Commentary on the Gospel for Tue, May 5th 2015

Some years ago, a woman dressed in white would stand on a downtown Omaha street corner every day over the noon hour waving her Bible, preaching loudly to passing shoppers and office workers. Hardly anyone ever paid any attention to her but nothing deterred her.

What a woman!

Maybe she was crazy, certainly a "fool for Christ," but as I reflected on today's reading from the Acts of the Apostles, it occurred to me that she was probably more like Paul and other early disciples than us respectable people heading back from lunch to toil for big corporations.

In mind's eye, downtown Omaha became the public forum of Antioch ringed by temples and marble buildings instead of Omaha's banks and office buildings. Try as I might to imagine myself as a disciple, I could not. Instead I kept envisioning myself as a fairly privileged middle-aged matron in a toga wondering who these strange people were. Why were they disrupting my community's public square?

Just as I had hurried past our street corner evangelist to get back to my office, I did the same thing in ancient Antioch. I avoided the crowd that stoned Paul just as I did the crowd of homeless men who thronged Omaha's downtown library every day. Just as I did nothing to help Paul, I did nothing for the crowd of homeless people.

In both my imagined ancient Antioch and the real downtown Omaha, I did what most respectable people have always done – minded my own business and avoided getting involved in anything troubling or distasteful.

I'm not proud of either my ancient or modern self for this perfectly rational behavior. I believe that Jesus demands more of those of us who claim to be his followers than polite piety, especially when it comes to helping the least of our brothers and sisters like the homeless.

Being a Christian demands taking a certain level of risk on behalf of others and spreading the gospel.

Why do I find this so difficult????

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