



Prejudice

The trouble all began, at least in the United States, when the Indians started calling the white settlers “Pale Face.” Then the white folks imported the blacks from Africa and we just got paler by contrast. So as soon as the technology was available we built tanning salons to help us catch up. Meanwhile, prejudice raged because we could not celebrate the God ordained uniqueness of our fellow man.

We bare the same type of animosity toward those we deem offensive through various modes of sinful behavior. The prophet Jonah was an example of one who was devoted to God, but at the same time was not able to share God’s concern for the spiritual welfare of the pagan Ninevites.

God told him to go and preach repentance to these ones whose behavior was so vile, God had no alternative but to destroy them unless they repented and turned from their wickedness. Jonah, however, preferred to see them incinerated and refused God’s command to try and save them.

Jonah fled from God, but trying to hide from a Being who is omnipresent is an impossibility at best and as a prophet Jonah should have known better.

He boards a ship thinking that maybe a cruise might put enough distance between himself and the Almighty, but there was to be no smooth sailing for a soul in rebellion. In the midst of a mighty storm, Jonah’s integrity finally came to the surface and he acknowledged the fact that he was the reason the ship was endangered. To his credit, he was willing to allow them to throw him over board in order to save the lives of the crew and the passengers.

Jonah was pitched into the sea, where God had prepared “a great fish” to swallow the prophet, which was the taxi God used to deposit Jonah at his appointed destination.

Jonah was in the fish’s belly for three days and nights, which is the analogy Jesus used to relate to His death and resurrection. One scholar has suggested that Jonah may have actually died inside the fish, as he cried from “the belly of hell” suggesting that Jonah had expired and was pleading for his rescue from that place of torment.

In the meantime, God was preparing Jonah’s body inside the fish for the prophet’s debut before the Ninevites. I can imagine Jonah’s skin being bleached a ghostly white from the acids in the fish’s stomach. His hair may have developed a slight greenish tint from the algae and his lips turned into a deep shade of blue from the lack of oxygen that matched the dark circles under his sunken eyes.

At last when Jonah’s body had reached the Divine Beautician’s approval, the fish was instructed to burp Jonah’s body upon the beach.

Jonah was revived, and presumably heard God’s voice say gently, “Are you ready to obey me now?”

Jonah willingly answered, “Yes, Lord! I’ll go!” which should be our response to whatever God requires of us - if we have learned anything at all from Jonah’s example.

Jonah obediently goes to preach repentance to the dreaded Ninevites. He commanded their attention immediately as their eyes widened with horror at the ghostly white apparition with green hair and blue lips in their midst, wildly calling them to repent before God destroys the city.

Apparently the Ninevites received Jonah’s warning as from God and they repented.

Even after everything he had been through, Jonah still did not share God’s compassion for the Ninevites as we watch him waiting on a hill outside the city, hoping to see the place go up in smoke. It was going to be a long wait, because God honors His word, and repentance as He has promised, opens the door to His mercy.

We sit with Jonah on that hill in our lives, waiting for God to pour His wrath upon all those we think deserve it, and we suddenly find ourselves sitting in a congregation of piously religious souls waiting to hear a man named Jesus read the Scriptures for this morning’s Sabbath service (Luke 4:16-30).

Jesus takes the scroll and He reads, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the Gospel to the poor; He has sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised. To preach the acceptable year of the Lord” – Luke 4:18/ Isaiah 61:1,2.

Then we hear Him say that today “this Scripture is fulfilled in your ears.” He’s trying to break it to us gently that He is the promised Messiah of Israel. Then seeing the self-righteous pride in our hearts, He concludes the matter by telling us that the despised Samaritans are going to catch on to His truth a whole lot quicker than we will.

That’s too much to bear. How dare He even mention the word “Samaritan” within the walls of our beautifully white-washed sanctuary?

The pious congregation responds to His honesty by transforming into a vicious mob that attempts to murder the Son of God. (In some religious circles today, depending upon the congregation, the mention of an unfavored political party could invoke the same response).

God sees it all, you know. No matter how hard we try, we cannot disguise what we harbor in the inner chambers of our hearts; those ugly attitudes and prejudices that keep the individuals God has called us to reach at arm’s length.

We lower our heads; we’re beginning to see how it all applies to us at this moment, as we stare at the elements before us; the Bread and the Wine that reminds us of His sacrifice for the sinners that we are.

We make our confessions before Him at the foot of His cross. The last hymn is sung. It’s been a great service. We feel wonderful. We’ve dealt with our obvious atrocities and left them behind us, covered in His blood.

We gather together in the fellowship hall for some refreshments. We’re not really noticing that our conversations are

being overheard by a visitor to our church. He hears one of us say, "I am of Paul." Someone else counters with, "Well, I am of Apollos," and someone else adds proudly, "I follow Peter!"

"But I follow Jesus!"

One hyper looking fellow adds emphatically, "I follow Calvin!"

"I'm Arminian!"

"I am of Luther! I'm Lutheran!"

"I am a Catholic!"

"How did you get in here?"

"I'm a conservative!"

"Well, I'm a liberal!"

"So what are you doing in my church?"

"What are YOU doing in MY church?"

"I thought liberals were supposed to be tolerant."

Then we are all fairly horrified when someone has the audacity to admit that he is a P...P...P...Pentecostal!

The sweet unity we all experienced together a few moments before at the Lord's Table has been shattered. Not realizing that we have been segregating ourselves by cleaving to our denominational, and sometimes political boundaries, we find ourselves suddenly being reprimanded by our visitor, the Apostle Paul (I Cor. 1:11-12). He reminds us that Christ is not divided showing us that our behavior is merely revealing our carnality. His words have been designed to impale our perceived spirituality and we find the illusion of it disintegrating to the floor.

Then suddenly we notice another figure from the past marching across the sands of time in our direction. His pale face is gleaming in the light of our stained glass religiosity and he is looking at us with the same revulsion he reserved for the Ninevites. We all know what he is going to say before he even opens his mouth.

"Repent!"

I would like to close with a bit of prose entitled, "Honesty." Let us read it together. –

In honesty Jesus spoke, and the music of His words never skipped a note. He brought His song into the streets; He sang it in the temple, the synagogues – the churches. He flowed into our midst, loving us too much to leave us where we wanted to be.

He spoke, and the music of His words broke through our religious lies. He wouldn't stop, even though He knew His honesty would cost Him His own life.

He sat in the congregation, and at first they all assumed that He was just like them. And He said, "The kingdom of God has come upon you." Miracles danced from His being and the people still refused to believe Him. He saw through their complacency, and all their pompous piety. Then He pulled out His whip and overturned the tables of their business of religion.

His tongue was as powerful as a two-edged sword, tightly controlled by the love in His heart. He deftly wielded His weaponry, aimed to carve away our treasured carnality. He cast our swineherds into the sea – those things we sacrificed to the pagan idols of lust, indulgence and greed. Then in response to His kindness, we politely asked Him to leave.

Some of us followed Him professing our undying devotion and He turned to us and exposed our motives; "You seek Me not because you saw the miracles and desire the things of God, but

you prefer the earthly bread." And He spoke of the reality of only needing Him. "Eat My flesh and drink My blood, I am all you need." Then as most began to leave, He let them go, for He would never compromise His words to get them to stay – instead He chose to feed His sheep.

He became a mirror reflecting an image of who we really are in the light of His perfection. Withering there before Him, no longer able to hide behind our religious pretensions, we lower our eyes and begin to cry, "Forgive us. We have sinned." Then we feel the warmth of His smile. We feel His comforting touch as He gently wipes our tears away. We can look up into the mirror again, but this time we do not cower, for we have been cleansed by the repentance of tears shed in honesty.

Jesus sees the Person

For the Lord takes pleasure in His people: He will beautify the meek with salvation. – Psalm 149:4

There are many people who suffer from hereditary diseases that cause major facial disfigurements. In an interview with a woman whose face was severely marred by her affliction, she sadly made the comment that people did not see her as a person.

Every human being is a unique and precious creation of God. Yet, each one of us has been disfigured by our disease of sin. We all come short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23).

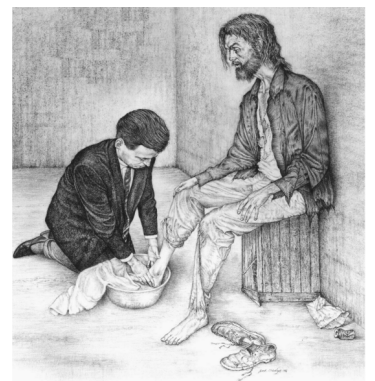
In the book of Hebrews, we see a portrait of Jesus as the highly exalted only begotten Son of God, who left His high estate for the sole purpose of identifying with mankind to purchase their redemption with His sacrifice. He is now our "merciful and faithful high priest." He permitted Himself to be severely marred and disfigured in order to take upon Himself our sins and remove them forever.

This One who was so willing to suffer for the people He loves, does not view the disfigurement of our sins, but sees beyond those deformities to seek, rescue and beautify our souls with His salvation. He peers through the disease of sin and treasures the person, no matter what we look like or who we are.

Jesus sees the person; and those who profess faith in Him, need to follow His example, look beyond the sin, and treasure every soul, no matter what they look like on the outside, or who they are on the inside. Love changes lives, and we are called to be reflections of Jesus' love in us, reaching out to bring as many disfigured and lonely souls as we can into His embrace.

Can we be like Jesus and look into the faces of those who are so disfigured by sin, and see the person that they can become when they are beautified by His salvation?

Let this mind be in you, Which was also in Christ Jesus: who being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: but made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant...Philippians 2:5-7



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