



I imagine this is probably how it went down. Although there wasn't anyone there capturing it on their smartphone, there was plenty of social media being used with the only social media they had at the time—word of mouth. It was pretty effective. News spread about how the controversial rabbi—Jesus was challenging people to think about challenging issues. The crowd began to get stirred up when Jesus said the Spirit of the Lord had anointed him to bring good news to the poor, the hungry, the thirsty, the immigrant, the stranger. Jesus said that he had come to proclaim hope to those who were sick, disabled, addicted, hope for people imprisoned by all kinds of things—the “deplorables” (to borrow a phrase) of the day. Things were stirred up.

But then what got the crowd really ornery was when Jesus indicted the faith community over their ignorance of the needs of others—especially those who were not part of their faith community or spiritual persuasion. The very people who should have understood the whole “kingdom of God is here, at hand, among us, unfolding, a present reality” somehow did not understand what that meant. Or they understood, but chose to ignore what it meant. Jesus did not come to do “bring the kingdom” by himself. Preaching Good News to the poor, the defenseless, sightless, voiceless and powerless was—and continues to be the ministry of the whole people of God. So when Jesus spoke the words, “Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing,” he was setting loose Kingdom of God compassion, kingdom of God justice, kingdom of God love for all people—no exceptions.

I imagine this is probably how it went down. The crowd got worked up and a riot began to brew. Emotions got stirred, and then people probably began yelling which is what often happens when people get emotional and talk more than they listen. And when people get caught up in making sure

their own voice and perspective heard, there isn't much room for everyone's voice and perspective. What usually happens next is that people yell. And when people yell, people become violent. And that's what happened in the synagogue. The crowd wanted to silence Jesus. They didn't like being challenged to think differently about challenging issues. So they wanted to hurt him. They wanted to kill him. I imagine this is probably how it went down. Jesus was in the synagogue. It came time to read the scripture and say something about it. It was probably one of the shortest teachings he ever gave—certainly the most impacting messages he ever gave: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.” And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. Then he began to say to them, “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”

The story that Luke tells of Jesus reading from the prophet Isaiah—and the crowd's response challenges us with two things. The first Challenge is to let these words drive the Prince of Peace community deeper into our responsibility to love those whom God loves and to bring good news to the poor, the captive, the blind, the oppressed. An important way to get at that is to consider how our poverty of compassion holds us captive gets in ways that perpetuates a blindness—and inability to see how we participate in the oppression of others. Part of the reason the crowd wanted to throw Jesus off a cliff was that he just held up a mirror and they didn't like what they saw. They had gotten pretty comfortable and set in their ways. But Jesus wanted them to think on a deeper level; to get people to consider that if their brother or sister wasn't whole, they couldn't be whole. If my side of the lake is clean and your side of the lake is messed up, the whole lake is messed up. The reality of the kingdom is this: as long as our brothers or sisters aren't experiencing life and aliveness, then we aren't experiencing life and aliveness. There is no wholeness for anyone if there isn't wholeness for everyone. That calls us to action. Jesus simply wanted the faith community to think through these things and instead of taking an honest look at themselves, they became defensive with the message and tried to kill the messenger. To hear the challenge in these words without becoming defensive—that is, to hear an uncomfortable message without wanting to throw the messenger off a cliff might be the first step toward creating a healthier community of faith where everyone is welcome, where people look out for the needs of others.

The second challenge is to hear the words of Isaiah the way Jesus heard them: as a call to action. When Jesus rolled up the scroll, handed it back to the attendant, sat down and said, “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing” it was a way of saying, I’m doing this. I’m all in on my mission—I understand that God is calling me to bring good news to the poor because God has a heart for the poor, the captive, the blind, the oppressed—in all of their expressions. But Jesus didn’t come to do that alone; he didn’t come to call us as a team to sit on the sideline and watch him—the coach play. No, he came to model life and aliveness through love and compassion. Think of what is possible; how lives can be changed when a faith community like Prince of Peace rallies around a mission which proclaims “Christ has no body now but ours. No hands, no feet on earth but ours. Yours are the eyes through which he looks compassion on this world. Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good. Yours are the hands through 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 on earth but yours.”

So what does this mean for us moving forward? Two possibilities: A call to hear these ancient words in a brand new way... maybe like this: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon you, because he has anointed you to bring good news to the poor. He has sent you to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”

Watch the video from Sojourners found here:
sojo.net/media/riff-martin-neimoller-and-matthew-25

A Riff on Martin Neimoller and Matthew 25

First they came for the Muslims and Jews ...
and I said “I’m with them,”
even though I wasn’t a Muslim or a Jew.

Then they came for the immigrants ...
and I said “I’m with them,”
even though I wasn’t an immigrant.

They came for the Black Lives Matter activists
and the LGBTQ folks ...
and even though I was white and straight,
I said “I’m with them.”

When they came for the hungry
and for those who hunger for change
and hunger for righteousness,
I said “I’m with them.”

I’m with the thirsty
and the thirsty earth gasping for rain.
I’m with the stranger, the refugee,
all those who scale walls for freedom.

I’m with the naked,
those stripped of human dignity,
those without decent work,
without the cloth of human compassion.

I’m with the sick, the disabled, the addicted,
and all those dependent on the kindness of strangers.
I’m with the prisoners, the journalists, the detained
the deported, and the deplorables.

When they came for those, I said, “I’m with them.”
I AM with them. I’m with us.

– Words by Rose Marie Berger
(written on the feast day of the Holy Martyrs
Onesiphorus and Porphyrius, 284 AD)

Video by JP Keenan