

January 27, 2019

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

When you read the Gospels, and particularly if you take the time to read one of the Gospels from beginning to end in one sitting [I HIGHLY recommend doing this someday...] you might start to note a few interesting things, things you may not notice if you just listen to the Gospel lessons on a Sunday morning. One of those somewhat startling things that jumps out – or at least has jumped out for me – is that everyone who meets Jesus either wants to follow him or kill him. Jesus ‘bores’ very few people.

When we dig around in the life of Saul, who is quickly going to become Paul, we see this very thing playing out. Saul knows the story of Jesus. Saul knows some of Jesus’s disciples and they know him. He was standing by at the stoning of Stephen. Saul definitely falls into the category of those who want to kill Jesus, only Jesus isn’t here – in Saul’s book, Jesus is already dead – so he wants to kill those who are continuing the story, this false, blasphemous, dangerously deluded story that Jesus is the fulfillment of the promises of Israel and that in Jesus of Nazareth we see God’s purposes for the world and for all humanity.

So, here’s Saul bumping along on his horse, and we know the story, he’s off to Damascus to root out these followers of this Jesus, these people who are saying that in Jesus we find the fulfillment of the hope of Israel [And we should stop here and think about what that fulfillment is all about. That God is going to restore the world and humanity with it. That God is going to merge God’s world into our world. That God is going to make our world holy. And that God is going to make the world safe for God’s chosen people, the Israelites.]. And Saul doesn’t believe this. He thinks this Jesus stuff is going to actually take the world in the *opposite* direction. He can’t imagine that Jesus has anything to say about the hope of Israel because he managed to get himself killed by the Romans, which is only a further sign that he was at best, misguided, and his followers are – for the purposes of God’s people – also dangerously misguided.

So Saul, bumping down the road on his horse is praying. He’s meditating. And a lot of people think he’s meditating on heaven, the very thing he wants to see come to life on earth. Remember, Saul – like every good Jewish boy and girl –

wants to see God's world merged with our world. So he's meditating on God's world, and probably the images of that world we get in Ezekiel's writings that he's thinking about. And it is, by any account, a crazy vision. God's world really isn't like our world [which is part of the problem]. And he's meditating on this and he, Saul, sees the Lord. And the Lord reveals himself to be Jesus. And this literally blows him off his horse. And at this moment, Saul has to come to grips with who he is and what he's doing. So in this moment, he's going to have to decide what he's going to do about Jesus. Is he going to follow him or is he going to kill him?

So what is it about Jesus that makes us feel this way? What is it that makes us want to follow him or kill him, make the nations want to follow him or kill him? This is the question that Paul will rummage around in for the rest of his life. And what he comes up with is that Jesus makes us human. Jesus makes us truly human which, when you think about it for a bit, is often the last thing we want. Jesus gets us to embrace our humanity and the humanity of the people around us. Paul will talk about the ways we've failed our humanity – greed, deviousness, licentiousness and the like – and the ways we've lived into it – love, joy peace. And when you start to think about this, this is the stuff that puts everyone on edge.

Here's where Paul finally got with some of this. In his letter to the Philippians he says that Jesus, "did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant..." [Phil 2:5-11].

Jesus takes on the role of not God, but a human. And Paul would come to see that it was in his humanity that Jesus makes us human. Sometimes, we call this being saved.

May God allow us to see a vision of Jesus. And even when it places us in conflict, may Jesus give us the power to live fully into his vision of humanity.

Amen.

Pastor Erdos

St Luke 21:10-19. Acts 9:1-22