

Sermon
Lent Two-B
Saint Andrew's-Methuen
February 28, 2021
William Bradbury

Genesis 17:1-7, 15-16
Psalm 22:22-30
Romans 4:13-25
Mark 8:31-38

Jesus knows he will be crucified because he will be seen as a dangerous heretic. It's no problem for a carpenter in Nazareth and a few fishermen in Capernaum to be heretics—who will they corrupt, the fish?

But if a rabbi gives false teachings to large adoring crowds, then something must be done.

First century Palestine isn't living under the US Constitution, but under the Roman Empire, and so the religious leaders need to silence anyone they think will destabilize the status quo bring down the wrath of Rome.

As Caiaphas, the High Priest, says, "it is better to have one man die for the people than to have the whole nation destroyed." John 11:50

For thousands of years political and religious leaders banish or kill those seen as threats to the status quo of their Power.

On Broad Street in Oxford, there is a memorial to Thomas Cranmer, Archbishop of Canterbury under Henry VIII and primary author of our first Book of Common Prayer written in 1549, where he along with two others were burned at the stake by Queen Mary in 1556.

The Powers also couldn't allow a heretic like Martin Luther King to preach against White Supremacy and the war in Vietnam.

But since we learned in Sunday School that Jesus was meek and mild, we might well ask how did Jesus threaten the leaders of his day?

The shorthand answer, to paraphrase his words to Peter, is because **Jesus thinks, not like humans, but like God.**

A few examples: In Mark 2 when a paralytic is brought for healing, Jesus says to him, **"My child, your sins are forgiven."** And the Scribes say to themselves, **"This man is being blasphemous! Only God can forgive sins."**

In John 10 Jesus says, **“The Father and I are one”**, and the people pick up stones to kill him, saying “we are stoning you, not for your healings, but for blasphemy because you, **who are only a man, claim to be God.”**

Then there are the numerous times Jesus violates the Sabbath and the rules about who a pious man is allowed to eat with.

And finally, five days before his death, Jesus drives the moneychangers out of the Temple, revealing God’s judgment on its corrupt leadership who have made a den of robbers what Jesus says is to be a house of prayer for all people. Matthew 21:13

All these prove to the leaders that Jesus is a heretic, because he is acts as if he believes what he says, that **“The Father and I are one”**.

But Jesus isn’t claiming that he IS the Father or that he knows all that the Father knows: surely, Jesus doesn’t know how to drive a stick shift or how to sequence DNA to produce a vaccine.

Rather what Jesus knows is what he shares with God: God’s Consciousness, God’s Spirit. He views the world through God’s eyes, so that in the Sermon on the Mount he says, “Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, ⁴⁵ so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous.”

Jesus shares the Mind of God.

That’s why Paul tells us in Philippians 2 to share the Mind of Christ, **the same Spirit that is in Jesus of Nazareth.**

 On the Day of Pentecost Holy Spirit floods the people—as Luke says, folks from all over the known world--Pathians, Medes, and Elamites and dwellers of Mesopotamia—have their consciousness transformed.

Jesus says that to **lose awareness of the Consciousness of God is to lose our life and to remain stuck in the past—with our sins, resentments, and destructive habits of thought—instead of moving in the flow of love in the present.**

Too often we in the church also live in the past, longing for the good old days of pews filled with happy people, but we wrongly assume that if we could imitate what the church did then, we would have the same results today..

But there’s a problem: we are no longer living in 1960 or even in 1990.

Church innovator and author Brian McLaren gave a talk to diocesan clergy a number of years ago and he showed us a high-altitude picture of a plain with a river running through it (I think it was in Australia), with a lovely big bridge crossing the river. **He then showed us another picture taken 20 years later: there was the winding river and the bridge was still big and strong.** But because of an earthquake the river had changed course and now the bridge was no longer near the river.

Fred Craddock, retired UCC pastor and homiletics professor, tells of his first student church near Oak Ridge, Tennessee. He says when the region experienced a building boom because of the atomic energy research going on there lots of new people moved into the area and Craddock told the board these people needed a place to worship and they should reach out to them, but after some discussion it was decided these folks wouldn't fit in with their hard hats and being temporary living in trailers, so the board voted that only those whose family owned property in the county could be members of the church.

Years later Craddock and his wife decided to visit this site of one of his early failures, so they drove up from Atlanta on a Sunday to worship at the church. The parking lot was full of cars and trucks and there was a sign out front: Barbecue. All you eat: chicken, ribs, and pork.

"Well", he said, we may as well go in for lunch." The old pump organ was there and the pews were around the walls for people waiting to get a table. He said the place was full of all kinds of people, Pathians, Medes, and Elamites and dwellers of Mesopotamia. He said to his wife, "It certainly is good this is not a church now. These folk would not be welcome. They wouldn't fit in." The Collected Sermons of Fred Craddock, page 225

Saint Augustine famously said that the Holy Spirit is the love that continuously flows between God the Father and God the Son. This Spirit-Love flows from the Cross and is the river flowing in you and me right now, even when we forget to notice, so we don't have find Spirit, any more than we have to go find our legs.

Just as Jesus tells the Samaritan woman at the well: "The water that I will give will become a spring of water welling up within to eternal life."

It is who we really are, our true nature. As Jesus prayed on his last night: "May they all be one, just as, Father, you are in me and I am in you, so that they also may be in us." John 17:21

All we need is for Jesus the Heretic to reveal what is already inside us: the river of the Spirit.