

## Upsetting the Applecart

Back before Billy Graham, there was this famous preacher named Billy Sunday. Like Billy Graham he was an Evangelist who traveled state to state conducting crusades and saving souls. In one particular city he was preaching about the unfair working conditions the workers faced working at the local mill. After the service he was approached by several businessmen they told him in no uncertain terms “leave labor matters alone just stick to saving souls”, Stay away from political matters, you are rubbing fur the wrong way”. To which Billy Sunday replied; “ If I’m rubbing the fur the wrong way, tell the cats to turn around”!

Perhaps that is what the congregation was thinking in today’s Gospel reading. Maybe they were just as upset with Jesus as the businessmen were with Billy Sunday. After all here was this Jesus, a simple common man who was saying such profound things, things they didn’t want to hear. He was welcomed as a home town hero, until he exposed the darkness of their souls. That darkness included the view that they “were holier than thou”. They thought that Jesus could save his miracles and teachings for them, instead of including people they regarded as human trash; namely the Gentiles and others rejected by society.

They did not realize something that we often fail to realize today. The church is not a club, or a membership organization. It is a place where Christ is preached and proclaimed, where disciplines are made and nurtured, and a place where we confront ourselves. We have to realize that we are not who we think we are, but instead we are sinners who have been redeemed by a God who sent his son to die for us. The church is where we gather as sisters and brothers who are different

from each other but are one people gathered at the font and table and sent out to serve in so many ways. Jesus came to free sinners from the bonds of guilt, sin and corruption. He is the servant referred to in the passage he read from Isaiah. Now the Jews have been waiting for centuries for a Messiah to rescue them from the bonds of oppression, but they weren't ready for him when he came. They expected a military-type of Messiah who would drive out the Romans and return Israel to the glory days of King David. Instead what they got was someone who was far from their expectations a simple common man from a simple common background who would do extraordinary things; such as healing the sick, curing the lame, making the blind to see, hanging around with the poor and outcast, and worst of all hanging with sinners and tax collectors. They did not realize that in fact they were the ones who needed healing and saving.

When someone is different <sup>or</sup> ~~of~~ doesn't meet our expectations, how do we treat them? Do we cross the street to avoid them, do we move from our seat on the bus, so we don't have to talk to them? We often judge people because of prejudices that are caused by the other person's family, social status or other reasons. Jesus told the crowd what they needed to hear instead of what they wanted to hear. He challenged their way of thinking and the status quo. He came to upset the applecart called their way of life. He told the crowd that they did not have an exclusive relationship with God. Jesus dragged the margin boundaries of race, creed and color to include all people. This was part of his ministry. The Jews were not necessarily at war with Jesus the man. They were at war with his ministry, just like the world is often at war with modern Christian ministry. The Jews felt threatened by the Christian movement. Jesus did not follow their laws, Jesus welcomed those who have been shut out of the temples and synagogues.

Today where do we see the church behaving like the congregation in the synagogue. Where do we see any group suffering from a toxic case of in group loyalties. Otherwise decent people making furious fools of themselves? Any group or religion that feels itself to be favored can behave in this way, from a congregation to a nation. Where do we see outsiders who welcome the good news and new life that Christ offers?

Jesus read the hearts of the congregation just like he reads our hearts today. How do we respond to war, abortion, divorce, concern for the poor, racism, sexual orientation or child abuse? Do we response out of prejudices or out of Christian love? Jesus calls us to take up our crosses and follow him. Can we do that, can we hang out with sinners can we minister to those left out because they are different or are poor. We are called to speak on Gods' behalf, especially when we see injustice in our world. Jesus asks us the same question he asked St. Peter a long time ago....."Do you love me?" He really is asking us " Do you love me more than anyone or anything else?" Amen