

Commentary on the Gospel for Fri, Aug 29th 2014

Today's scripture readings are an interesting mix. They speak of the message of the cross and tell the story of the demise of John the Baptist. In 1 Corinthians, Paul tells the reader "The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God". And Paul says, "Jews demand signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we proclaim Christ crucified". The psalmist proclaims "The earth is full of the goodness of the Lord". In Mark, we hear the sad story of Herod and the death of John the Baptist.

It's interesting that, centuries ago, Paul and the Corinthians ran into the same rejection of the Good News that we see in the world today. Everyone wants a sign (me included). After all, we live in an age where science is worshiped. Science is all about evidence and signs. Christ crucified? What does that even mean?

Recently my family was on vacation in Branson, Missouri. As we walked down the street, a young man approached me and asked, Are you saved? To be honest, I was a little put off and immediately on my guard. I expected the next question to be about money. I replied yes, and he gave me a blessing and moved on. I was rather ashamed of my reaction to the Good News and my treatment of this young man who was bold enough and cared enough about me to ask the question.

Shortly thereafter we walked into a thrift store. To be honest, my wife is the shopper, so I stood by the cash register and waited. I asked the clerk how she was today. To her credit, instead of the standard, fine, she responded that she was not doing well. A few further questions revealed that her son was quite ill and going in for brain surgery in a week. My wife came over and joined the conversation. Talking one mother to another, I could see immediately tears forming in my wife's eyes. She has such a wonderful heart and empathy for people in pain. As we left, we promised the woman that we would pray for her and her son. She thanked us. I wonder if God was sending me a message? Why did I ask this complete stranger how she was doing? It would be easier if Jesus had said, hey, once you get to know me, let's just keep it a secret. My relationship with Jesus is very personal, but I don't think it is meant to be private. I think knowing that God loves us allows us to venture out into the world and risk loving people who may not love us back.

My son, Nattie, recently returned from a mission trip to Haiti (his second). As he talked to people in our church about a young Haitian boy who had particularly touched his heart, he began to cry. Afterwards, he told me he how embarrassed he was. I told him to never be ashamed to cry. It shows he has a heart for God's children.

My granddaughter, Annie, is approaching two years of age. Her favorite word is wow. She throws her arms in the air and shouts, Wow! I'm with her. It's an amazing world we live in, full of amazing people. God places people in our lives and asks, "now what are you going to do?" I believe if I put Jesus first, then I will be able to love others as God wants me to.

My prayer is for those of us who are afraid of rejection and who are reluctant to share the Good News. May God give us a bold spirit and a heart for his children.

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