

To be Christ Like  
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Sunday, February 10, 2007

One of the unique things about Matthew's interaction with Jesus in today's Gospel reading is that there is a reminder that Jesus' ministry was always on the go. Jesus never stayed settled too long because he was on a mission to spread the Good News. Jesus was busy visiting cities and villages, proclaiming a new message, a new hope, and a renewed passion for the presence of God on earth and through each person.

Jesus, by nature didn't wait for the people to come to him; he took a message of justice, compassion and reconciliation to the people. Jesus fostered a message of not waiting until every situation was just right before he entered because wherever Jesus was, wherever Jesus taught, there was often discomfort. He didn't wait for ease, he went to where there was dis-ease and offered a healing touch.

The moment of dis-ease comes in this morning's reading in three different scenes: 1. Jesus calls Matthew, a Roman appointed tax collector, to follow him. 2. After calling Matthew, Jesus decides to have a meal with Matthew and his friends in Matthew's home; and 3. The local religious leaders asking "why does your teacher eat with the tax collectors and riff-raff?"

As was often the case, Jesus' actions made folks uncomfortable. Jesus was not acting the way that folks thought he ought to act as a religious leader. Jesus was breaking the "rules and customs ... established to support the good order of an institution, community *and* society"<sup>1</sup>[1].

Jesus, calling an unlikely person to come follow him and to join his ministry and by then eating in the home of Matthew, the tax collector along with the riff-raff, this was an act that made folks uncomfortable. Jesus was performing out of the norm.

Through his actions, I believe that Jesus was establishing what noted theologian Dr. Carter Heyward calls "mutual relationships".

In this realm, Heyward says "mutuality is much more than right relation between friends, lovers or colleagues. Mutuality is the creative basis of our lives, the world, and God. It is the dynamic of our life together in the world insofar as we are fostering justice and compassion."<sup>2</sup>[2]

I believe that in this particular setting this is what Jesus was doing, reaching out to the Other in order to establish "mutual relationships". Like Jesus, modern saints like Mother Theresa, Martin Luther King Jr. and modern heroes like Reverend Elder Troy Perry, took on the task of changing the world through mutual relationship by breaking down walls and building up hope.

Jesus took the time to reveal the presence of God, through his action, so that it was felt at the point of human need. Jesus reached out to touch those that society's privileged had cast out and looked down upon. The message that Jesus offered destabilized everyone. Our Gospel reading today finds Jesus destabilizing not one but two communities, the Pharisees and the people whom Jesus chose to eat with.

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<sup>1</sup>[1] Carter Heyward, *Saving Jesus*, 137

<sup>2</sup>[2] Ibid 62

Jesus' message was not one of divide and conquer, rather it was one of building up communities so that their differences need not separate them from being agents of God here on earth and from being agents of change.

For the past few Sundays, our readings, sermons and Spirit and Truth reflections have been focused on the 8 Points of Progressive Christianity. These 8 points are a set of values or principles that a lot of our Metropolitan Community Churches have signed on to over the past years and they have become part of their DNA, right along with their Vision, Mission and Core Values Statements.

Our point today reminds us that we are to invite all people to participate in our community and worship life without insisting that they become like us in order to be acceptable. I believe that to be one of the strongest characteristics of the Metropolitan Community Churches as we invite people to join us on our journey to make the world a better place through our Inter-Religious efforts.

I also believe that statement affirms the action of Jesus in Matthew's reading today. Jesus invited people to be with him, regardless of their past or current situation, regardless of their religious beliefs, regardless of their political ties and that same invitation is extended to us today. I believe that Jesus invites us to be in community with each because it is in community that we can develop mutual relationship as we do our part to make this a better world for all people.

To try to be Christ like and the hand of God in the world challenges me at the very core sometimes. In some moments and situations it is easier than in others to be Christ like. To be Christ like destabilizes my reality of what I can and cannot do. To be Christ like destabilizes my perceptions of global justice to the point of asking how is that we can spend billions of dollars on wars and space travel when we can't end something as simple as world hunger or guarantee that a child has a place to sleep at night other than the streets.

For me to be Christ like means that I want to destabilize the norm. I want to see more medical advancements. I want to see the issues related to dislocated individuals resolved. I want to see every person in the world with access to needed medication. I want to see the homophobic violence in Jamaica ended. I want to see the Florida Anti Gay Marriage Act defeated. I want the students at Ponce de Leon High School in Florida afforded the right to wear pro-gay symbols, even if they are straight.

For me to be Christ like means that I want to destabilize the status quo by challenging racism, sexism, homophobia, able-ism, transphobia, and other oppressions. I want to work for justice, compassion and reconciliation, just like Jesus.

I believe that we are the hands of God that reach out to touch those who are hurting, just like Jesus.

I believe that we are called to be in community with those who are unlike us, just like Jesus.

I believe that we are called to carry the message of hope to other places like Jamaica, Miami and right here in Fort Lauderdale, just like Jesus.

I believe that we are the feet of God called to carry the good news to all people.

I believe that we are people of God that believe as Psalm 46 says, “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should be changed.” Because we here at the Sunshine Cathedral have taken on the task of change by Sharing the Light with the World. And when we share our Light, people’s lives are transformed and the world is forever changed. Amen

My experience has been to be like Jesus hasn't been easy.

Now, there have more good days than bad, but when those bad days comes it is enough to questions everything I believe about what it means to be Christ like.

But one thing I have always been assured of is that in those moments

That I am ready to give up,  
That I am ready to quite

is that Jesus meets me where I need Jesus the most. Jesus is at my point of need.

I don't know what your point of need is this morning but I want to offer to you the opportunity to allow Jesus to meet you there.

*I am the hands of Christ!  
I am the heart of Christ!  
I am a person of worth!  
I am blessed by the power of God!  
I am filled with the love of God!  
I am filled with hope!  
I willingly share my good with all!  
And so it is!*