

A Less Domesticated Jesus

James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came forward to Jesus and said to him, "Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you...And they said to him, "Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory." But Jesus said to them, "You do not know what you are asking." When the ten heard this, they began to be angry with James and John. So Jesus called them and said to them, "You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all..."

The Gospel of Christ is a very subversive and dangerous thing. I think many of us modern Christians have forgotten this explosive truth. For a variety of reasons, we seem to want to shrink Jesus. We want to make Jesus domesticated and predictable.

Despite our best efforts to make a Christ in our own image, we are confronted again and again by this subversive and dangerous man who stands in our midst and challenges our assumptions about almost everything.

Over the last several weeks Jesus has given us a crash course on discipleship.

We are told that if we want to follow Jesus we must be willing to cut away anything in us that is malignant. He says in effect that if we want to carry his name into the world we must gouge out or cut off any behaviors that might prevent others from coming close to him.

And after this radical spiritual surgery, he cautions us, by teaching in a new way about divorce, that simply following the letter of the law will not suffice if we use our knowledge of "the rules" to marginalize or oppress another. We are made to confront the hard truth that just because some things are "legal" that they are not necessarily moral or ethical. As disciples, we are not allowed to look for legal loopholes to get us out of the tight corners into which we sometimes paint ourselves.

One more little detail, if you follow me, Jesus says, 'people will hate you and you will most likely have to die to your own ambitions again and again if you really want to live a full and Christ-filled life.'

Who is ready to sign up? This coming Sunday, we are asked to take a hard look at ourselves and figure out where we jockey for pride of place, and to do an honest inventory of all the ways we too want to know what's in it for us if we follow Christ.

We are invited to hold a mirror up to ourselves and ask, "Where do I seek to find my power and satisfy my own pride and ambition in service to God."

I do not think that Jesus seeks to disgrace or scold us. Jesus is only trying to remind us that the power and greatness of God is not to be embezzled for our own ego. The power and greatness of God is meant to be a source of hope and freedom for those needful of support and the oppressed.

This is a dangerous and subversive message in a power-seeking and ambitious world. If you do not believe me, just Google a few names like Oscar Romero, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, and Martin Luther King Jr.

When they sought to remind the power structures of Church and State that the eradication of poverty, genocide, and oppression was our call to glory, their lives were extinguished. Many modern followers of Christ colluded with the powers and principalities that sought to silence them forever; it is a shameful truth that we bear.

But the power of God cannot be subverted by the violent and power-seeking wills of men. In death, the voices of these faithful disciples have grown even stronger. This is the power of our large and undomesticated Christ.

This is so important for us to grasp because the freeing power of God to which we are all heirs is so very easily squandered. The history of these men I've mentioned has now been writ large across history, but they all started in small little communities of faith all over the world.

When we think on the sacrifices of such people, it sheds a great deal of perspective on the little power squabbles in churches all over creation. We see the waste of grace in those moments, when we, like James and John, take our eye off the big picture and get lost in power struggles and petty bickering that keeps us far from God's hope for us.

Yes, some conflict is normal. Actually certain kinds of conflict can be very healthy in a faith community. But we know the difference, and so often a parish's energy is just drained by toxic squabbling.

Great hope is found for us in that even Jesus' first followers suffered the same ego malady. Here Jesus is, on his way to death and those closest to him are behaving in self-serving ways. We as lesser mortals can take hope! I love that Jesus does not lapse into cynicism or even rebuke them. He seems to see them through the eyes of compassion and he recognizes that at the heart of this petty squabble is their fear and anxiety; they want a promise of security in a world that is ever-changing.

We are no different in our own petty squabbles; dig deep enough behind any anger or self-serving focus and we will inevitably find fear.

We are afraid of many things these days, but Jesus provides us with the antidote for what ails us and he points yet again at the power of God's hope for humankind. Be not afraid. Jesus is with us to the end of the age.

Following Jesus closely is a risky business, but it is the only way to *truly* live. Grace and Peace, Stephanie+