

November 21, 2021 Christ the Vulnerable Sunday.

In the name of God, Abba-Imma, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

I grew up in a world, (and I hope you did too), I grew up in a world that respected truth, and truth-seeking. We longed for it. We desired it. Nobody I knew pretended to have the truth, or all the truth. But the curiosity to discover the truth was constant. It might come to you, from anywhere and everywhere, from a magazine article, from a conversation with a friend--from the stillness of a lake to great philosophers and theologians. We looked for it. We hungered for it. We were taught and trained to pay attention to the truth.

Power doesn't need truth. Deceit, manipulation are perfectly fine. And that's the basis of [Pontius] Pilate's first cynical question, 'Truth, what's that?' Because power depends upon intimidation and threat. And so Pilate's second question, 'Are you the king of the Jews?' Are you supposed to scare me or something?

Bev and I saw a wonderful movie recently--Netflix or HBO, you'll find it--entitled *Resistance*. *Resistance*, and it's the story of Marcel Marceau, the great mime, who in his youth was part of the French Underground and Resistance in WWII France. I had no idea. Stunning film!

And I want to tell you about one little scene-conversation in it--and I'm not ruining the film, but you'll love it when you come to this. He is forging passports. And a woman he's just met in that French Resistance movement says to him,

'Where did you learn to do that?'

He said, 'Painting.'

She says, 'What?'

He says, 'I'm a painter.'

She says, 'Really?' She says, 'Your people are no good at that.'

He says, 'What?!'

She says, 'You Jews--you're no good at that.'

He says, 'What are you talking about?'

She says, 'You're scholars, you're philosophers, you're performing artists, but you aren't painters.'

'Well, why not?'

'Because,' she says, 'you have no image of God. And when people pray, they want to pray to someone that they can see, they needed an image of that, and you people don't have that, and so you're no good at painting.'

He says, 'Really? I thought they hated us because we're Christ-killers.'

She says, 'No, that's not the reason! Your people were the first liberated slaves in history, and that's why people hate you--the powerful all over the world throughout history--they hate liberated slaves.'

No image of God--True.

Christ killers--False accusation. (I'll have to explain it another time.)

Liberated slaves--Yes. 'This is why people hate you.'

And now, I'd like to add the fourth reason: Judaism is the first religion to expose and reveal the dynamics of scapegoating--sacrificing other people so that I can avoid facing my own problems. That's what scapegoating is, yes? And they brought it to the surface. And what do we do with the messengers who bring us truth? We kill them. And that attitude has been around for a long, long time.

Just this week, I met a new friend in the courtyard out here, after an NA--Narcotics Anonymous--meeting. We got to talking, and he told me the story of when he lived elsewhere in the country, and would go to meetings. They rented a building there, and they had a variety of different rooms that they'd use throughout the week, and over each of the entrances to all of the rooms in that building, they put this sign, "It's Not Them."

It's not them. It's not them. It's not. Them.

It's here [motioning to heart]. It's here that the work has to be done. Stop blaming them. That's scapegoating.

And how did that work? How did Judaism begin to expose this?

In a nutshell, on Mount Sinai. God comes to the people, and, speaking through Moses says,

"I'm the one who liberated you from Egypt. Do you remember that?"

"I'm the one who liberated you from slavery. Do you remember that?"

"I'm the one who liberated you from the narrow places and narrow-minded thinking. Do you remember that?"

And the people go. 'Uh-huh.'

'Therefore, let us now live in a Covenant relationship of mutual understanding which seeks to find delight in each other, and encourage each other in all of the best ways of becoming human, so that the whole world can see this light emanating from within Judaism, and inspire us to become fully and truly human.'

And the sign that the Covenant is alive and vibrant, will be your welcoming the strangers, the foreigners, and the outcasts, into your communities and country, and especially into the sacred Temple itself. We're all welcomed. And the least among you, the most vulnerable, the widows and orphans, they will receive your protection.'

Well, Judaism has had an up-and-down track record with that, like us. And they failed again and again, and again. And this is what fueled the outrage of the prophets who stood up and denounced the powerful and the aristocracy, and said you are behaving exactly like Pharaoh treated us. You're destroying our own people, and if you do not change, there will be dire consequences.

And after a period of little more than 200 years, that's precisely what happened. The nation of Israel finally collapsed, and people were driven into exile. And it is this theme that Jesus picks out. You get that part. It's a loser theme; it didn't work.

He picks it up, and embodies it, and says, 'Now, friends, not only passive welcoming of strangers and foreigners and immigrants and refugees, but, now actively, I want you to move towards them:
Love your enemies. Do good to those who hurt you. Bless those who persecute you.

And Jesus probes the inner meaning of the Covenant. He says,
'It's not good enough to just not kill or murder. Pay attention to those seeds of resentment and hatred and rage that are emerging inside of you.
It's not enough just not to commit adultery. Observe what that is it that provokes lust within you, and wanting to possess another?
It's not enough to just not steal. Are you stealing people's reputations? Are you stealing their integrity?
It's not enough to just not lie or deceive or bear false witness. Are you encouraging the well-being of your brothers and sisters, your neighbors, and your friends, and your enemies? Are you improving their lives?'

And so Christians throughout the ages, and many fine scholars have said Jesus is just talking about an ideal. You know, he doesn't expect us to live that way, does he? That's too much.

And we deny the truth that we are being called to live as 'little Christs', with open expansive, generous hearts, blessing life wherever we find it. For our God is not a God of blame and scapegoating, the God of herd mentality and mob mentality, so popular these days.

No, our God is vulnerable to us, to all--vulnerable to our wounds, our brokenness, and our violence--because that's what puts Christ on the cross. It is not some heroic sacrifice. It is our violence against each other and him. It's not them.

And yet, there is this emerging, resurrecting mercy, which confounds the world, and upon which our lives depend, that keeps calling us into life.

And that's the truth.

Amen.

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The peace, which surpasses all human understanding, keep your hearts and your minds in

Christ Jesus.

Amen.