

FEBRUARY 17TH, 2019: SIXTH SUNDAY OF THE YEAR

Jeremiah 17:5-8 I Corinthians 15:12, 16-20 Luke 6:17, 20-26

Paul employs an argument in our I Corinthians reading that might raise a few of our eyebrows. He doesn't reason the way we'd expect him to reason. We'd suppose he'd say, "If Jesus didn't rise from the dead, then we're not going to rise from the dead." But he turns the argument around. He maintains, "If we're not going to rise from the dead, then neither did Jesus rise from the dead."

Some Corinthian Christians seem to believe Jesus rose from the dead, but they don't see what that has to do with their rising from the dead. I, for instance, believe Bill Gates is a multi-billionaire. But his wealth doesn't put an extra dollar in my billfold. What does Jesus' resurrection have to do with me?

In Paul's mind, it has everything to do with me. If I've made the decision to become another Christ, then our lives overlap. What happens to one happens to the other, and vice versa. If I suffer, then the risen Jesus suffers; if the risen Jesus rejoices, then I rejoice. The key to understanding this passage is that Paul's referring to the risen Jesus, not the historical Jesus. The latter was a free, Jewish man; the former, as much a slave as free, Gentile as Jew, woman as man. That means a non-Jewish, female slave can be part of risen Jesus' body, even though the historical Jesus couldn't identify with any of those aspects.

Just read a transcript of the [11 sermons the "papal preacher" recently delivered](#) to the American bishops during their Mundelein retreat. I was especially interested in the one in which he treated celibacy. He started out presuming something no Scripture scholar presumes: Jesus wasn't married. We have no idea whether or not this Galilean carpenter was married. Our biblical sources are silent on the subject. This not only tells us Jesus' marital status wasn't important for our sacred authors, but the preacher might have been dealing with the "wrong" Jesus. If he was solely concerned with the situation of the historical Jesus, he logically would have had to give separate conferences on how Jesus' being a free person, a Jew and a man paralleled the bishops' ministry. If he treated those topics, no one provided the transcripts. I presume he preached on celibacy simply because "we've got it," and he felt obligated to defend it.

The preacher wasn't alone in employing such biblical methodology. We hear it frequently, for instance, from those defending a male only priesthood. Such reasoning flies in the face of Paul's theology. How can one argue priests must mirror the maleness of Jesus if they're disciples of the risen Jesus?

Like Jeremiah, we're constantly trying to achieve life through our faith. But the life the prophet discovered in a relationship with Yahweh, we discover in a relationship with the risen Jesus.

There's only one way to do that: by dying with Jesus. That's why today's gospel pericope is so significant. Luke's Sermon on the Plain has the same beliefs as Matthew's Sermon on the Mount. They're taken from the same source. Both stress that the only way to rise with Jesus is to first die with Jesus. We don't necessarily do this physically, we achieve it by giving ourselves to others. But the life-giving results are always the same. Sharing our wealth and food with those around us, for instance, brings a wealth and satisfaction we can't acquire any other way. And the best (and most demanding) part about it, anyone can do it. The risen Jesus has taken away all human restrictions. If we can pull that off, then the person who first achieved it – and with whom we're one – must also have pulled it off.

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FEBRUARY 24TH, 2019: SEVENTH SUNDAY OF THE YEAR

I Samuel 26:7-9, 12-13, 22-23 I Corinthians 15:45-49 Luke 6:27-38

In those dark days before I began studying Scripture, I thought a “holy” person was someone who exuded pious, other-worldly characteristics. Their eyes always turned heavenward, their thoughts constantly on “good” things. But eventually I started to realize that holy has just a one-word biblical definition: “other.” A scriptural holy person is someone who’s different from others around him or her. It doesn’t necessarily have anything to do with faith or religion. Some cultures, for instance, regard people who are severely mentally ill to be holy.

When Jesus asks his followers to be holy as he is, he’s simply asking them to risk being different. If you’re going to imitate him, difference is the name of the game.

David starts off today’s three readings by doing something so different that it creates amazement among his followers. He’s being pursued by the present king, Saul, who’s rightly convinced David is leading an insurrection against him. Saul’s so convinced of David’s treason that he leads 3,000 men into the desert of Ziph to track him down and kill him.

Yet when the tables are fortunately turned, David – against his soldiers’ advice - spares Saul’s life. This passage, and the “bathroom cave” episode in I Samuel 24, seem to have been prompted by the sacred author’s pro-monarchy theology. Because of that bias, he presents David as refusing to do something the vast majority of Israelites would have had no problem doing.

Christians are also expected to engage in unique behavior, not because of any pro-monarchy stance but because they, like their mentor, are unique. In today’s I Corinthians pericope Paul shares one of the reasons he buys into that theology. In God’s plan of salvation he is convinced Jesus is the “second man,” - the “last Adam.” What the first Adam screwed up, Jesus rectifies. But he and his followers can only achieve this not by just objecting to what the first man did, but by actually doing the opposite of what the first man did.

Luke gives us a partial list of those unique things in our gospel passage.

Presuming Luke and Matthew never knew about one another’s gospel, both must have employed a common source for Matthew’s Sermon on the Mount and Luke’s Sermon on the Plain. Scholars believe that yet-to-be-found source was a pre-gospel scroll chock full of Jesus’ sayings. (Usually referred to as the “Q.”) Both evangelists make generous use of it.

The teaching which holds today’s sayings together is, “Do to others as you would have them do unto you.” In Luke’s mind that simple command includes some drastic behavior. Turning one’s cheek, giving, not lending, loving, not hating, forgiving, not condemning, and giving without measuring. Such persons can’t help but stand out from those who are the opposite.

One lap from the finish of the 1989 Indianapolis 500, Emerson Fittipaldi “spun out” Al Unser Jr., the leader. Unser immediately released his restraints, climbed out of his car and waited on the track apron for Fittipaldi to come by to receive the checked flag. Everyone speculated on what gesture Unser would give to the man who had just cost him the world’s most prestigious auto race. But to the fans surprise, [Unser gave Fittipaldi a totally unexpected thumbs up!](#)

When reporters eventually caught up with Unser and asked about his thumbs up, he smiled and answered, “Well, if I did what people thought I was going to do, they’d have forgotten it in 24 hours. But I figured everyone will remember what I did just now for a long time. It’ll make all the highlight reels.”

I trust some of the unexpected things we’ll do in imitating Jesus will also make the highlight reels – the reels that really count.

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