

SERMON- Proper 4 (B)

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1 Samuel 3:1-10

Psalms 139:1-5, 12-17

2 Corinthians 4:5-12

St. Timothy's (Herndon)

June 2, 2024

Mark 2:23-3:6

OPENING:

Jesus: Good

Pharisees: Bad

Man with Withered Hand: Good

Herodians: Bad

Grainfields: Good

Synagogue: Bad

Christian: Good

Jewish: Bad.

I don't think anyone *here* hears that story in *that* way

I don't think Mark wrote this story in that way.

I definitely don't think Jesus would want us to interpret it that way.

I do think that we, Christians, *can* hear it in that way, and *have* over the years.

CLERGY GROUP:

I attend an interfaith clergy group, and this week we met at Northern Virginia Hebrew Congregation in Reston

and the Rabbi there started the meeting by saying:

“This year, the year 5784 (in the Jewish calendar) has been the hardest year in my decades of ministry.”

He said that because of the events on October 7, 2023 in Israel and everything that has happened since. He spoke movingly about the feelings of his congregation, this deep sense of fear and difficulty that has become their reality.

He spoke movingly as well about his college-age children living as Jewish persons on campuses across the country.

His colleagues then echoed these sentiments in a variety of ways.

Then the rabbi did a remarkable thing, he asked for help, for the other clergy in the room (who were all Christian at that particular meeting, but oftentimes include Muslims) he asked for help.

It was a moment of great power and vulnerability.

He asked for how things were going in our congregations, what our perspectives were, what we were seeing and hearing from our vantage point, at how we could work together.

So people went around the room, the Presbys, the stern Lutherans, the rock stars from Floris Methodist, the UU's (Universalist-Unitarians) and fellow Episcopalians.

We all pledged support for our brothers and sisters of the same God, the God of Abraham.

GOSPEL

After that, I read our passage, our Gospel reading this morning, in a slightly different way.

What was Jesus saying then? What is he saying now?

3 things jumped out at me: the first was that, in this exchange with the Pharisees, that Jesus appeals to what we call the Old Testament, to the Hebrew Bible, and to the Book of Samuel specifically. It's a little obscure but Jesus says "Have you not read what David did when he and his companions were hungry and in need of food? Like a good rabbi, he says, you say "x" and others say "y" but what about "Z"? Jesus was well-versed in the rabbinic method, he "outJews the Jews" here, so to speak, from within and as a part of that tradition, because that's who he is.

The second thing I noticed was that what was happening in this story was ritualized political theatre, that what Jesus was engaging in was a staged episode of political-religious disobedience.

Like the Boston Tea Party, or the Montgomery Bus Boycott or when Jesus himself overturned the tables at the Temple. Jesus is forcing the issue.

For example, he could have healed the withered hand in private without provoking the reaction.

Or he could have healed the hand, presumably, on Monday as it seems to have been a chronic condition. But he decided to make a show of it and he went into the synagogue on the Sabbath instead. Under the glare of the media lights, Jesus calculates and plans his actions for maximum effect.

If you are like me, you have found yourself turning my attention AWAY from the protests on our college campuses over the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, out of a sense of tiredness or hopelessness or whatever.

I am reminded by this story that they are examples of civil disobedience, which does not make them inherently just, but they are at least worthy of my attention.

The third thing I noticed was Jesus' emotion in this story.

Jesus here is ANGRY,

Most of the time the New Testament wants to flatten Jesus out anytime he appears too human or emotional, so the adjective does not appear in the Lukan and Matthean versions.

But in Mark, Jesus gets angry, specifically at the Pharisees silence, which is also interesting.

And it says that he grieves, grieves at their hardness of heart.

Again, that description is intentional, linking their hardness of heart to the hardness of heart of the great enemy of the Jewish people to Pharaoh. There is even the hunt that Jesus is making the connection between "Pharaohs" and Pharisees" with that "Ph" sound.

In other words, these are "fightin' words", from within the tradition, and so what's at stake is a larger issue than card-playing or dancing on a Sunday.

PIVOT

Back to our clergy meeting:

The Northern Virginia Hebrew Community hosts a Muslim prayer meeting every Friday, it serves as a satellite campus for the ADAMS Center, the All Dulles Area Muslim Society in Sterling, where hundreds of Muslims come and use the Jewish space for prayer.

Our Christian counterparts, meanwhile, have, as a part of their confirmation class curriculum, visits to the mosque and synagogues, so the young people get a sense of the shared Abrahamic tradition and how those faiths are connected to our own.

There were police at this meeting as well, who were there as a conversation partner and resource, to help during this time. The police reported that there have been no crimes of an Anti-Semitism nature since October 7, that they have contacts with the FBI for hate crimes and terrorist threats, and outposts in our schools to protect our young people.

I thought, there is so much we are doing right in this area on this issue.

And yet and yet and yet.

Like Jesus, the Rabbi was emotional, angry and hurt and afraid.

I know that in my context, that I can preach sermons that resist the idea that Jesus came to supersede and fix Judaism, even if the Gospels themselves.

I know that we can call out and name Anti-semitism in our society, along with

Islamophobia, and all the rest.

But I also felt bad because we could do so little.

I remember thinking that I just won't know what it's like to wear a Yarmulke in a grocery store and receive a look, or to drop a child off at a JCC or at a secular school and have that fear.

As the Christian pastors went around the room, there was the common refrain that everyone was or would be praying for them, but in terms of action, we were all a little lost.

One brave soul said: "At our church, we are shrinking, we are getting older, we are tired, and we have to pick our battles, which ones to fight, and which ones to let go."

There is a persistent dynamic, as Americans and as Christians, we want to fix everything. But what if we can't.

When you are stuck, you reread the passage and see what comes up.

When we place ourselves in the story we tend to think we are the disciples, we think we are Jesus.

But what if indeed we are actually the Pharisees trying to do our best but missing the point, or we are the ones with the withered hand, who desperately need help, and who does not do anything, but stretch his hand out.

CONCLUSION:

One more sharing from the meeting. One of the pastors said that he used to work in the Intelligence Community prior to becoming a priest, and what he kept thinking about when this issue was coming up was something he learned working for the "Community" was a sense of humility and the reminder:

"That we don't know what we don't know. And we don't know what we do know."

That maybe we

I won't end with that uncomfortable thought, instead with two thoughts about humility and about rest.

There was a church recently that really was thriving, pastor said in his sermons, condensed the Bible into 7 words.

"God is God and you are not."

Then there is the story

Alcoholic in recovery taped a sticky to his mirror:

"There is a God and you are not him.

AMEN.

