

Trouble, from the Troublemakers – February 28 2021

Matthew 16: 1— 12

Introduction — There was a family recently, in which the father and mother insisted that the two sons and the two daughters should do chores: wash dishes, help with the laundry, mow the yard, pick up after the dog. When the kids were elementary age kids or middle school perhaps, they would say “Moouooooommm! Why do we have to do this stuff?” She would answer “I gave birth to you, now do it!” But as the kids became teenagers, and got into high school, they began to respond to the “I gave birth to you” line with “that was a long time ago!” - - kind of an implied “what have you done for us lately.” Well, Jesus found out that there were grown men in Israel who sounded a little like those teenagers.

I. What just happened???

1. The feeding of the four thousand — ch. 15: 29— 39 for the second time in only, maybe, a few weeks, God provides a miracle of abundant food, abundant bread, through Jesus, with the help of the disciples. A few weeks earlier, it was the feeding of the 5,000, women and children beside. On that day, maybe 10,000 or 15,000 people were fed!!! — Now, it is the feeding of 4,000 people. Miracles abound when Jesus has compassion — God’s compassion — on the people. — This miracle should convince everybody that God is working mightily through Jesus!!! — So, you might think — But, the religious leaders had other ideas

2. And now— what did the religious leaders want?? V. 1 Jesus was incredulous at their “demand for a sign” — he was a little insulted. His attitude was, “the miraculous feeding of the 5,000 wasn’t enough of a ‘sign’ —???? Then, the miraculous feeding of the 4,000 wasn’t enough of a ‘sign’????” What have you done for me lately, indeed.

3. What kind of sign did they want??? Did they have to be hit in the face to see it??? To see — that God is at work, in Jesus??? These religious elites, the Pharisees and the Sadducees, were

troublemakers!!! They wanted Jesus to satisfy their questions, their issues, and were not interested in what Jesus said plainly was God's will — feeding the hungry, reaching out to those in need, loving and praying for others.

II. The answer of Jesus —

1. His answer — Jesus quoted a long time sailors' observation (even then it had been long known as a warning) — an observation about the horizon, which tells sailors a half day or a day in advance, what the weather will probably be like that night and the next day. I learned it as a kid, as: — “red sky at night, sailors' delight. Red sky in morning, sailors take warning.” — In other words, some signs are clearly seen and understood by everyone— why couldn't the Pharisees and Sadducees see that??? — are you familiar with the saying, “it is as plain as the nose on your face??”

— Jesus meant—>> that he was God's messenger, God's son, and most people saw that, and understood it!! The people of Nineveh listened to Jonah— why won't the Pharisees listen to someone greater than Jonah?? — Whatever human beings have learned about God, by observing God's work in nature

— Whatever humans have figured out about God through other religions

— Whatever people have learned about God, from God's revelation about God's self through Abraham, and Moses, and the Law of Moses, and in the psalms, and through the prophets

Yet: — it is Jesus Christ who is the final, complete revelation of God to the human race. As one Bible scholar put it (William Barclay), “Jesus Christ is God's last word.... Here is God plain for all to see. Here is God's message plain for all to hear. Here is God's sign to [humanity].” “When we are confronted with Jesus Christ, we are confronted with God's final word and God's ultimate appeal.”¹ — what more could Jesus do or say, to convince the conservative Pharisees, or the politically savvy Sadducees, the religious ruling elites, that Jesus was God's special messenger, God's son, God's promised Messiah???? — answer to that??? There was nothing more that Jesus could do with the religious elites.

2. His comment to the twelve disciples??? v. 6 Jesus was frustrated with the religious leaders.

He led the disciples across the lake, the Sea of Galilee, and the disciples realized that they had forgotten to bring the seven baskets of leftover bread with them, bread leftover from the feeding of the 4,000!!! They would have to buy gentile bread, “unclean” and not proper for a Jewish rabbi & his followers to eat But they would have to, now. Then— Jesus warned the disciples: “beware the yeast (or leaven) of the Pharisees and Sadducees.” ----->>> What did Jesus mean??? Well, here we find an example.

3. Humor in the gospels!!! V. 7 the disciples, as usual, concerned with practical, immediate things right in front of them, were still thinking of the seven baskets of bread that they had forgotten— “Jesus is upset because we forgot the bread. That means we have to buy gentile bread, here on the gentile side of the Sea of Galilee. He is mad at us.”

4. Jesus became exasperated, w/ the disciples!!!! vv. 8— 11 let me paraphrase what Jesus meant: “what are you guys talking about!!! Why are you talking about bread?!?! Doesn’t God take care of our needs??? Remember the miraculous feeding of the 5,000??? What about the miraculous feeding of the 4,000??? I am not talking about bread that you eat. I am talking about the corrupting concerns about doing things the Pharisees way, or the Sadducees way, or to please one political party or another, or to please one group or another, instead of trying to please God!!!”

5. Jesus wanted his disciples to understand that the “yeast” — the “leaven” in some translations — is their selfish, narrow– minded influence that permeates everything that they believe and do. — The Pharisees and Sadducees had different ideas, of course. “The Pharisees saw religion in terms of laws and commandments and rules and regulations. They saw religion in terms of outward ritual and outward purity.”²

— The Sadducees had different priorities. “They were wealthy and aristocratic, and they were deeply involved in politics.”³ They were the descendants of Aaron and his brother Moses, and were very concerned about the continuation of Israel as a nation. They always played the political game of trying to please the Roman occupiers of Israel, whatever they had to do.

6. Jesus wanted his disciples, and all of his followers (including us!), to see that playing political

games and only being concerned with outward signs of ritual and piety, “going through the motions,” is always going to fall short of what God wants for us!!! — God is most concerned with our hearts, and our actions for others that come from the heart.

7. It is Jesus Christ, and following him, that makes all the difference. Religion, as just outward motions and rituals, is not enough. Political movements, even when well intentioned, are not enough.

III. Do you see when God is at work??

1. God at work in his people, today — my friend, Rev. Walter Cross, told me about the youth in his church and neighborhood in near north Knoxville, in the — unfortunately, Knoxville, like all medium – sized and large cities, have their own youth violence, especially in and near the inner cities. — One summer evening, two teenage youth from the area got into a disagreement. Guns appeared, and several shots were fired.

2. One of the young teenage guys who lived on that street, Xavian Dobson, a rising star on his high school football team and very active in the church youth group, was on a nearby front porch that evening, along with three little girls, aged seven or eight. When the shooting started, he grabbed those three little girls, pushed them against the wall of the house, and shielded them from the gunfire. The girls were not injured. The football player, the bright young Christian teenager, active in Rev. Cross church’s youth group, was struck and killed. That young man gave his life to save three innocent young girls from the routine violence that too often breaks out on the streets of American cities.

3. In the Gospel of John, chap. 15, verse 13, we read that Jesus said, “Greater love has no one than this: that he lay down his life for his friends.” (NIV) Rev. Walter Cross’s favorite high school football player, Xavian Dobson, was a friend to those three little girls, that evening.

4. God was at work that evening, in the life of his young disciple, that football player.

5. Where is Christ at work today?? My friend, Steve Diggs, was the son of a United Methodist minister, Hubert Diggs. Steve got a position as the youth director at Emerald Avenue United Methodist church a while ago. It is an almost inner city church, just on the near north side of downtown Knoxville, Tenn. He not only ministered to the kids of families in that church, he ministered to the youth in that neighborhood. All the youth met together, and more and more young lives were touched and turned around, and the Emerald Youth Foundation in inner city Knoxville, Tenn., was born!!! For thirty years, Emerald Ave. has offered Jesus Christ to thousands of youth in the center of the city of Knoxville, Tenn. Youth have been turned away from drugs or the dead ends of inner city life, to know that God has a future for each and every one of them. Hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of their lives have been changed— because a preacher’s kid dared to love teenagers with the love of Christ, and show them that Jesus Christ does change lives, today!!!!

Conclusion — Jesus had an interesting conversation with his disciples after he’d had that rude treatment from the Pharisees and Sadducees. He reminded his disciples that God still changes lives, and we stand here today and see that Jesus is still at work changing the lives of people in this area, and all around the world. Let’s pray he makes a difference in your life today, and every day.

Endnotes:

¹ William Barclay, Daily Bible Study Series: the Gospel of Matthew, vol. 2, Westminster Press, 1975, p. 130.

² *ibid.* p. 132.

³ *ibid.*

