

Most Christians choose to believe that Jesus had a healing and comforting effect upon people. And sometimes he did, but more often than not, Jesus had an unsettling effect upon people. More often than not, he left people scratching their heads and wondering what had hit them. He invited people to think, act, and believe in new ways. Jesus pushed people to do different things and to look at the world in a totally different light, and much of the time it was far from comforting.

Today’s Lectionary text from Luke has Jesus teaching a crowd by what was called the Lake of Gennesarret, which we know today as the Sea of Galilee. He notices 2 fishing boats, and decides to get into one of the boats belonging to Simon Peter so that he can continue speaking to the crowd from the boat. Then he asked Simon to sail out from the shore, and there drop the net into the water. Simon is annoyed by all of this. They have been fishing all night and haven’t caught a single thing. He knows this is no use, it will only be a huge waste of time to try to fish in a different place.

But reluctantly, he does what Jesus tells him to do. And then, the impossible happens. They caught so many fish that their nets were beginning to break. They signaled to the other boat to come and help them. Both boats were so full of fish that they began to sink. It is unbelievable, and prompts Simon Peter to say to Jesus, “Leave! I cannot handle this holiness!” What a delightfully honest response: “I cannot handle this holiness.” He seems to be saying, “My life was fine before you came along, so go, don’t distract me with miracles!” Most of us do just fine when things are familiar and manageable. But when our world is shaken up by a bit of holiness, it is terribly unsettling and uncomfortable. We realize that there just might be a whole lot more to this world than meets the eye, and that things are far more complicated and mysterious than we realize.

The ministry of Jesus was characterized by innovation, as he encourages people to continually see things in a different light. He heals people on the Sabbath, he raises the dead, eats with sinners, befriends prostitutes and tax collectors, does and says things that are just appalling. He turns everything upside down and inside out. In his eyes the forgotten become precious, the scorned become special, the haughty become humble. He could look at a woman and see not a prostitute, but a princess. He could

look at a man and see not a blind beggar, but a lovable child of God. He could look at a hated tax collector and see longing and loneliness.

Jesus teaches us that the real journey of discovery is not to new places, but in seeing the same people and things with new eyes. Seeing things in a completely different light is what the spiritual journey is all about. It can be heartbreaking and exhausting to see the world through the eyes of Christ. It is just too much holiness.

Think about a time in your life when you were forced to see things in a different light. You get sick, lose a job or someone you love. Suddenly you are forced to look at the world through the eyes of “cancer” or “widow” or “the unemployed.” Or, you visit a foreign country, and even the simplest things like ordering food or finding a bathroom take enormous effort. Have any of you tried to drive in a country where you stay on the left side of the street, and the steering wheel is on the right side of the car? Experiences like that are similar to learning to walk and talk all over again—they force us to pay attention to things we preciously took for granted. Spend a day in a wheelchair and you will see the world in a different light.

We were so fortunate to get to know Sanne, our exchange student from the Netherlands. She helped our family see things in a different light. She taught us about the importance of St. Nicholas Day on December 6, and Santa’s crafty helper Black Piet. She had never seen an avocado before. She was amused by some of our verbal expressions, and she loved to play games. She noticed that the most popular sizes for french fries in America are Large, Extra Large, and Extra-Extra Large! Seeing the world through her eyes helped us see the world in a different light. It is good for us to be reminded that our version of reality is not the only version there is. It is like learning to sing a song in a different key. Now we are going to sing a very familiar song to a different tune.

(Amazing Grace to the tune Where Love Is Found #643)

The point of Christianity in my opinion, is to constantly sing a different tune. Our song of faith is radically different from the songs of the world. The songs of the world are about happiness, romance, money, success. Our song is revolutionary and counter-cultural, where meekness, gentleness, and forgiveness are sacred values. Our song says love your enemies, pray for those who persecute you, serve the poor, make disciples. Our tune that says pay attention to the world and to yourself—listen, learn, grow and become

better than you are now. It is a very strange and haunting song that we are trying to sing. It is one that the world often does not want to hear.

A book that Jim Marshall loaned me called *Jesus, Mean and Wild*, reminded me once again how completely we have failed to see who Jesus really is. We have sugar coated the radical, counter-cultural Jesus. We have created him in our image to the point where he is nearly unrecognizable. The Jesus we know and love is meek and mild, not mean and wild, and he is the nicest person we can imagine: understanding, sensitive, and compassionate. But he is also without backbone, without substance. Someone to be worshiped but not followed, adored but not taken seriously. C.S. Lewis said that every generation gets something right about God and something wrong about God. When it comes to Jesus I am beginning to think that the Christian Church has gotten more things wrong about him than right. He was not one to keep rules or uphold the status quo, and he was not always a very sympathetic figure. He is a stunning and powerful force that should take our breath away. He is completely beyond our imagining, a mystery to hide our faces from, a challenge of goodness to haunt us, and a promise of hope to make our darkest nights bearable. We need to discover him again, as if for the first time.

Jay Bakker has a strange grasp of who Jesus was, and it is causing him to sing a different tune. He's Jim and Tammy Faye's son, of the Heritage USA fraud scandal. Jay now has a ministry that may be more substantial and significant than his father's ever was. He sees Christ primarily in the outcast and forgotten.

Jay Bakker holds a Bible study every Tuesday evening on the second floor of Safehouse, a Christian outreach charity located behind a metal fence in downtown Atlanta. He's a 23-year-old high school dropout with a ring in his eyebrow and a tattooed cross on his arm, and he stresses acceptance and the unconditional love of Christ, a gospel uniquely suited to kids like him - Goths and punks and hippies - who seem so terribly fragile and unable to fit in anywhere.

"Jay Bakker's hope is that someday everyone will belong," writes Katherine Marsh in Rolling Stone magazine. "But for this to happen, people must start to listen and forgive. They must start to accept." Standing among the marked and the pierced, surrounded by the outcasts he loves, Jay reveals who he really is: "Listen, I dropped out of high school," he says. "I can barely write. I'm white trash. I wear leather bracelets and tattoos. But God has given me a gift - to relate to people and to see the common sense of God and the radical message of Jesus. It's not about 'Don't do this, don't do that.' God is saying, 'You guys are accepted, and you are loved.' God is saying, 'Change yourselves and you can change the world.' That just might be too much holiness for some folks to take.

Simon Peter spoke for many of us when he cried out to Jesus, "Leave,

I cannot handle this holiness. Leave me to myself.” Give me back my safe, selfish, comfortable little world, don’t make me stretch myself and grow! I don’t want to see things in a different light. It can be a fearful thing to come into the presence of the living God. I think William Sloane Coffin was correct when he said, “What we fear most in ourselves is not the evil, but the good. Because the good is so demanding.”

Right after they caught all of those fish, Jesus invited Peter to follow him, and fish for human beings. He offered those common fishermen a richer, fuller life that they dreamed possible. And they dropped everything to follow him. Jesus offers the same to us. The choice is ours.

Following Jesus is incredibly demanding. It requires something from us, inviting us to see the world in a totally different light. But it is a light that the deepest darkness cannot overcome. It is a light to live by, and a light to die by. May God grant us the grace and vision to see this world through the eyes of Christ.

Let us pray:

Help us gracious God, to embrace and accept all of the holiness this world has to offer. Help us to see reality in fresh and new ways. Transform us through the sacrament we are about to receive, so that our lives might radiate the love, hope, and peace of the living Christ. Amen.