

The Radical Sayings of Jesus -- Ignored Today

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Though Americans Claim to Love Jesus, they Hate His Politics

Jesus, according to the Gospel narratives was a social reformer much as was his radical cousin, John the baptist. The narratives clearly and unmistakably depict Jesus as a champion of the oppressed and a despiser of the rich, wealthy and powerful elites, yet modern popular preachers and churches swimming in wealth pay little regard to his clearly political teachings of social reformation. Jesus himself labelled such as hypocrites and wolves in sheep's clothing. .

This instruction from Jesus stands on its own. Comment seems hardly necessary.

Instead, Jesus' unadorned words should turn bright red the faces of all in our country who claim to be his followers. For they contradict our economic system and entire way of life driven as it is by the military-industrial complex, unending wars, and an economic system that victimizes the poorest among us, while enriching beyond belief a tiny minority.

Moreover, Jesus' teachings call entirely into question the "realism" of mainstream politicians. Such realism ridicules anyone (like Marianne Williamson) who might have us adopt Jesus' approach before it's too late.

Think about that in the light of our readings from the Gospel of Luke these past few weeks. In case you've forgotten, here's a summary of Jesus' absolutely radical, highly political program found in the passages we've read. To begin with, he describes his entire purpose in this way:

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to bring glad tidings to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to let the oppressed go free,
and to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord."

Notice the blatantly political thrust of Jesus' teaching. He emphasizes bringing good news to the impoverished. He wants to clear out the prisons, to cure the disabled and liberate those oppressed (by the Roman empire that controlled Israel in Jesus' day). Notice he is proclaiming a Jubilee Year with its debt forgiveness, release of slaves, and radical land reform. That's Jesus' agenda. It's undeniably political; it's directed towards the poor.

And just in case we might miss the point, our readings of just last week had Jesus continue like this:

"Blessed are you who are poor,
for the kingdom of God is yours.
Blessed are you who are now hungry,
for you will be satisfied.

Blessed are you who are now weeping,
for you will laugh . . .
But woe to you who are rich . . .
Woe to you who are filled now,
for you will be hungry.
Woe to you who laugh now,
for you will grieve and weep.
Woe to you when all speak well of you,
for their ancestors treated the false
prophets in this way."

As I indicated last week, those words should shock us. Jesus' words turn everything upside-down. It's the poor who are God's favored, not the rich. According to his promise, the poor will govern God's Kingdom (a highly politicized image for what the world would be like if God were king instead of Caesar). By contrast, the rich, well-fed, the apparently happy and admired incur God's disfavor.

Read those words again. Imagine if our spiritual leaders insisted that they instead of the Ten Commandments be posted in front of our court houses and on school walls! "Blessed are you poor! Woe to you rich!"

But the evangelist still isn't finished. Here's what he has Jesus say in today's Gospel selection:

"To you who hear, I say, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. To the person who strikes you on one cheek, offer the other one as well, and from the person who takes your cloak, do not withhold even your tunic. Give to everyone who asks of you, and from the one who takes what is yours do not demand it back. Do to others as you would have them do to you . . . (L) end expecting nothing back . . ."

And yet, despite such clear instruction, here's what our "Christian" criminals in Washington do (with scarcely a whimper of objection from us "believers"):

- They spend more on war than the next 12 countries combined.
- They're currently attacking poor people in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, and Ethiopia having just destroyed Libya and previously most of the countries in Central America.
- Against all the principles of international law, they're tightening the screws on Venezuela causing hunger and shortages of medicine in order to spark rebellion against a government that has not attacked the United States.
- They have their eyes set on regime change in Nicaragua and Cuba which have harmed the U.S. in no way at all.
- They're cooperating with Saudi Arabia in bombing to smithereens Yemen, the poorest country in the Middle East. (And virtually none of us can explain exactly why. Can you?)

With that in mind, doesn't it seem true to say U.S. policy (especially towards the world's poor) is 180 degrees opposed to what Jesus is reported to have said? It's as if Jesus taught:

"To you who hear I say, hate your enemies. Annihilate those who disagree with you. Curse those who speak ill of you. Condemn those who retaliate against you. If someone defends himself by striking you back, waste him. And take everything from the person who tries to recover what you yourselves have stolen; put them in prison and throw away the key. Ignore those who seek alms from you; they're just lazy freeloaders. And jail the one who takes what your system denies him making sure he pays back every cent with interest. Do others before they can do you. Lend at the highest rate of

interest the market will bear even if it causes women and children to starve."

Just look at the world such departures from Jesus' wisdom have produced!

Still, when someone (e.g. like Marianne Williamson) comes forward calling the nation to a radical spiritual change based on the elementary teaching found not only in Christianity but in all religions viz. "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you" she's dismissed as "impractical," "unrealistic," and "new age"

No, that teaching is "old age." It comes from Jesus! It represents his political program.

Isn't it time for politicians to reverse course and follow the teachings of the spiritual Master they claim as the Savior of the world? For starters, truly following Jesus' political program that we've reviewed these past few weeks would have us:

Assume leadership in the fight against climate change

Cut our defense budget by at least two-thirds

Withdraw from all foreign wars

Repair the damage done by those conflicts

Close our country's military bases across the world

Forgive the debt of the former colonies

Completely reform our prison system from one dominated by punishment to one centered on rehabilitation

Make reparation to the descendants of former slaves

Renounce interference in foreign elections (as we would have others do in relation to our own voting system)

And so much more

You get the idea. I get the idea. Or maybe we can't . . .

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