

Don't Ignore Him

January 28, 2007

(Epiphany 4 - Year C)

Luke 4: 21-32

St. Alban's Episcopal Church, Waco, Texas

Many of you know that our oldest son, Scott, plays basketball for Midway High School.

And, last Tuesday, our family traveled down to Killeen to watch the Midway Panthers basketball team battle against the Killeen Kangaroos.

The game was played in the gym of Killeen High School, and as soon as we arrived inside the gym, we realized that we were in unfriendly territory.

We had already heard the stories about the fights and riots that have occurred in the past at other basketball games in the Killeen gym. And, this last Tuesday night, emotions seemed to run high during the basketball contests.

During the game, we witnessed several flagrant fouls against our Midway players.

We witnessed the officials at the scoring table making "errors" in the counting of the number of team fouls, errors that under-recorded the team fouls of Killeen and over-recorded the team fouls of Midway.

In response, those of us on the visitor's side of the gym, the Midway side, began to boo and hiss and protest against what we saw happening, both on and off the court.

At one point, the athletic director for Killeen came over to reprimand the Midway fans.

Accompanied by a uniformed police officer, we were told that, if we didn't start keeping quiet, then we were going to have to move up to the very top bleachers in the gym, because our behavior was too distracting to the officials sitting at the scoring table.

We were told that we were going to have to move.

I became furious.
The blood pressure in my neck began to rise.
My sense of righteous indignation had been activated,
And I determined right then and there that I was *not* moving up to the
bleachers at the top of the gym.

Some of the other parents around us said in resignation:
“Well, I suppose if they want us to move, then we’ll move.”

But, I replied to Susan with dogged determination:
“Nope.
I am *not* moving.
I bought a ticket to sit wherever I want to in this gym and *I am staying
right where I am.*”

I was angry, protesting and standing up for my rights.
But, then - I began to visualize myself in handcuffs, having to explain to
you, and to Al Melis and to the Waco Trib, how it was that the
rector of St. Alban’s Church was arrested at a junior varsity game
in Killeen.

So, eventually, I did simmer down.
And, I did move up to the top bleachers, as we were asked to do.
But, that did not take away from the fact that I had experienced strong
emotions, strong emotions of righteous anger that I could not
ignore.

The people in Nazareth in Galilee also felt strong emotions on that day
when Jesus went into the synagogue, unrolled the scroll of the
prophet Isaiah, and read:
“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me.”
The people in Nazareth felt strong emotions on that day when Jesus said:
“Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”

Initially, the people in Nazareth felt strong feelings of pride and joy,
because Joseph’s son, their hometown boy, had returned to bring
good news to the poor.

But then, their strong emotions of pride and joy swiftly changed to rage and anger when Jesus told the people of Nazareth that they would have to move to the top of the bleachers in the gym.

The Nazarenes were asked to move to the top bleachers in the gym in order to make room for the Gentiles, the non-Jews, who are also included in God's family.

And, in response to this scandalous news, Jesus, the son of Joseph, is run out of town on a rail, as the people of Nazareth attempt to hurl Jesus over the side of a cliff.

Yes, on that day in Nazareth, Jesus evoked many strong emotions:
Starting with pride and joy in their hometown hero,
And, ending with rage and with anger that could not be ignored.

And, what about *your* feelings toward this Jesus?
When you encounter Jesus, do you feel emotions of pride and joy and amazement?
When you encounter Jesus, does he sometimes make you angry and furious?

Sometimes I wonder, if we come into this church Sunday after Sunday,
and instead of feeling emotions of joy or anger toward Jesus,
We simply yawn out of boredom over Jesus and ignore him.

Over 20 years ago, a man named Clarence Jordan wrote a play called *The Cotton Patch Gospel*.
The Cotton Patch Gospel is a play in which the life of Jesus is set in the modern-day American South, and Jerusalem, the holy city, is instead, Atlanta, Georgia.
Clarence Jordan wrote *The Cotton Patch Gospel* because he wants us to see Jesus as a real human being.

Clarence Jordan, the writer of that play, says this:
"Jesus has been so zealously worshiped,
His deity so vehemently affirmed,
His halo so brightly illumined,

And his cross so beautifully polished,
That in the minds of many he no longer exists as a man.”¹

Jesus was, and is, a man.

Jesus comes to his hometown of Nazareth, and goes to the synagogue,
where he reads from the scroll of the prophet Isaiah saying:

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon *me*.”

Then, Jesus put down the scroll and proclaims:

“Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”

And, in this episode in Jesus’ very human life, he provokes strong
emotions of joy and anger and pride and rage.

Has Jesus ever made you feel like you are going to bust out in joy?

Has Jesus ever ticked you off?

If you have never felt any strong feelings about Jesus, pro or con, then I
invite you to get to know him better.

Not so that we can admire his halo or polish his cross.

But, so that we can get to know this Jesus as a man, a man who became
flesh and lived among us.

Last Sunday, I presented the rector’s annual report at the annual parish
meeting.

In that report, I told you that one of my goals for this parish is for us
read our Bibles more, as we live into our true identity as a Bible
Church.

I challenge you, then, to sit down one day or one evening this week, and
read the Gospel of Mark, all the way through, in one sitting.

The Gospel of Mark is the shortest of all the Gospels.

It will only take you a couple of hours to get through the whole thing.

This week ahead, read the Gospel of Mark - and put yourself into the
story - allow yourself to experience Jesus, the man, in a new and
strong way.

¹ From *Clarence Jordan: Essential Writings* by Joyce Hollyday

Because, our Christian faith is centered on this one man, the homeboy
from Nazareth.

Therefore, I invite you,
To meet this man,
Love him,
Hate him,
Rejoice with him,
Be angry with him.

I invite you to follow him,
Spit on him,
Laugh with him,
Shake your fist at him,
Eat with him,
Reject him,
Rise with him.

But, please, whatever you do,
Don't ignore him.

AMEN.

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