

The Message for Sunday, February 28, 2010

Title: “Fruit Stand”

Scripture: Luke 13:31-35

I. Shock... Let’s pretend, for just a few minutes, that we have never read the Gospel account—none of them. How would the Gospel of Luke sound to us? If we were reading Luke for the first time, shortly after it was written, we would probably be living in Rome. By the time we got to the 13th chapter, what impression would we have about the Pharisees?

In chapter 5 (verse 21), Luke says that the Pharisees and Scribes accused Jesus of blasphemy. Blasphemy is being totally irreverent toward God. Because it is sin against God and not against a human being, it is considered even worse than murder. Later in the 5th chapter, and then in the next chapter, Luke reports that the Pharisees complained directly to the Disciples of Jesus that they ate with sinners and did not obey the Jewish laws concerning the Sabbath.

Still later, Luke tells us that Jesus denounced the Pharisees by saying that they were greedy, wicked, and hypocrites (13:31 ff.). He went so far as to call them “foolish people” (11:39-40). Just after that (11:54), Luke tells us that the Pharisees began “lying in wait for him, to catch him in something he might say.”

Up until then, any reader of the Gospel of Luke would have gotten the clear impression that Jesus and the Pharisees did not get along. So, if we were reading the Gospel for the first time, don’t you think it would come as quite a shock to read where the Pharisees came to warn Jesus?

II. What’s going on?... Luke tells us that Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem where he would be crucified. Somewhere in Galilee, at some town or village along the way, a contingent of Pharisees came to Jesus and said that He needed to get out of the area because Herod wanted to kill him. This is the same Herod (Antipas) who had John the Baptist beheaded. He was a dangerous man. Even Jesus called him a fox, indicating that he was cunning as well as dangerous.

There were many reasons the Pharisees did not like Jesus. In addition to Him calling them foolish, greedy, wicked, and hypocrites, there was the whole problem of who Jesus said he was. Even though the Pharisees were looking for a Messiah, they did not believe that Jesus was the One sent by God. In addition, they did not like it that he was healing people and claiming that His power was from God.

So, how is it that proven enemies of Jesus would want to warn him? When I read that passage in Luke, I immediately get suspicious. What’s going on? Did the Pharisees have a change of heart? Jesus is in the heart-changing business. Did the Pharisees see an opportunity to scare Jesus out of Galilee? That is where Jesus had 90% of his ministry. And, that is where Herod was ruler (literally “tetrach”). Or, were they working with Herod and attempting to chase Jesus out of Galilee as early as possible so that he

could be more easily dealt with in Jerusalem? Actually, Jesus was less well known in Jerusalem; and there was more support from Rome there.

III. The big deal... These questions literally plagued me for days. You might say, “So what? What’s the big deal?” Herod did not end up writing history. Jesus went to Jerusalem, as planned, and there suffered and died before being resurrected. So, here is the big deal—at least for me.

I kept wondering if the Pharisees were concerned about Jesus simply because they did not want to see human blood shed once again by Rome. Or, were they concerned because they did not want to see the Savior sacrificed?

In the end, I came to one conclusion. Even though I had good reason to suspect the motives of the Pharisees, I did not, in fact, really know their motives. I just assumed they were up to their old tricks. In reality, I was guilty of pre-judging them.

IV. Fruit Stand... In the 1960’s, hippies began pouring into a dilapidated neighborhood in San Francisco named Haight-Ashbury. Soon, it was a center for drugs and psychedelic music. But, as with many cultural phenomena, the area was gradually gentrified. Many of the hippies moved out and moved on.

Eventually, they began to settle down and have families. However, they didn’t name their children Bob or Suzie. Instead, they gave them names like “Moon Unit,” “Time Warp” and “Spring Fever.” Children with these names, plus hundreds of others with names like Moonbeam, Earth, Love, and Precious Promise began to show up at the schools in California.

Luanne Oleas of Salinas, California, writes of one child who showed up the first day of school with “Fruit Stand” on his name tag. The teachers thought the boy’s name was odd, but they were used to such names by then and were willing to work with it.

They would say, “Would you like to play with the blocks, Fruit Stand?” Or, “Fruit Stand, how about a snack?”

He accepted—hesitantly. By the end of the day, his name did not seem that much more odd than “Moonbeam” or “Sun Ray.”

When school was over that first day, the teachers led the children out to meet the buses. His teacher asked, “Fruit Stand, do you know which one is your bus?”

He did not answer. That was not too unusual. He had not seemed to be very attentive all day. They simply reasoned, lots of children are shy on the first day of school. Well, no matter.

To keep things from getting too complicated, the teachers had instructed the parents to write the location of their child’s bus on the back of the name tag. And so, when Fruit Stand did not answer, his teacher simply reached out for his name tag and turned it over. There, printed neatly on the other side was “Anthony.” (Luanne Oleas in Salinas, Calif., *Reader’s Digest*, found at www.sermonillustrations.com)

Having taught many a class, I know how something like this could have happened. A student shows up who is not on the roll. Seeing a name tag, I might have only asked for his last name, and then added “Fruit Stand Jones” to the temporary, first day roll of students and reported it to the Dean. I might have done the same thing and called Anthony “Fruit Stand” for a couple of days. Any one of us could have done the same

thing, simply assuming that this kid had another one of those crazy, left-over hippie names.

This true story is a rather light-hearted way of illustrating the problem caused by assuming. But, we do it every day. Sometimes, it only leads to a little humor and some mild embarrassment. But, it can have more serious consequences.

V. A dangerous assumption... Edward McManus tells the story of a photographer for a national magazine who was assigned to get photos of a great forest fire. There was so much smoke and confusion that the photographer was hampered from arranging for an airplane to take him over the fire. He whipped out his cell phone and called his home office. He asked them to hire a plane. The home office made arrangements, and the photographer was told to go to a nearby airport as quickly as he could where the plane would be waiting. Maybe he could get a scoop with exclusive photos.

When he arrived at the airport, a plane was warming up near the runway. Dragging all of his equipment behind him, he jumped in the plane and yelled, “Let’s go! Let’s go!”

The pilot taxied down the runway and took off. As soon as they were clear of the airport, the photographer shouted to the pilot, “Fly over the north side of the fire and make three or four low-level passes.”

The pilot asked, “Why?”

The photographer got a little agitated and shouted back, “Hurry. If I get some good photographs maybe we can beat the other guys to press.”

After a short pause, the pilot said, “You mean you’re not the instructor?” (From *The Jokesmith* and found at www.sermonillustrations.com. The Jokesmith is published by Edward C. McManus and is a comedy newsletter for business and professional speakers.)

This is another humorous illustration of a situation that could have had serious consequences—even life-altering consequences.

How many of us have had to suffer in school based on the reputation of an older brother or sister? Did a teacher simply assume that you are a goof-off like your older brother? Or, did a teacher assume that you would be a scholastic whiz like your older sister? In a similar fashion, have you ever assumed that someone who wants to bid on your project will be as crooked as was his father when he was a contractor?

It seems to me that all of us, far too often, will judge someone simply because of an undeserved reputation and never give him or her another chance. How much confidence do you think it destroys in a child we simply assume that they will be a trouble maker? How much damage do you think you will cause when you assume someone will have the same talents as someone else. And, how fair do you think it is to sum someone up simply by looking at him or her—or by observing one thing that he or she has done?

One of the great things about Jesus was that he never simply judged anyone by the way they looked, or what they **had been doing**. Jesus always looked for potential—especially the potential to repent. And, that leads me to the last thing I want to say.

VI. xxxxx... John tells the very painful story of a woman who had been caught in adultery and who was dragged before Jesus. The crowd knew what they were going to do with the woman. They were going to stone her. But, before they could do that, they

thought they would use her to force Jesus into saying something they could use against him.

They asked Jesus what they should do with the woman. They were kind enough to remind Jesus what the Law said of such a situation. They said, “The law of Moses says that she should be stoned.” (Leviticus. 20:10 and Deuteronomy 22.22)

As we might expect, Jesus did not jump to conclusions. Sure, she had sinned. She had been caught in the act. Jewish law stipulates that there must be witnesses. It is likely, they were in the crowd who brought the woman to Jesus. But, Jesus simply was not willing to condemn this woman without giving her a chance. And, it is clear that he meant for the crowd of condemners to do the same. He simply stated that the person without sin should throw the first stone in what would become an expected execution.

No one picked up a rock—of which there are plenty in the Holy Land. Instead, they simply turned and left. Jesus then looked at the woman and said, “I don’t see anyone who is left to condemn you. So, go and don’t repeat the sin.” (John 7:53 through 8:11)

The point is this. It would have been easy to condemn the woman. She had the look of sin all over her. But, Jesus saw that there was more to the woman than sin. Jesus saw the potential for the woman to repent and be returned to the community as a productive citizen. Don’t you think Jesus expects the same thing from us? Don’t you think Jesus wants us to look at everyone that way? Don’t you think that Jesus wants us to look at people and see beyond the first impression? Isn’t that the way we want him to look at us? Isn’t that the way we want others to think of us?

Sure, we all sin. And, there are times we not only look guilty of something, but are. And yet, *we* know that we not only want to do better, we *will* do better. All we need is for someone to give us that chance. It will never happen if we go ahead and make up our minds beforehand that nothing good can come from someone else.

I caught myself in the act of assuming that the Pharisees had something up their sleeve when, in truth, I do not know what their motives were. And, if I was willing to do it for the Pharisees, then I might also do it for someone else who is in much greater need of grace than condemnation.

That is the way Jesus does it. And, I think that is the way he wants us to treat others. Maybe we will do that if we remember that someone’s life hangs in the balance.

Now, go and sin no more.

Rev. Michael O’Bannon, Pastor