

Jesus Drags Us Along

We are entering into the season of Pentecost, traditionally thought of as the season of church growth. When framed in this fashion and we look at the readings from a community growth aspect, we may get a slightly different understanding of the readings. Normally we look at today's Gospel reading from the perspective of Jesus and how the Pharisees were reacting to what He was doing. The examples of the leader whose daughter had died and the woman who was hemorrhaging are seen as examples of what can happen when we trust in Jesus. While these are fine examples of faith in Jesus, I would like to take a little different approach to this text and see what it may have been like from the disciples' point of view.

I have often mentioned that the games that the world plays are like a big king of the hill game where the one at the top, the one who has the power makes the rules and uses the power they have to keep and increase their power. They may enlist others who would help them keep their power because they know that on their own they could not topple the king and see the king as a way to get power for themselves. Barriers are placed so that it makes it harder for others to try to get the power away from 'the king.' More refined nuances of this game involve ways where fear is generated between groups that don't have power in order to keep them from uniting against the king and taking the power. Additionally, false hills could be generated so as to distract those without power to pursue avenues going up hills that lead nowhere.

These games of king-of-the-hill are played in nearly all levels of society. People routinely will try to get whatever power over others that they can and then find ways to keep that power. If you look at any kind of community or any size of community you would be able to recognize this game that is being played. The

Pharisees played these games themselves and tried to lord it over others in telling them what they needed to do; which was to strictly follow the Jewish law which they interpreted for the people. They were the kings of this little hill of Jewish society and they were not going to begin to let someone else, especially an outsider, usurp any of that authority.

Along comes Jesus and He not only does not play their game, but plays an entirely different game. Notice that whenever Jesus touches someone who is unclean in any way, that the person who is unclean becomes clean while Jesus does not become unclean. This state of clean versus unclean was very critical to the Pharisaic line of thinking and using their power. However, the issue that the Pharisees have with Jesus is never about being clean or unclean; rather it is about following the law. They do not even dispute the miracles that Jesus performs and try to discredit Jesus in calling Him a hoax. It is these actions by Jesus that strains the tension between the 'powers that be' and Jesus which eventually leads to the protection of their power and staying on the hill by eliminating Jesus.

But what about the disciples who were with Jesus when He ate with Matthew and the other tax collectors and sinners? There is a saying that you are known by the company that you keep. Granted, the disciples were not much higher in the societal pecking order than the tax collectors and sinners, but they did have a status above these two unsavory groups. I would think that maybe some of them were thinking about their own reputation if it was found out that they were at this meal, possibly bringing shame to their families. Would their friends and families think that they were supporting the Roman cause and agreed that it was okay for the tax collectors to make money off of their fellow Jews by charging their neighbors higher taxes? Did they not think much about it until the Pharisees came

and said something, thinking that they were caught and would be exposed? I would think that these and many other questions may have entered their minds when this meal took place, questions which may have made the disciples a little uneasy.

But when you examine how Jesus behaved and answered the Pharisees and anyone else who questioned Jesus' motives, I could see where the disciples could be comfortable with what Jesus was doing. Some may have thought that this was the game that Jesus was playing and in the end Jesus would end up the king of the hill and they would be in positions to protect Jesus's power and get some for themselves. While Jesus was about tearing down artificial barriers between people, Jesus was not about reconstructing new barriers. Jesus was about playing a game that is not hierarchal, but rather is flat, where no one person has more power than the next person.

After a lifetime of playing a game based on power, who has that power, where one fits in that power game, how that power is used over others and that there were winners and losers in this game; the disciples are dragged by Jesus into another game. This new game that Jesus plays is one that is flat, where power is used to help others up rather than to keep others down. While it may have been initially uncomfortable for the disciples to be dragged into this new game and the 'rules' that Jesus used were so different from the other game, the Biblical record shows that eventually, they accepted this new game from Jesus and embraced what it meant for them and everyone.

How is it that Jesus is dragging us into this 'new' game which He is playing. Actually, it isn't new it is just the way that God intended when creation occurred. We may be dragged to a physical location which we had no dreams of going to. For example, I, a suburban boy from the Buffalo, NY area, had never dreamed of living

in rural Minnesota. However, God had other plans for me, so here I am. But Jesus may be dragging us in other directions, not in a physical sense, but in an approach to engaging others. We hear of stories how people had changed their perspective towards a group that is unlike they are. When they were younger, they may have been prejudiced against a particular group, but something happened to them where they learned to see that group as a collection of individuals and in getting to know individuals, they put aside their prejudices and see others in a different light. In short, Jesus may be dragging us across barriers that have been erected to keep others down simply because of an 'accident of birth' in which the person had no choice of who they are.

Like those first disciples, we may be comfortable in our traditions, in our way of doing things. Maybe Jesus is dragging us into a new future that takes those traditions and incorporates them into something new that suddenly opens our appreciation for life and others around us. Perhaps Jesus is dragging us into a future where God is at the center of our lives and we do those things that are God's will, not worrying about our own needs because we have the confidence that God will make sure that they are met as we help meet others' needs. That is where we find the Good News - that when we allow Jesus to drag us to those places and attitudes that Jesus knows best and wishes to take us, that things will work out for us, that we will have a new eye towards life and an open heart for all.

YouTube links:

Gospel and Sermon:

Service: