

Church of the Good Shepherd
and
St. John the Evangelist

3 Pentecost
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Fr. Bill McGinty

“Have You Met Jesus?”

Of all the characters in the Old Testament the two that are perhaps the most evil are Ahab and his wife Jezebel. Other people could be bad, such as the sons of Solomon, or foreign rulers such as Pharaoh in Egypt, but they were merely bad as opposite to intrinsically evil. Ahab and Jezebel are evil. They are evil because they use lies and deception to kill someone they know to be honest and good.

The existence of evil is often discussed in Philosophy from the Greeks to modern times. You and I have probably only seen real evil a half dozen times.

In Friday's newspaper a story ran about two nineteen year old boys killed by the Ku Klux Klan in Mississippi in 1963. They were abducted off the street, tied up and tossed with weights into the river. All of us would think of that as evil.

Elijah the Prophet tells King Ahab that although he has deceived the eyes and ears of mortal men he can never truly deceive God. And God who sees all things will visit on him the same death that he brought to Naboth the good man who owned the vineyard.

In the old theology of many years ago there was a teaching in the Christian Church that there were some sins that were so bad, so evil that they cry out to heaven for vengeance.

Jesus himself never hides his teaching that he has come to redeem the sinner. He has come that sinners might be saved, but he leaves us in no doubt that he is against sin and evil and after all his efforts some will perish in everlasting damnation.

Speaking about those who would harm children, he tells his Apostles, “Better now that they have a millstone tied around their neck and they be thrown into the depths of the sea.”

In the story of Lazarus the poor beggar and Dives the rich man, Dives tries to repent after death but it is too late. He perishes in hell and nothing can be done to save him.

Often we are so busy reading Jesus' words of love; peace and harmony, that we fail to see the cutting of the Gospel. The gentle Jesus, meek and mild takes a back seat to the Jesus who would combat evil, fight for justice and who is righteously angry at the mistreatment of women, children and the poor.

In today's Gospel Jesus confronts a different kind of evil the prejudice that would take the place of God's mercy and would choose to judge others as worse sinners than themselves.

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Jesus is in the House of Simon a leading Pharisee. A debate begins about the woman who anoints Jesus feet with ointment and washes and dries them with her tears and hair. While the Pharisees have already condemned her as a sinner, Jesus defends her because he sees in her remorse and sorrow and great love.

All Jesus' statements about washing and purification refer to a simple instruction from the Book of the Law about entering a house. On entering a Hebrew home, a visitor will be greeted in the name of the Lord and invited to a ritual washing from fingers to elbow and from feet to knee.

Not only was it practical because of the dusty roads but it was also symbolic of the Covenant of Israel with Yahweh. It was a renouncing of sin and a renewal of their commitment to live a holy life under God's law.

In the story Jesus does not receive this ritual blessing, instead he is faced with the ranqor and hate of the Pharisees upset because the poor and the sinner seem to have gate crashed their party.

In the woman who anoints his feet Jesus sees the symbol of a new ritual, a new blessing and a new covenant. He does so because her action pre-figures his death. Jewish bodies are solemnly anointed, head, feet and hands at death.

What this woman does in this story, the other women try to go to do at Jesus tomb on the morning of his Resurrection.

Surely, in the story Jesus is saying: I have come to forgive the sinner, but to condemn evil. All who would listen to my teaching must know which side of this battle they are on.

The Pharisees think that they are righteous and in the right with God. Yet, Jesus makes it clear that it is not obeying the laws alone that bring salvation, but faith in him. Paul in Galatians repeats the teaching "a person is justified not by words of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ.

It is, of course the great rallying cry of Martin Luther: "We are saved by faith alone." Alas, for many of us Protestants we allowed ourselves to forget about sin. Almost to the extent that we believe that we will be saved despite our sins. Jesus didn't say that, nor did Marin Luther. Jesus said believe in me, reject sin, reflect evil, come over to the good side, and you will be forgive.

Even Martin Luther would tell us, "You can not say, I am justified by faith in Christ," and then go home and beat your wife.

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You can not claim faith in Christ and disparage your neighbor with your tongue. You cannot claim faith in Christ and cheat the IRS. You cannot lie, steal, cheat, abuse, malign, hurt, offend and still claim you are justified by faith.

In 1943 a young preacher rose to speak to a youth conference in Illinois, his name was the Rev Billy Graham. In one hand he held the Holy bible and in the other a simple wooden cross. By his side stood his young wife of just 2 months and her name was Ruth. She would stand by his side for the next 64 years through many a rally and campaigns; from state to state, country to country and to every continent around the world.

Ruth died Friday at her home in North Carolina with her husband and five children by her bedside. Even in her dying days, she could still remember the words that young preacher spoke to the youth of Illinois in a football stadium all those years before.

“Do you believe in Jesus? Do you accept him as your personal savior? Will you live by his teaching? Will you fight evil and do good? Will you this night come forward and commit yourself to him and embrace this cross and book?”

In 64 years Billy Graham’s words did not change. The world changed, wars raged, presidents came and went, today his words are the same words, “Do you believe in Jesus Christ?”

If the answer to that question is truly yes, then everything else in life will change for you. And you can no longer view the world in the same way.

Today at the 10:00 service we welcome Kaden Messing to the sacrament of baptism. In doing so, we ask him the same questions:

“Do you accept Jesus Christ as your savior? Do you renounce evil and commit yourself to him alone?”

As we answer these questions for young Kaden today, we also ask them of ourselves; “Do we really believe in Jesus Christ and are we committed to him and all he stands for?”

We need today to answer that question about the nature of our faith and relationship with Christ. It is important question, for on it rests our eternal salvation.

Meet some Evangelicals for the first time and they will ask you one question: “Have you met Jesus Christ the Lord?” They ask the question for a deliberate reason because they know that although many people profess faith in Christ, few have gotten close enough to have really met him.

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As we witness this baptism today, let us join with Kaden in really meeting Christ and inviting him into our life.

Amen+

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