

July 14 - 15th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Last week when I gave Quinn some flags for the Fourth of July, I mentioned that a discussion about the dynamics of the intersection between politics and prophecy was for another time. This is the time. John the Baptist died a cruel and unjust death because he challenged the political leader Herod on a moral issue concerning his marriage. John boldly, and perhaps unadvisedly, told Herod that it was unlawful for him to marry his brother's wife because of Leviticus 20:21: "And if a man shall take his brother's wife, it is an unclean thing: he hath uncovered his brother's nakedness; they shall be childless." Every literate Israelite knew that verse, everyone in Herod's realm knew what Herod had done, but only John said something, and he made bitter enemies of Herod's family.

In our text, the young daughter rushed in to ask for the head of John, and added, "I want it on a platter." When Martin Luther King, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, or Bishop Oscar Romero spoke out against injustice, they were pointing out the obvious, things that everybody knew. They arose from the silent majority and spoke up, and all three of them, like John, were martyred for the cause of truth.

Now, there are ways to be more diplomatic than these folks were, but the bottom line is our Lord is for social justice, and if so, we should be. We do not do it for church growth or any advantage for ourselves; we are involved because the writers of scripture spilled the most ink over this issue.

I referred last week to the hometown sermon that almost got Jesus stoned while preaching on Isaiah. "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised." He then said, "this is fulfilled in your ears." However, as my wife says, it is best to "keep reading." After John the Baptist is imprisoned, he sends some of his disciples out to ask Jesus, "Are you the

one or should we seek another?" Jesus answers, "Go your way, and tell John what things you have seen and heard; how the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, to the poor the gospel is preached." Jesus reaffirms but also reframes the application of social justice. Tellingly, he omits "freeing the captives." Surely that had to disappoint John, who was suffering in a cell. I wonder if Jesus regretted that, for after the disciples left, Jesus turned to the crowd and said this: "I tell you the truth, of all who have ever lived, none is greater than John the Baptist. For before John came, all the prophets and the law of Moses looked forward to this present time. And if you are willing to accept what I say, he is Elijah, the one the prophets said would come." Wow, high praise. John died, but justice did not die with him. To speak on justice is always difficult if not dangerous.

I was at church when one of our dearest friends stormed out over the pastor advocating on behalf of the Sanctuary movement. No action by the church was taken. Merely the endorsement of the concept ensured my good friend would never darken the door of a church again. If the actions of justice are so dangerous and divisive, what approach can communities of faith take?

I believe if justice has a chance, bridges must be built.

I was at a Lutheran preaching class when the leader spoke about forgiving third world debt during the Catholic campaign for a year of Jubilee to help the poor. She mentioned that with a "red" church, you needed to be more nuanced. A conservative (red) church would say, they got themselves into that debt, and we simply can't afford to bail them out. She suggested that you mention that Reagan had bailed out the savings and loans, forgiving their debt; thus, there was precedent for such action from a conservative icon. She also mentioned that the bailout of the Savings and Loans cost more than the World Bank forgiving Third World debt would cost. There may be another way to build a bridge based on the parable of the Bridge.

There was a bridge over a very dangerous stream, and due to lack of repair, many people fell off the bridge, were swept away in dangerous

waters, and were in peril of their lives. One group of people formed rescue squads who dove into the river as the people were washed downstream and, with great courage, rescued them. Another group asked, "Why is the bridge in such poor repair? Let's invest some capital in an upstream solution." So they advocated with the Bridge commission; they got blowback from local landowners and anti-tax people, they received threats from people who wanted historical preservation of the bridge, but the bridge was deadly and dangerous, and everybody knew it. Both groups are right in some ways, both groups are risking much. Perhaps the answer to injustice is to combine downstream and upstream solutions.

To not only feed the hungry but advocate for legislation.

To combat global warming, or weather weirdness, it would be good to be careful with our own energy lifestyle choices and to advocate for legislation.

Trinity has done both over the years; the shelter and the showers are on-the-ground approaches but are also part of Urban Works, Casa, and other advocacy groups.

There is a long list on the back of the bulletin.

There are matters for the truth, but the arc of the universe heads toward justice. You see, the folks who travel on that arc are not in a sprint, or a marathon; they are in a relay race.

We at Trinity walk in the footsteps of those who came before us, who walked in the footsteps of Jesus, and we will hand off the search for truth and our work for justice to the next generation, and the next, and the next.