

Lovers in a Dangerous Time

Isaiah 49:1-7, John 1: 29-42

Whitefish UMC

January 16, 2011

† Twenty-five years or so ago, a Canadian singer, Bruce Cockburn, wrote these words, in a song called “Lovers in a Dangerous Time:”

Don't the hours grow shorter as the days go by
You never get to stop and open your eyes
One day you're waiting for the sky to fall
And next you're dazzled by the beauty of it all
When you're lovers in a dangerous time
Lovers in a dangerous time....
When you're lovers in a dangerous time
Sometimes you're made to feel as if your love's a crime
Nothing worth having comes without some kind of fight
Got to kick at the darkness till it bleeds daylight

† As we gather here this morning, I feel safe in saying that we, as followers of Jesus, are “lovers in a dangerous time.” The same was true for Jesus and for his first disciples, too. How did they face the perilous times in which they found themselves, and what can we learn from them?

† One preacher describes the encounter in John’s gospel between John the Baptist, Jesus, and his first companions in ministry this way: “One day, not long after his baptism by John in the River Jordan, at the very beginning of

his public ministry, Jesus and John the Baptist—his cousin actually—meet again. It’s an odd little story.

- † The Fourth Gospel, the Gospel of John, tells these stories differently from Matthew, Mark, and Luke. John puts an intriguing twist in here and there, a twist that makes us think. The other three tell it straight: Jesus sees potential disciples, tells them to drop what they are doing and follow him, and they do just that. Here Jesus is walking by; John the Baptist is standing there with two of his followers.
- † John says, “Look,” (“Behold,” the older translation put it, but it means “Look”) “there goes the Lamb of God.” What a peculiar thing to say. What does that mean? God’s lamb, a small, weak, vulnerable little lamb? Whatever it means or does not mean to us, John’s two friends turn around and start to follow Jesus.
- † And instead of saying “Follow me,” Jesus asks them a question: “What are you looking for?” And instead of giving him an answer, like “We’re looking for the meaning of life,” they ask him, “Where are you staying, Rabbi?”—which sounds suspiciously like they’re angling for an invitation to lunch. That’s essentially what they get.
- † “Come and see,” he says, and they go with him and spend the day there, and at the end, one of them, Andrew, finds his brother Simon and tells him the most astonishing thing: “We just found the Messiah,” which is a way of saying, “We just found the truth.” And he persuades Simon to come and see, and he does, and Jesus renames him Peter, and the rest is history. The Christian enterprise begins.”
- † Do you wonder what it was about Jesus that made these quite ordinary people declare that they had found the long-awaited messiah and spend the rest of their days carrying out his mission? Simon had heard the rumors

about a liberator—one who would come and restore Israel to its former glory, who would vanquish the Roman occupiers with power and a sword.

- † But somehow in this initial meeting, the man didn't really look like a revolutionary. There was warmth, humor, openness, and dignity about him—but revolutionary? Not hardly. Still Jesus' commanding presence, his *charisma*, underlined in Simon's mind the reason why his brother Andrew had been so insistent on his coming to see this Jesus.
- † The people expected someone with royal majesty, a divine conqueror, but instead John the Baptizer calls him the “lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.” This image of the messiah radically rejects earlier biblical images of the savior. In choosing this metaphor, God, through Jesus, is choosing weakness and electing to play the role not of the All-Powerful Passover Deliver of Exodus, but of the sacrificial Passover lamb.
- † How can this be? And yet if we look closely at the Old Testament, we find glimpses of this other kind of messiah—a servant leader who would be a servant of the Lord, not of one's own interests. When we look at the passage from Isaiah, we are reminded that it was this prophet who said, “Here I am, Lord, send me. Use me to be a beacon of light to the world.”
- † But what difference does it make to us, what kind of Messiah the people of Israel and Jesus' time expected? Dear sisters and brothers in Christ, it makes all the difference in the world for us, we lovers of Jesus in dangerous times.
- † For we cannot spit hateful names at each other when we disagree or point accusing fingers at one another when we are convinced the other is wrong and still be a lover of Jesus. And heaven knows there are plenty of us who have done just that while still professing to be Christian. I stand before you as one of them.

- † And so today, we ask ourselves, are WE standing as God’s beacons of light? Are we a light to our families? Our children? Our community? Are we willing to enter the divided places and listen, and are we willing to challenge our own assumptions and ask questions that might lead to our growth and change?
- † Are we guided by principles of justice and love and forgiveness? Or are we caught up in what is temporarily satisfying, to be right no matter what the cost, to claim the truth as ours alone?
- † To ask ourselves if we can truly follow the Lamb of God, we can turn to the scriptures, the Old and New Testaments, to look in the mirror and find the answer to the question: “Can I call myself a representative of the Lamb of God?”
- † The prophet Micah summed up what is required: “What does the Lord require of you, but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?” We remember that Jesus’ answer to the young lawyer about which commandment was the greatest is: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and soul and mind and strength, and your neighbor as yourself.”
- † Martin Luther King, Jr., whose birthday we celebrate this weekend, said, “Life’s most persistent and urgent question is ‘What are you doing for others?’” That means not just what you are doing in your worship but in your everyday life. For devotion to God is shown best in prayer and praise and worship—AND—in acts of compassion and love for our neighbors.
- † And as people grow spiritually, they are drawn beyond the circumference of their own lives, as Richard Rohr calls it, into the center where unity with God is found. And this center then begins to transform the circumference, or

the boundary. We move from fear to love, and we take love with us into our fear.

- † We begin to understand that our natural anxieties are within the reach of a God of love, not apart from God. And so when tragedy strikes, as it has in the last week or so, we are more able to see our fear and shock included in the range of God's love.
- † And so when we move beyond what is familiar or even comfortable into action that meets the world's needs with our own selves, created in the image of God, but surely not perfect and certainly in need of forgiveness, we become, in truth, lovers in a dangerous time.
- † As Jesus knew all too well—as Martin Luther King knew, as little Christina Taylor Green found, offering love and service and nonviolence in a dangerous and violent world—can be costly. But today, as we worship our Savior, remember Dr. King, and honor Christina's memory, are we meant to live in fear of the world or in love with it?
- † That doesn't mean we stand silent in the face of violence or hatred, but it does mean that we don't answer in kind. Instead we hold within us God's dream for us and for our world.
- † The theologian Howard Thurman, one of Martin Luther King's teachers at Boston University Divinity School, wrote:
 - † *The dream is the quiet persistence in the heart that enables a person to ride out the storms of churning experiences.*
 - It is the exciting whisper moving through the aisles of the spirit. . . .*
 - It is the ever-recurring melody in the midst of the broken harmony and harsh discords of human conflict. It is the touch of significance which highlights the ordinary experience, the common event.*
 - The dream is no outward thing. It does not take its rise from*

the environment in which one moves or functions.

It lives in the inward parts, it is deep within, where the issues of life and death are ultimately determined. Keep alive the dream; for as long as we have a dream in our hearts, we cannot lose the significance of living.

† We come today to keep alive God’s dream in us and in our world. Will our country become less violent or more in the days to come? I don’t know. But I believe that churches are places where we can move beyond some of the isolation that exists in the United States to a love that embraces those different from ourselves.

† We can move to courage that refuses to live exclusively in self-protectiveness, and to justice that extends itself in passionate, daring, response—in other words, we can live here and outside these walls lives worthy of the Gospel. And that kind of transformation will bring healing beyond the walls of the church and into the world.

† The sixteenth century mystic Teresa of Avila composed a letter to her nuns near the end of her life. Hear these words and let them become a part of you:

† *Christ has no body but yours,
No hands, no feet on earth but yours,
Yours are the eyes with which he looks
Compassion on this world,
Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good,
Yours are the hands, with which he blesses all the world.
Yours are the hands, yours are the feet,
Yours are the eyes, you are his body.*

*Christ has no body now but yours,
No hands, no feet on earth but yours,
Yours are the eyes with which he looks
compassion on this world.
Christ has no body now on earth but yours.*

† Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. Look into one another's eyes, hear each others' voices, and "Come and see." Amen.

Sources:

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