



ONE VOICE



Churches: ♦Bethany ♦Immanuel ♦Lunder ♦Silver Lake ♦Winnebago

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From the Pastor's Desk

"If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it."
Matthew 16:24



Often as we enter the month of March, I am reminded of Shakespeare's "Julius Caesar". I think about "Julius Caesar" as Shakespeare has an insider of Julius Caesar's inner circle warn him, "Beware of the Ides of March." It is an ominous warning. Caesar is wondering, why am I to be aware of days in the middle of March. It was an eerie warning. Maybe Caesar was thinking that there might be a winter storm in the middle of March and he shouldn't be thinking about making any military conquests at that time. In a way, the warning was talking about an upcoming storm. Things and people were not as they appeared to be. Caesar's enemies had persuaded his inner circle friends that Caesar was a threat to Rome and had to die. So on a day in the middle of March, some of Caesar's friends asked to have a meeting with Caesar, with just them. They came close to Caesar and they ran their swords through his body. When Caesar saw his friend Brutus, he asked, "You too Brutus." Then Caesar ceased to defend himself. Things were definitely not as they appeared. Friends became assassins.

During the season of Lent as we focus upon Jesus' journey to the cross, things and people are not as they appear. When Jesus is teaching and healing people, thousands of people are following him. We know this because we have two stories of Jesus feeding the crowds in the wilderness. Jesus is a popular teacher, as Jesus teaches them about the kingdom of God. Jesus is popular as a healer. Jesus has an insight about why they are following him. The crowd and even his disciples are thinking that Jesus will be a great king ruling from Jerusalem, restoring Israel to the glory days of King David and King Solomon. After Jesus feeds the crowds in the wilderness, he dismisses the crowds and goes up to a mountaintop to pray. Jesus knows the crowd is wanting to make Jesus their king, a king who will feed them with bread and fish, much like his Father provided manna in the wilderness. The people are followers, but they are not as they appear to be. They are followers of their own plans and visions of who they want Jesus to be.

Jesus challenges the crowds and his disciples about this vision. Jesus gets the crowd's attention and declares, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it and those who lose their life for my sake will find it." This is a different vision of what it means to be a follower of Jesus and what kind of Messiah of God, Jesus is going to be. Jesus challenges this vision of an earthly kingdom and power and riches over and over again on the way to Jerusalem. On the way to Jerusalem, Jesus overhears his disciples arguing amongst themselves, who is going to be the greatest. They were thinking about positions of authority and power, of sitting at Jesus' right and left hand as he rules in Jerusalem. Jesus tells them if they want to be great, they must



be a servant, a servant to all. When Jesus received a great welcome to Jerusalem with people waving palm branches and shouting "Hosanna", the disciples once again have visions of Jesus ruling in Jerusalem like King David. Jesus tells them not one stone of the buildings they were admiring, not even the Temple, will remain one upon another. Jesus makes a point again that things are not as they appear. Jesus takes the role of the lowliest servant, and he washes their feet. Not something a powerful king would do. Jesus again tells them about his suffering and death and how they will all abandon him and Peter his best friend would deny even knowing him three times. They all denied it, but Jesus knows things are not as they appeared.



As we know Jesus became the Suffering Servant, as he endured the abandonment of his friends, the mocking, the jeering, the beating, the crucifixion and finally death on the cross. Above his head on the cross hung a sign, "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews". It appeared to be a sign of a defeated earthly king, who was popular with the crowd, but now had come under the crushing power of Rome. But things were not as they appeared to be. Jesus is indeed God's Messiah, the Suffering servant. Jesus did not come to be a political king. Jesus came to be God's Messiah, the one who saves.



Sometimes we can become like the people in the crowds who were following Jesus. We create our own vision of what kind of Messiah Jesus is. Sometimes we create a vision of Jesus being our cheerleader, cheering us on and supporting us as we strive to chase the dream of financial success, or being a moral guide for us. Sometimes we create a vision of Jesus being the one who can open the door of God's blessings to be poured out upon us.

Jesus brings a corrective to those kind of visions as Jesus bore the cross. Jesus is the Messiah, who cannot be held at a distance, to only be called on for favors. Jesus comes as the one who knows you. Jesus breaks through our façade. Jesus knows our brokenness, our hurts, our fears, our joys, our challenges and our stressors. Jesus comes to you in the darkness of your brokenness, your hurt and your guilt and Jesus disperses the darkness with his love. Jesus wraps his arms around you and lifts you up in his love. Jesus forgives. Jesus heals. Jesus claims you as one who has born the cross for you, revealing the depth of our sin and the depth of God's love for you. This is God's Messiah, the one who walks with you, the one who draws you near, the one who redeems and the one who makes you new.

Pastor Randy



WANDERINGS AND WONDERINGS



¹³Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us — for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree" Galatians 3:13

Most of us know something about the story “The Beauty and the Beast.” What would have happened to the Beast if the Beauty hadn’t appeared?



There was a time when his face was handsome and his palace pleasant. But that was before the curse ... before the shadows fell on the castle of the prince ... before the shadows fell on the heart of the prince. And when the darkness fell, he hid. Secluded in his castle, he was left with glistening snout ... and curly tusks ... and a bad mood.

But all that changed when the girl came. I wonder, what would have happened to the Beast if the Beauty hadn’t appeared?



I'M IN A BAD MOOD...

Better yet, what would have happened if she hadn’t cared? Who would have blamed her if she hadn’t? He was such a ... such a ...well, such a beast. Hairy. Drooling. Roaring. Defying. Indignant. Self-absorbed. And she was such a beauty. Stunningly gorgeous. Contagiously kind. If two people ever lived up to their names, it was the Beauty and the Beast. Who would have blamed her if she hadn’t cared? But she did care.

And because the Beauty loved the Beast, the Beast became more beautiful himself. And the curse was eventually broken.

The story’s familiar, not just because it’s a fairy tale. It’s familiar because it reminds us of ourselves. There is a beast within each of us. The

product of our sinfulness. And our unwillingness to let God intercede.

It wasn’t always that way. There was a time when humanity’s face was beautiful and the palace pleasant. But that was before the curse... before the shadow fell across the garden of Adam ... before the shadow fell across the heart of Adam and Eve ... before humanity “hid” from God. And ever since the curse, we’ve been different. Beastly. Ugly. Defiant. Angry. We do things we know we shouldn’t do and wonder why we did them.

This story sets up our life experience ... and our Lenten journey of self re-discovery. But the ending is a bit different ... more profound ...and not just “life changing” but “life” itself. In the fable, the beauty accidentally stumbles across the beast and his castle and his situation. In the fable, the beauty kisses the beast. In the Bible, the beauty does much more. The beauty is sent ... seeks out ... has the purpose to encounter the beast. The beauty becomes the beast ... so the beast can become the beauty. Jesus changes places with us. We, like Adam, were under a curse, but Jesus “changed places with us and put himself under that curse.”



What if the Beauty had not come? What if the Beauty had not cared? Then we would have remained a beast. But the Beauty did come... and the Beauty did care.



The sinless One took on the face of a sinner (me) so that we sinners (us) could take on the face of the “holy one” (Christ).

Wanderings and Wonderings,
Pastor Bill Peters