we sit with him, waiting.... waiting.... And finally one of you says to Jesus, "Teacher, what are you thinking about?"

There is a brief hesitation as he continues to gaze upon the flowing river below, when he says, "You've heard me speak before about birds of the air and flowers of the fields... I'm thinking now about the fish in the river... The waters everywhere are warming... the fish are suffocating! The warmer water doesn't hold the oxygen like it should. And the rising tides because of glacial melt- and the flooding streams because of catastrophic weather- are washing minerals into the water and sweeping sewage from the treatment plants.

In the southeast the mining is bringing chemicals into the rivers that are causing mutations among the fish. You panic when your children have mutations or birth defects, but I have other children too! These creatures are my children, my delight. The fish... and the bears and the deer and the elk that come to the streams to drink... and the cows further down stream that eat grass covered by salts from contaminated irrigation.

Mutations make the fish and the birds infertile. Either they can't conceive or when they do, the fetus dies"

Jesus grows quiet... After a spell of silence, one of you asks, "Teacher, what are you thinking about?"

"I was thinking about scripture... verses like, "I lift up my eyes until the hills" (Ps. 121:1) or "The Lord lives! Blessed be my rock, and exalted be my God, the rock of my salvation" (2 Sam. 47)

I lift my eyes to the hills; behold, someone has torn off the top of the mountains and filled in the valleys with rubble. They extract minerals like coal, always at the least cost, for the most profit. They don't put back the rock. But they will put back the topsoil. But it's not the same.

It's not like the way our Heavenly Father did it. The fish are gone. The deer are gone. The flowers are gone...

I want to thank those who attempt to remediate the mountain. Thank you for the effort. Thank you for the great cost, the investment that could have been used elsewhere. But...

The damage has been done. All the dust in the air and upon the water... the erosion... loss of habitat and biodiversity... All those years of construction and operation – the years between operation and reclamation - the mountain cannot be the living sponge that holds the rain and releases it into the streams and rivers. You do the best you can. But it's not the same. It's not like it was....

“Now you want to stop mining the coal. But someone else wants to mine lithium! I've already given you technology to claim lithium from the waters of oil drilling. But it will cost more. And you can repurpose lithium again and again. I've given you the technology. ..”

Jesus is silent again. The more silent the Teacher is, the more anxious the disciples become.

Impatiently, you ask, “Teacher, now what are you thinking about?”

His voice cracks a little as he says, “I'm thinking.... About my Jewish children... and my Muslim children... and my Oriental children...and my missing and murdered Indigenous children... and the children who have lost their culture, their language... their spirit in residential schools.

“These are my children too! I came to save them too!”

OK, now someone listening is getting a little defensive and replies firmly, “But we heard you say that you have come first to the lost children of Israel!... You said it is not right to take children's food and throw it to the dogs! (Matt. 15:26 & Mk. 7:27)”

The Teacher responds softly but firmly, “I believe, my child, that you stopped listening before I stopped speaking. Have you not also heard me call one of these

other children my daughter? Have you not seen for yourself, just recently, that a prophet is not welcome in his own village, among his own kin? Have you not seen that those who are well have no need of a physician, but I have come to heal the sick, not the righteous but sinners. (Matt. 9:12, Mark 2:17, Lk. 5:31)

“And after the daughter of that Canaanite woman was healed, did we not go along the Sea of Galilee? Did we not sit on the mountain where they worship? Did not the people come seeking freedom, healing and deliverance? And did we not heal them... and feed them?” (Matt. 15: 26-39)

And... have I not given you the power and the authority to do the same things in my name?”

Imagine, to break the tension, in order to take a time out, Jesus steps away from us gathered at this picnic table and he moves a hundred meters away. We cannot hear his words, but the Father does, ‘Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!’ (Matt. 23:37; cf. 1 Esdras 1:30)

Some of us are uncomfortable. “Leave him to himself. He is exhausted. He is burned out. Let’s go.” But some of you insist on staying. As uncomfortable as it is to be thinking like this, you find yourself thinking like he is. Thinking. And praying...

The sun is beginning to set. The Teacher returns. Some begin to gather their things but the Teacher motions for everyone to sit down.

“I have been thinking about vaccines.” There is an audible groan from the back. The Teacher continues saying, “I have blessed you with scientists. I have blessed you with loyal, faithful health care workers. The scientists themselves have said that these vaccines should have taken years to develop. Your scientists were given the vaccines in a few months. I have blessed you with vaccines. Not one but many! Not in one country only but in several!

“What should have taken patience was refused. Isolate, I said. Keep a sabbatical. Not a year long but a week of weeks. But people were impatient.

“When vaccines came, some took them out of turn. They were wealthy and powerful. They thought they deserved privilege. Some others refuse the vaccines even now. Others pray, pleading to receive them. They “would die” to take them!

“And with all this suffering you bicker and blame and accuse. What should draw you together in compassion is dividing you. Some claim the freedom of conscience not to isolate, not to wear masks, not to take the vaccine. Others claim their own conscience and threaten, even attack, those who have a different conscience.

“Have we not seen similar bickering in Corinth? (1 Corinthians) Christians divided over sexual liberality, foods offered to idols, circumcision, self-indulgence, public worship – when and where and how - hierarchies of spirituality! This is not new. It is way too old...

“You have more vaccines than you need. You have vaccines that are expiring, unused! You have the capacity to show mercy to the third world, to be generous with vaccines. You do give... a little... not enough... and a bit too late.

“Why are you so divisive?

“Why do I bother you with so much wealth? Why, with all your abundance, are you so afraid of scarcity?

“I asked you once, ‘If you have two coats, give one to someone who has none.’ (Luke 3:11) Look in your closets. How many pairs of shoes are there? Forty? How many coats? Eleven?

“I ask you to feed the hungry. You have grocery stores with eleven aisles, each with five shelves high. Yet there are food deserts in your inner cities...

“Industry will grow your strawberries and coffee and cocoa, but the farmers who grow those things for you are not allowed to grow their own food...”

The teacher now pauses. The silence is awkward. His words are awkward.

One of you asks, "Will you now leave us in your disappointment? Will you curse us in your anger?"

"No!" the Teacher says. "Will you curse me?"

Drop the slide of the lone figure now

"I have told you – I will be with you always! To the end of the age! I will show you what compassion is. I will prove to you that the full life is one given away.

"I will feed you. With bread and wine. With my Body and Blood.

"You will be indignant. For everyone who says, like Pontius Pilate, 'What is this you are saying? Do you know who I am? I have the power to...!' For everyone like that... there are twenty who say, "At last! This is the word of the Lord."

"Don't you see yet? You have no power except that which is given you..."

The Teacher is silent for a moment. Two moments....

"What are you thinking, Teacher?"

"I am thinking what I am always thinking. I love you. You are my children. Sheep of my own flock. But I have others that are not of this flock. I love them too!

"I wish you would know how much I love you. I wish you would love one another as I have loved you.

"Sometimes I need to step away. To think. To observe. To listen. To regain my perspective.

"I need to step away so I can return and say once more 'I have loved you from the very beginning. I could not love you more. I cannot love you less.'

"I love you now. I will love you until it is finished.

"At the cross it is finished. At the empty tomb we begin again. "Let's go home."