

February 28, 2010  
Lent II  
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So the Pharisees enter today's Gospel with an interesting twist. Are these the Pharisees we've grown to know and despise? Are these the same Pharisees that have stirred up trouble, challenged Jesus at every turn, made life more difficult than it was already? Is this the group who pointed fingers, made fun, and then when they were trapped by Jesus and his unfailing ability to ask better questions, have they suddenly come over to the other side?

The more you know about a person, the more you come to understand what makes him tick, what causes her eyes to flash or pushes her buttons. What we know about the Pharisees is about the maintaining of their tradition above all things. There is a status quo in their history that keeping in tact continues their role in power within the Jewish religious hierarchy. Change may not be their friend!

They tell Jesus to leave Jerusalem. Why? Because they like him? Or because a character like Jesus is best out of the way? Because they are caught between a rock and a hard place with Herod the Great's successor, Herod Antipas, on the throne? Are they putting Jesus in the wings to lead a revolt against the civil Jewish government? Did you know all these things were involved in this lesson?

I doubt we could get to the bottom of all of this, as much of the motivation and the characters of history are long gone. What we can do is look at our own way of dealing with Jesus and how he impacts our lives.

Jesus, as characterized in the Gospels, is radical, free-thinking, fun-loving and difficult to pin down on some issues. He is pushing back at

structures and then, seemingly in the same instant, compliments a lesser member of society's structures by saying "Let's do lunch."

This is Jesus who does leave Jerusalem, knowing that this city and what it represents is resistant to change, however it happens. Secular rulers, religious rulers, Roman rulers, all looking for a way to be in charge; dynamics between Jews and Gentiles; dynamics between men and women: There is so much happening here. Believe it or not, their lives were complicated, even though we sometimes yearn for the easier times of the earlier Church!

Jesus is well aware of his fate, as it reads in the Gospels. He will set his face to Jerusalem and we will walk through those stories again in just a few weeks. We have seen this movie before and we think we know how it ends. What is different is what we bring to that movie to watch it again this Spring.

We are back, again, to watch because somehow Jesus means something to us. Our spiritual lives are to be grounded in him. Our greatest hopes are to be like him, strong, sure of ourselves, because we have that communication with God like his communication with God, direct and sure and life-changing.

Somehow, in my heart of hearts, I don't believe the Pharisees have changed a bit. And there are days and people in my own life who wonder if I have changed because of my encounters with Jesus.

What we bring each year to the story of the resurrection is our own needs to have some things inside of us undergo radical change. And perhaps those changes have come or have been realized, but most likely in small steps, like single steps to Jerusalem along a road we share with one another.