

Embarrassed to Death

Presented by Pastor Scott Walters on 08/18/2019

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Has a member of your family ever embarrassed you by something they said? Have you ever embarrassed a member of your family?
(not counting your children)

Today, it would seem that Jesus embarrassed his would-be disciples.
Big Time!

Someone has once said that the Gospel today is “8 of the toughest verses in Luke’s Gospel:

EMBARRASSMENT #1: Jesus talks about division and not peace;

EMBARRASSMENT #2: Jesus sounds so judgmental today;

EMBARRASSMENT #3: The very people you’re trying to attract,
Jesus calls “hypocrites.”

Nevertheless, this Jesus is a Lord worth getting to know.

But why preach on this passage? Almost any other one would be better.

Because here is an opportunity to move beyond the saccharine to wrestle with a God of substance and power.

Whatever happened to the kindly carpenter who healed the man possessed by many demons a few chapters ago?

Or the Jesus who stopped by Mary and Martha’s place for supper together?

Well, you see, something recently happened in Luke’s version of Jesus.

A decisive turned occurred when Luke reports, “When the days drew near for him, Jesus set his face to go to Jerusalem.”

You may think that we’re a long way away from Holy Week – and we are – but those days before Good Friday offer the best backdrop to understand why Jesus speaks as he does today.

Friends, I know that there is a thin wall that separates this sanctuary from what you have experienced during the week.

When we come to worship, carry with us a lifetime of personal experience, and sometimes very painful memories from other experiences and other congregations.

That includes, for some, terrible things done in the name of Christ’s Church.

That’s why what Jesus says, and how he says it today, might be especially difficult for some of you.

There was a tension for many who heard Jesus talk about bringing fire to the earth and causing division within families.

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And for some, there still is an underlying tension.

In *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, by C. S. Lewis, four British children enter a coat closet and discover a whole other world called Narnia. This magical world is filled with talking animals and the *original* Lion King, a lion named Aslan, who rules over all of Narnia. The youngest child, Lucy, strikes up a conversation with Mr. Beaver, asking about Aslan, “is he quite safe?” to which Mr. Beaver replies, “Safe?...Who said anything about safe? ‘Course he isn’t safe. But he’s good.”

Of course God isn’t safe, but God is *good*. There are those in the kingdom of God who like to dwell on the fiery rage of God...the seemingly “unsafe” parts that scare us and seem to be trying to coerce us into obedience...but that kind of thinking leaves little room for the goodness of God.

While I served on the Capitol District Committee on Ordained Ministry, we interviewed a young man who was exploring the possibility of ordained ministry for himself.

He was poised, self-aware, intelligent, good credentials, great recommendations. His written material was impressive and the oral interview went marvelously. It was a unanimous vote. He was easily approved.

There was only one nagging issue. As it turned out, his approval by the committee came to what was going to be a considerable cost to himself. You see, he came from an unchurched family of a lot of wealth. His father in particular expected his son to enter the world of finance or business.

But something got hold of him, you see. It got hold of him and held on tight. And I thought being approved by a District Committee was a joyful occasion. So I guess the young man’s approval was what Jesus meant, when he talking about how one’s faith can actually pit one family member against another.

Friends, there have been, and continue to be, prophets in our midst who capture God’s beautiful vision for the world, and they become enraged by the injustices they see, and the ways precious lives are too often compromised. There is a reason the terms “prophet” and “angry” so often go together.

There are also those times when we discover God to be the refiner as a refiner would fire precious metal until it reflects God’s own image back at him.

The fire of God’s anger is directed at injustice, at oppression, at the sin of the world and of our lives and it burns away until what is precious and beautiful is revealed. It is no wonder that fire has come to signify the transforming power of the Holy Spirit. You see that fire in the logo of the United Methodist Church – the Cross and the Flame.

The Holy Spirit is a fire that burns, but doesn’t destroy.

The next time you feel the fires of life around you, the next time you find yourself in the midst of the flames of a crisis – remember the strange fire of God’s refining.

I know that it may seem presumptuous of me to say, but chances are, God takes our trials and our pain and even our loss and can mold something even more precious out of us.

God can and does do this with us today. God kneels in the dirt and ash, coaxing new life out of places that appear only charred and ruined. Where we see only worthless destruction, God sees promise and hope. In this burned and ashy ground, new life can come.