

Upsetting the Status Quo

Second Sunday of Easter 2018

Emmanuel UCC

Jesus came to challenge the status quo. During his active ministry he did just that! He railed against the Jewish leaders of the time who were satisfied with their luxurious living and the power they wielded against the people. After Jesus crucifixion, I am sure the Pharisees and leaders of the temple breathed a sigh of relief that Jesus was no longer a thorn in their side. But, through his resurrection, Jesus was about to challenge that belief as well. It is ironic that Jesus was to reveal himself first to the women. In the Jewish culture at the time, women were simply necessary and had no real value in the male dominated society other than to bear offspring and provide for her husband. So Jesus revelation of himself to the Marys' was itself a challenge to the norms of the time. Jesus was not afraid to rock the boat and do something new. Today we see dear Thomas – I think Thomas gets a bad rap. He is

described as the doubter and the one who refused to believe unless he could see the wounds of Jesus himself. Yet, Jesus gave Thomas room to question. He does not shame him or turn him away, but invites Thomas to touch the nail marks in his hands and place his hand in his side. He wants to encourage Thomas' belief. We might ask where Thomas was the first time Jesus came to see his followers, locked away from everyone in the room. Perhaps Thomas was the only one who was brave enough to show himself in public. Maybe he was gather food for the rest who were locked away and fearful for their own lives. SO, when Jesus came through the locked door to visit his disciples, Thomas was not present. This time, however, Thomas is with the others when Jesus comes to visit. Not only did Jesus encourage Thomas' faith in the risen Lord, he also gives us words of encouragement. He says to Thomas, "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe." **Blessed are those who have not seen and yet, believe!** My friends, Jesus is talking about you and me! Most of us have probably not seen the Risen Lord, but can attest to his presence in our lives

because of things which have happened. Some might call these events coincidences, I choose to call the God-incidences. They are the unexplainable things that happen that help us to believe when we doubt or when we begin to take the presence of God in our lives for granted. Someone says something we need to hear, something happens and we should be dead, but we are not, we go through tough times and then, unexplainably, we come through them unscathed. God-incidences which remind us or restore our faith.

Here is something else shows that Jesus challenges the status quo...What does Jesus look like? Close your eyes for a moment.

Picture Jesus physically in front of you. What does he look like? Is he white skinned? Many of our religious art works depict Jesus as white. Jesus was from the Middle East. He was not white, yet we make him into our image and likeness, not the other way around. Jesus looks like the people that we are turning away from our borders because they come from predominantly Muslim countries – Jesus looks like them, nit like us!

Dianne and I attended the ACT Rally to end Racism on Wednesday on the National Mall in Washington DC which was organized by the National Council of churches in commemoration of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr's assassination 50 years ago and to reignite the dream of ending racism on our nation... I was struck by the opening worship service. People of all faiths, Christian, Muslim, Jewish, Hindu as well as other faith traditions, shared prayers for the healing of all racism. As I listened to their prayers, it touched me how alike we are! We all have the same desires for peace, equality and respect. Had each person not told us what their faith tradition was, I would not have known they were *not* Christian. Rev. Jim Wallis, a progressive evangelical who founded Sojourners, called us to repent of our original sin of racism and white privilege in order to save the church and our nation. Our own UCC General Minister, Rev. John Dorhauer, shared, and I quote: "50 years after the assassination of MLK, we ARE FORCED TO admit that as painful as was the silencing of his voice, the greater pain today is the re-installation and resurgence of the racism he gave his life to eradicate.

Let our time together today not be about retrieving a memory, but a rekindling of hope.”

The day before the ACT Rally Dianne and I were sitting in the National Museum of the American Indian in the hall of the Trail of Tears. Dianne asked me, “Who were we that we thought we were so much better than they were?” Our government moved thousands of Native Americans out of their homeland and onto reservations far from their native lands, and for what reason? For the love of cotton and money. So much wrong doing has been done in our land because of the love of money – in the form of King Cotton. What would have been if we treated people according to the ways of the King of Heaven? How would our history have been different if we would have encouraged the advancement of peoples instead of placing them on land that was not familiar to them, making them travel mile after mile, suffering from sickness and where thousands died, or freeing people, only to keep them in servitude, tied to the land and landowners, erecting monuments to keep them in fear for their freedom long after the Civil

War had ended, or to keep freedmen from exercising the right to vote.

Or how about when we rounded up Japanese American citizens and placed them in internment camps because we feared their turning against us during WWII? It seems that every generation in our great nations, we allow fear to overtake us because of the messages we are being fed through our leaders and the popular culture. Some of us might remember the McCarthyism and Red scare prior to and during the Cold War. There is nothing we can do about these injustices.

However, at this time in our history, we are seeing young people who came to this country as children being forced to go back to a place they do not even remember we are cautioned to fear them as rapists and criminals along with the people barred from coming to the US for fear of terrorism. How would Jesus encourage us to challenge the status quo around these issues of our time? When we allow our leaders to influence our values of justice and equality to the point of harming others for financial gain, we are shutting out the Sunlight of the Spirit. We are blocking the experience of God's presence in our lives. How

would Jesus challenge these injustices? We know how he dealt with the woman at the well and the woman caught in adultery as well as the healing of the lepers who were ostracized and feared during his life time.

We fear that which we do not understand. This nurtures racism in our land – a sin and scourge that we can ill afford. If we judge others because of what they look like, we would probably reject Jesus in our day and age. Jesus would fit the stereotype of a terrorist = dark skin and beard, from the Middle East. Terrifying thought isn't it?

Yet, Jesus came to challenge the status quo and encourages us to do the same. He gives us the chance to come to him and place our fingers in the nail marks in his hands and our hand into his side. He invites us to go to him when we are unsure about what we are being told by those in power. Go to him in prayer-express your disbelief! We have a wonderful example of this in Thomas who gives us hope that Jesus will help to strengthen our belief when we go to him with real questions of faith. Let us not repeat the racist actions of those who came before us,

thinking they were protecting us. Instead, Work for justice, walk in harmony with Jesus and love each other as Jesus taught us. Then too, in faith, we will challenge the status quo.