

Pastor Jon Mark
Holy Wednesday
March 31, 2021

Meditation

How do we deal with staying to our principles while also recognizing the possibility that we are wrong?

Or maybe to ask another way, how do we stick with our values in a land that does not support them.

When I was at a seminary that believes in child baptism, talking about baptism is a difficult task. I should start with a story about the one class in Seminary that I dropped after one class, it was a Methodist theology course and the whole first day was taken up by talking about the importance of child baptism. Moreover, in my talks with other students if I said to someone that oh I am right and you are wrong, I would get nowhere. And though I never said it outright, sometimes my passion for the importance of individual commitment in adult baptism could get interpreted the same as I interpreted that class, my way is the only way. The way that our words are interpreted that matters. What I really needed to do was not to speak my piece but to listen and listen well. Not because anyone is going to change their minds, but because understanding is a worthy end.

Isaiah's servant is no stranger to disagreement and adversity. We do not know exactly what he as his adversaries are fighting about. The servant claims that they are rebellious, while he stayed faithful. They turned backward, while he stayed on the path. As I have spoken about before, these servant songs take place during the exile, so perhaps the rebellious and backward looking people are his fellow Jews who have decided to stay in exile, rather than return to Jerusalem. It is one thing to turn our backs on a class that presents a theology that would fall flat in my chosen denomination, it is quite another thing for us to turn our backs on our own kin who we think have gone astray.

The servant sticks to his values, he is certain that what he is doing is right. He is so certain that he bears their mistreatment, they strike him, pull his beard, they try to shame him. But the servant makes his face like flint, turns the other cheek, and turns his back on them. In the face of adversity he stops listening, he cannot listen.

The servant shows one way to stick to one's values, stop listening to the other side, make your face like flint, and continue walking your own path. And I want to take this position seriously because there are times in our lives that we must do this. When people come to us to hurl insults or stones, there is little chance for communication. In those moments of conflict, it is human

nature to either stand firm or fold. In those moments, there is no shame in sticking to your principles.

However, this evening let me present to you the third way, to listen to the other. So how do we listen in the face of our own small moments of adversity? One method is through empathy, we put ourselves in their shoes and try to see the situation from their perspective. All of us have lived different lives, been raised with different values, and learned different lessons. It is important to realize that we are all on the journey and those further along the path should not look down on those who are just not realizing that the climate is warming or black people are people. Listen first, only then can we understand and tell our own stories. Though remember there is a high cost to empathy. Another method is listening as one being taught, listening as a student. When the high emotions have died down and we realize that someone of different principles has their own truth to share, we can become their students and they become ours. We listen to understand the other person even if we never change our own principles. This is a way of going deep into our own principles, thinking through them instead of just believing what we believe at face value. This is one way that interfaith dialogue works.

Through listening to the words of others, through being students we can become teachers.