

*Christ Crucified*  
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Sunshine Cathedral, Lent 3 2009  
1 Corinthians 1.22-25; John 2.13-16, 18

An anonymous person writing what we now call John's Gospel shows Jesus responding to injustice in a very dramatic way. He sees people being cheated in the Temple. They make pilgrimages to the Temple and at the Temple they want to make sacrifices. The idea of slaughtering animals to please God offends our sensibilities, but it was the custom of that culture at that time.

One can't always travel a long distance with an animal; so the Temple offered a service – you could buy your sacrificial animal there. But to buy anything in the Temple you have to use Temple currency...nothing with any image on it, because graven images are forbidden in the Ten Commandments.

So, first, you have to change your money. Well, I'm sure some money-changers charged a fee for this. So you have to pay to change your money. You then have to use your Temple money to buy an animal. Then you give the animal to the Temple. You've paid an exchange fee, bought an animal, and donated the animal all before you've walked in the door.

Now, Jesus would have believed in the biblical concept of tithing, that is, giving a percentage of your first fruits. Jesus doesn't mind that you may have to contribute something. He's not condemning gift shops or bake sales or car washes or ticketed dinners...those things are optional.

If you don't want to buy a bible in the gift shop...don't.

If you don't want to buy a chance to win some fabulous prize...don't.

If you don't want to play bingo...don't. But the sacrifice was part of worship for these people.

It would be like me telling you that you can come in for the sermon, but if you want to hear the choir anthem, that will be \$5 at the door.

Or, we'd be happy for everyone to receive communion, but you have to give us a dollar for the wafer.

Creating opportunities to give is necessary, and Jesus never condemns supporting your house of worship. But charging people to worship, and then cheating them at that...Jesus reacts strongly to that sort of exploitation.

The authorities want a miracle to prove that God is OK with Jesus' behavior, and in any case, the powers that be will be keeping an eye on Jesus from now on. His behavior will be closely scrutinized and of course, that will eventually lead to his arrest, trial, conviction, and execution.

Now, about 40 years before John's story is being written, The Apostle Paul writes a letter to the Corinthian church, and he actually shares some of the themes from John's story (or maybe John borrows from Paul, since Paul wrote his first).

People in Corinth are saying, "I belong to Paul." Others are saying, "I belong to Apollos." Still others are saying, "I belong to Kephass." A few say, "I belong to Christ." But aren't Paul's people Christ-followers? Aren't Peter's people Christ-followers? And so Paul said, "Can Christ be divided?" Whether the message comes from Kephass or Apollos or Paul or whoever, isn't it the message they have found in Christ, and really, shouldn't that be the focus? The message? The mission?

So Paul throws a big monkey wrench into all this preacher adulation. While the people are praising the preachers, and frankly, some of the preachers are probably enjoying it, getting their ego needs met from it, Paul suggests that being a Christ-follower really isn't about gaining prestige, power, or privilege. Following Jesus can get you run out of town, or enjoying the

hospitality of a jail cell; but the Jesus movement involves risk and sacrifice; it's not about perks, and pats on the head.

Paul drives this point home by reminding the Corinthians about the ugly truth of the crucifixion. The central event for those early Christians was a defeat! Crucifixion was terrifying. It instilled fear in to the hearts of conquered people, and it was meant to.

That's why the cross wouldn't become widely used Christian symbol until 300 years after Jesus' death, when Constantine used it as a sort of talisman. So imagine how shocking it was for Paul to tell them, "we don't focus primarily on miracles or on philosophy, we preach Christ crucified!"

We were waiting for a messiah...a warrior king raised up by God to lead us in war against our oppressors so we could reclaim our land and our independence. But it never happened.

However, some of us so experienced the grace of God in the person of Jesus, we decided that perhaps he was the messiah, the Christ, the anointed of God...but his anointing didn't lead to revolution, it led to execution. Our witness is that somehow, Jesus' execution wasn't the end of his story...he still lives in our hearts, in our imaginations, in our faith, in our daily lives...Golgotha didn't destroy his significance or his sacred value or even our access to the divine spark we first encountered in him and that we found within ourselves because of him.

No fancy arguments. No magic. Just a faith that will empower people to live so boldly that it might get them killed, and they do it anyway. It's a stumbling block to people who think being executed in such a manner is beyond humiliating, and its foolishness to people who would prefer to have erudite debates over fine wine in some salon where the intelligentsia meet.

But, Paul says, this is our faith...to stand up to systems of oppression, of privilege, of power; it might get you killed, but our God is somehow even in that...and will somehow raise us above it.

We don't have magic over the power system, the powers and principalities, and we aren't to expect to have an honored place within the power system; we are to challenge systems of oppression and injustice even when doing so could cost us everything. That's what we mean by preaching Christ crucified as the reality of our faith.

We are sometimes tempted to philosophize and theologize and wax poetic about Jesus rather than following his example. To us, no less than to the Corinthians, Paul says, "we preach Christ crucified!" We preach action. We preach risk. We preach sacrifice for the good of the community and the world. We preach standing up to those who would hold us back or keep us down. We preach Christ crucified.

We preach Christ crucified when we name and challenge racism...in the world, and in our own community, and in our own hearts.

We preach Christ crucified when we name and challenge male privilege...in the world, and in our own community, and in our own hearts.

We preach Christ crucified when we name and challenge transphobia...in the world, and in our own community, and in our own hearts.

We preach Christ crucified when we name and challenge the fear and hatred of same-gender love and attraction...in the world, and in our own community, and in our own hearts.

When we remember the poor, the lonely, those who are struggling with disease, those who have been abandoned by their families, those who have been targeted by religion or politics simply for being who they are, those who benefit from their gender or race or class without even acknowledging that such systemic injustice is inherently unfair...when we remember and when we speak up and when we act in positive and intentional ways, we are preaching Christ crucified. And when we do that, we are also embracing the hope of Resurrection for our lives and for our

world. We have been trusted to preach Christ crucified, and to offer the hope of Resurrection. This is the good news. Amen.