



Sermons from Northwood United Church

**“Talkin’ ‘Bout a Revolution.”
1 Corinthians 1:18-25, John 2:13-22
Will Sparks March 11, 2012**

May the words of my mouth, the meditations of our hearts and the actions of our lives be acceptable in your sight, O God, our strength and our redeemer. Amen.

I know it is not Christmas, but I want to begin by asking you to stretch your minds a little bit and imagine you are hearing a boys choir in Westminster Abbey in London like I did one Christmas, and imagine the beautiful sounds of “Once in Royal David’s city.” You know that one. “Once in royal David’s city stood a lowly cattle shed...” Imagining it yet? Well there is one verse that just cracks me up. It goes, “And through all his wondrous childhood, he would honor and obey, love and watch the lowly maiden in whose gentle arms he lay...” And then comes the kicker, the real icing on the cake. “Christian children all must be, mild, obedient, good as he.”

Now if ever you heard a prescription for a good Victorian child, isn’t that it. Children must be like Jesus, polite, mild mannered, quiet, long-suffering, even-keeled. In other words, just like gentle Jesus, meek and mild. Gentle Jesus meek and mild is not someone who flies off the handle. Gentle Jesus meek and mild is not someone whose emotions get the better of him. Gentle Jesus meek and mild is a stoic kind of character whose emotions, if he had them, were always kept in check.

Well leaving aside the fact that we actually have nothing about Jesus as a child in the gospels except one story of him not listening to his parents in the temple as a young teen, today’s gospel reading paints a completely different Jesus- today, gentle Jesus meek and mild flew off the handle, blew a gasket. And it probably wasn’t the first time. Jesus goes into the temple in Jerusalem, sees the trading going on in the court of the gentiles, and loses his cool. And what was he so mad about? Well imagine this. For hundreds of years the people of God living primarily in an agricultural society had been showing their devotion to God in the same way. They found the best produce they had and brought it to the temple. What they had offered to God was a fragrant offering over which they had labored and raised themselves. In other words they had offered something close to their heart, precious, something which held a connection for the one bringing it.

And now, in Jesus time, many people were from cities, coming from long distances, couldn’t cart a young sheep or goat all that way, didn’t want to; a business opportunity for those around the temple. Sell your goods to traders who would bring them to the temple and make a profit selling in the court of the gentiles. And the sellers hoped that the worshippers wouldn’t look too closely. And if in the trading the animals were not the best of offerings, well, lower the price. Make a deal. And if it was just before Passover, even better. The worshippers would be as desperate and the person looking for a Christmas tree on Christmas eve.

Jesus looks at this sleazy cheapening of the sacred acts of his people and says what other prophets before him had said, “Your heart is not in this. You have turned this sacred place into a strip mall.” And he turns over the tables of commerce. “For I desire steadfast love, not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings.” Rend your hearts not your garments. In other words, “I want what is most precious to you all the time, not just the prescribed animal on the specified day in the designated place done in the appropriate manner by the appointed people.” Yes, gentle Jesus meek and mild blew a gasket and the issue was the spoiling of the soul of his people.

Friends, gentle Jesus meek and mild never existed. Gentle Jesus meek and mild was a creation of Victorian society wanting to keep a generation or two of children in their place. And in the process, as Dorothy Sayers put it, “We have efficiently pared the claws off the lion of Judah turning Jesus into a household pet for pale curates and pious old ladies.” And pious young men I would add.

Some have liked the way gentle Jesus meek and mild is so easy to live with. But gentle Jesus meek and mild, the declawed lion of Judah, will never change the world, bring about the kingdom of God, or even inspire us to live fully and freely and vibrantly. And besides all that, I believe he never existed.

I believe we need to lay gentle Jesus meek and mild to rest and in his place, rediscover Jesus the revolutionary, the one whose blood boiled over that day in the temple, the one whose grief overflowed at the death of his good friend Lazarus, the one who looked across the valley at the holy city, supposed to be the hub of love and justice for his people and the world and wept at the sorry state of Jerusalem.

And after we have laid gentle Jesus meek and mild to rest and as we begin to discover a Jesus whose angers, passions, griefs, loves and longings were real and hot and still holy, we may also begin to discover our own angers, passions, griefs, loves and longings that are real and hot and still holy. There is a whole lot more to faithfulness than politeness. There is grit and courage.

In the United Church of Canada we have known this in the past. We have had a reputation for being the outspoken courageous social voice. We have been known as a place of courageous welcome with a fierce commitment to social justice. Joanne Ward wrote a piece that she shared with me last week about North Surrey in which she talked with a sense of holy purpose about the social ministry of North Surrey United. But in recent years, it has been harder to be courageous. Concerns about our future have dominated our consciousness, either because we have had our own issues, or we have lost our traction in the public arena.

Well friends, I think we are coming to a time when we can listen again to the lion of Judah, when we can come out of our protective shell and look around and rediscover the grit and passion of the gospel, find the places of suffering that really touch us, the places of struggle that really heat up our blood, and go there. God understands the time we have been through and our struggle to find traction in a world that doesn't seem to care about our message the way it used to. But I believe God is falling to us to offer our best, most passionate, most real, most uncensored honest selves unleashed in the world. Gandhi once said, “I have learned through bitter experience to conserve my anger and, as heat conserved is transmitted into energy, even so, our anger controlled can be transmitted into power which can move the world.

The Lion of Judah calls. It is time for our true hearts to come forth.

Amen