

## Communion

I couldn't help but think that somehow, someday, Jesus was talking about us in this text. Maybe it's just because people are people and human behavior doesn't really change that much over the course of the centuries, but when I hear him describe "this generation," as "children sitting in the marketplace calling to one another," I had a vision of facebook, twitter and snapchat, and the obsessive pursuit of "likes, retweets" and such things. But I do not think Jesus was using the word generation the way your cranky uncle uses it to talk about the millennials and their iPhones and entitled attitudes. This critique of humanity is two thousand years old. If anything I think we need to understand Jesus saying: "this generation," to mean all humanity. People do seem to have this NEED to be noticed, to feel some sort of connection with others even if it is through something as trivial as a little thumbs up, or a smiley-face emoji. That fundamental need that can seem so harmless, can also lead to some serious darkness.

There is a movie from quite a few years back called *American History X*, which takes a rather unflinching look at the radicalization of young white men into a racist Neo-Nazi gang. The important moves in such radicalization involve warping the natural craving for community, the desire to feel a part of something, the good feeling of being accepted, and turning that good and natural desire into something hateful and twisted. The twist is done by convincing people that some group of "others" is out to rob them of that communion feeling that they recently discovered. The necessary steps are to find someone who already has some reason to be fearful of the other, in this case it was white kids living in an urban setting where the "danger" of non-whites was embodied by black and Hispanic gang members. The Skinheads presented them with a way to be strong in a group, to stand up without being afraid.

The movie presented an extreme example of how even something good and holy, like our craving for belonging and community can be twisted, but you don't have to go as far as shaved heads and swastika tattoos. You just need to watch what's going on in the way we consume our news. We willingly segregate ourselves by preference, and there are media sources galore that cater to everything from right wing racists to left wing anarchists (the similarities between those two groups are bit unnerving, perhaps implying that everything is somehow circular, but that's for another sermon). There is plenty, perhaps even too much, possibility for community out there, but this abundance is actually leading us away from communion, which, as I've said, is the true deep need of humanity.

The first part of this text is sort of about the fickle way that attempts to mimic community usually end up making a mockery of it. The lacuna of this text, since the lectionary usually likes to clip out parts where there is woe to someone, is about how Sodom would have received the good news better than the world did at the time. Sodom was destroyed, not for the reasons some would like to imagine, but for a failure of hospitality (remember last week). Jesus is saying that basically the mockery of community that was happening then (and now) is in fact a tragedy of biblical proportions, and even the worst sinners ever would have realized their mistake.

But, after the woe, comes the hope... well, sort of. Jesus does this thing, a prayer that reads like we are eavesdropping on a conversation. Thank you God that you have made this so simple that children can get it, and yet so deep that the smartest still can't get their heads around it. Jesus is doing something different here, he is challenging the model of community building and he is opening the gate to something more: communion.

Here's how he challenges: this is not something you get because you're so smart, or because you are part of the in crowd. This is not a way for you to bolster your defenses against the "other," this is not a way for you to be "right." This is not the way that you show how you are stronger, faster and smarter than anyone else, this is something you are born into and that you must come to as a little child. If our need for communion can be twisted so tragically, it must have some real power. Only something intended to be good and right can be made so dangerously wrong by sin. Sin doesn't do anything that creative, it simply twists and bends the good that God has done. Jesus has the answer for that.

"Come to me all you who are weary and carrying heavy burdens and I will give you rest." This is not the typical rallying cry for an in group trying to build a coalition. This is not a political stump speech, this is "give me your poor, your tired, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free." This is Jesus explaining that his way is not the way of the strong and the powerful, but of the meek and the humble. This is Jesus explaining the way to communion with God and with one another. It doesn't come by building your walls and establishing your kingdoms and nations, it comes by letting down your guard and learning the way of Jesus.

We crave communion so dearly that we have become willing to accept any form, no matter how shallow and temporary. We find it in sports, we find it in politics, we find it through our entertainments, but there is nothing that will really satisfy it short of the holy communion of God with his people, and for that you must put down your conceit and your arrogance and take up Jesus' yoke.

I don't know about you, but I'm pretty tired of kingdom building. I'm pretty tired of worrying about who we need to keep out. I'm pretty heavy laden with all of the suffering in this world that is just crying out for the communion of the saints. I hear what Jesus is saying here is, "put down your anger, your hatred, your fear, and come and follow me, my way is so much easier, you're walking light and unburdened, you can enter into true and holy relationships without all the baggage of suspicion and mistrust, come into it just with love and grace." Is it easy? No. Is it safe? Certainly not. Is it the way? Absolutely. It is what we are made for, what we're called to, if we are to be in Christ, it is what we must be.