

The Change We Need: Put God First

October 5, 2008

(Pentecost 21 - Year A)

Matthew 21: 33-46

St. Alban's Episcopal Church, Waco, Texas

There is a pretty common tactic in parenting, I have concluded, to teach children and teenagers about the dangers of peer pressure.

This common situation in the parent/child relationship goes something like this, as the teenager asks:

“Mom, can I go to the mall with Bill and Tom and Kay and Mary?”

Then, the mother replies:

“No, you can't go to the mall with Bill and Tom and Kay and Mary.

You know that I don't like it when you all go to the mall by yourselves.”

“But, Mom, all of the other mothers are letting them go.”

“Well, I am not the other mothers.”

Then, the child answers back:

“But, if I don't go, then I will be the only one not there. I mean,
everyone is going.”

Then, mom responds:

*“If everyone was going to jump off a cliff, would you jump off a cliff,
too?”*

And, depending upon the age and the hormone level of the child involved in this situation - sometimes, the young person answers, in defiance:

“Oh yes, I would.

I would jump off a cliff - if that means that I get to go to the mall with my friends!”

Peer pressure, the pressure to go along with the crowd, is a powerful force in the life of teenagers.

And, I am afraid to say, peer pressure, the pressure to go along with the crowd, is a powerful force in all of our lives.

Jesus tells a story in the Gospel of Matthew that involves peer pressure.

In the story, an owner plants a vineyard, then he leases the vineyard out to some tenants.

However, when the owner sends his messengers to collect the ripe grapes, the mob of tenants bands together and beats up the first messenger.

The crowd of tenants then kills the second and third messengers that the owner of the vineyard sends to collect the grapes.

Finally, the owner sends his son.

The crowd bends to peer pressure as all of them say:

“This is the owner’s son.

Let’s kill him - and then we can take over the vineyard! Yeah!”

Not one person swims against the tide of the mob mentality,
But instead, the crowd in Jerusalem on Good Friday shouts “Crucify him! Yeah!” as everyone jumps off the cliff and nails the God of love to the Cross.

This month, as Americans, we have an unique opportunity to see how the Christian faith and life *should* swim against the tide of peer pressure, especially in the arena of politics.

And, before you all get too nervous about me treading into political waters -

I will let you know right now, that I will be an equal opportunity offender in this area.

Yet, since the tenants in God’s vineyard beat up or kill each and every one of God’s messengers, including God’s Son, then I think that I am in pretty good company.

The crowds that gather to support Barack Obama hold up campaign posters with Obama’s campaign slogan.

Obama’s campaign slogan says:

The Change We Need.

And, it seems that the crowd of Obama supporters have bought into this message: hook, line and sinker.

And, it would seem that this campaign slogan means that Barack Obama is the change we need.

And, I gotta tell you, that I am amazed that I have not heard one single Christian push back on this and press against the crowd and say:

“No.

Barack Obama is *not* the change we need.

For no human being can be our savior or bring about real transformation and change, except for Jesus Christ.”

So this morning, I will be the voice of one who swims against the tide of American peer pressure, and proclaim that:

The Change We Need is not going to come from the next President of the United States.

The Change We Need is a commitment to follow the example of Jesus Christ, who was nailed to the Cross for the love of all people.

Now, on the other hand, the crowds that are gathered to support John McCain hold up campaign posters with McCain’s campaign slogan.

McCain’s campaign slogan says:

Country First.

And, it seems that the crowd of McCain supporters have bought into this message: hook, line and sinker.

And, it would seem that this campaign slogan means that John McCain has put his country first.

And, I gotta tell you, that I am amazed that I have not heard one single Christian push back on this and press against the crowd and say:

“No.

No one is supposed to put country first.”

Instead, as we heard in the Ten Commandments that we read in the book of Exodus today, we are to put *God* first.

So this morning, I will be the voice of one who swims against the tide of American peer pressure, and proclaim that:

We are *not* to put country first.

Just as we should not put our family first or our job first or our children first.

We are to put God first.

We are to put God first and to love the Lord our God with all our heart and soul and mind and strength - and our neighbor as ourselves.

Now, don't get me wrong.

I think that each and everyone of us should vote in this presidential election next month.

But, it is disappointing to me, as I have seen Americans and Christians, Republicans and Democrats -

Both falling for peer pressure and a mob mentality in the vineyard and jumping off the proverbial cliff,

Instead of swimming against the tide and using these political slogans as a voice for the *real* good news:

The good news that no human being can save us and bring the change we need, except for the God of love,

The God of love whom we are to put *first*, above all things.

Just last week, the community of St. Alban's received pledge cards in their mailboxes.

We are being invited, in the midst of uncertain economic times, to swim against peer pressure and to increase our giving back to God through God's Church.

The mob in the vineyard opens that pledge card and says:

"Let's kill that pledge card - and then we can keep the money! Yeah!"

The mob in the vineyard says:

"We can't afford to give money to St. Alban's, because:

My electric bill last month was \$500.

My kid's college account just went down the toilet.

My Visa bill is out of control."

The mob mentality and the peer pressure crashes in tidal waves against us, seducing us to believe that *we* own the vineyard in which we are working, instead of the vineyard belonging to God.

So this morning, I will be the voice of one who swims against those torrents of peer pressure, and proclaim that:

St. Alban's Episcopal Church is the place where you and I have pledged

to spend eternity together, at this altar table and at the banquet table in heaven.

St. Alban's is the place where you can put your money today and know, that this is where the *real* change we need is going to happen, as hundreds of lives are transformed by God through this faith community.

St. Alban's is about the only place in our lives, where we *do* try to put God first - and everything else second - and proclaim the good news that God loves everyone and welcomes them home.

So, swim against the tide of peer pressure and don't jump off the cliff with everyone else.

Put country and family and money *second*.

Put God *first* - for *that* is the change we need.

AMEN.

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