

October 25, 2015

What Would Jesus Do?

As we started our series on this question, "What would Jesus do?" we began with a fundamental assumption. We are assuming that understanding what Jesus did in any number of situations and when confronted by any number of difficult issues would be an effective guide for our own attitudes and actions in similar situations and when facing similar issues.

Thus, last week we talked about how Jesus treated the poor and destitute that came to him throughout his ministry and we saw, I think, that the key in his treatment of them was based in his great compassion for them. This week I would like us to think about how Jesus reacted to those who came to him trapped in various sins.

As a society we are often confronted by those that we believe are doing horrible things and sinning in terrible ways. Our response to these sinners is usually dictated by how the rest of our society reacts to them. Some sins and those who commit them are accepted as normal while others are condemned out of hand as are those who commit them. But how did Jesus react to those who were trapped in sin? What did Jesus do?

There are any number of passages that we might consider, but there are two found in John's gospel that are, I think, very telling. The first occurred early in Jesus' ministry as he was traveling from Judea toward Galilee and is recorded in John 4. On this particular journey he chose to travel through Samaria even though most Jewish travelers would have chosen to go around Samaria because it was infested with sinners.

At noon he stopped at a well near the city of Sychar and while he waited for his disciples to return from a shopping trip in the city he began visiting with a woman who had arrived at the well. There are some things that stand out about this woman as the story unfolds. She has a bad reputation which she has earned by jumping from husband to husband and by living with a man who is not her husband. She is condemned as a sinner, even by those from the community where she lives.

In talking with her Jesus shows his great patience and more especially, I think, his great mercy toward her. It is not hard to understand why she is at the well in the heat of the day. To join the other women in the community at the well in the morning when they would normally gather there would expose her to their condemning attitudes. She has probably not heard a kind or gentle word in years and so she has insulated herself from the sneers of her fellow townspeople by avoiding them. Jesus, breaking several major taboos of the day, spoke gently to her about the living water that he could offer her.

The second event is one that doesn't appear in all of the manuscripts of the letter of John, but is, I think, also very indicative of Jesus' attitude toward sinners. That story is found in John 8. The Jewish leaders bring before Jesus a woman caught in the act of adultery. Under the Law of Moses they are justified in condemning her to death by stoning. They challenge Jesus to decide her fate.

Of course all of us know the outcome. Jesus calms the angry mob challenging them to consider their own sinfulness, and when they leave he shows great mercy to the woman telling her only, *"Go now and leave your life of sin."* (John 8:11) In both of these stories and in many others



that show us Jesus dealing with sinners, we find him demonstrating mercy to those who struggle with sin.

Of course Jesus was not always merciful. One group in particular aroused his anger and not his mercy. These sinners were primarily among the leading religious sect of the day. The Pharisees had developed through long years a complex system of rules and regulations that they kept religiously. They consider themselves to be very righteous because they kept these rules so religiously and to be above sinning and sinners.

Jesus condemned them again and again, not, I think because they were sinners, but because they failed to understand that keeping all of those rules they had created did not make them righteous. They were sadly, sinners who did not realize they were sinners and who lived lives condemning everyone around them as sinful. They were trapped by their blindness to their own condition and their self-righteousness was a roadblock to their repentance.

Jesus clearly treated sinners with great mercy and like him, we should let mercy guide us in our actions and attitudes toward those who struggle with sin. We covet his mercy on us for the sins that we commit and we should be merciful toward others who struggle as well.