

Jesus Says, "Be Civil, In an Extraterrestrial Kinda Way"

Lessons:

From genesis 4; 1-10, ed.

Now Eve conceived and bore Cain. And again, she bore his brother Abel. Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, and Cain a tiller of the ground. ³ By and by, Cain brought to the LORD an offering of the fruit of the ground, ⁴ and Abel brought of the firstlings of his flock. And the LORD had regard for Abel and *his* offering, ⁵ but for Cain and *his* offering he had *no* regard. So Cain was very angry *[afraid God loved Able more, so]... Cain said to Abel, "Let us go out to the field." And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel, and killed him. Then the LORD said to Cain, "Where is Abel your brother?" Cain said, "I do not know; am I my brother's keeper?" ¹⁰ And the LORD said, "What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground....

*Insert: non-canonical

John 15:12-17, 18-27

¹² "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. ¹³ Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. ¹⁴ You are my friends if you do what I command you. ¹⁵ No longer do I call you servants,^[a] for the servant^[b] does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you. ¹⁶ You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide; so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you. ¹⁷ This I command you, to love one another.

¹⁸ "If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. ¹⁹ If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. ²⁰ Remember the word that I said to you, 'A servant^[c] is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will persecute you; if they kept my word, they will keep yours also. ²¹ But all this they will do to you on my account, because they do not know him who sent me. ²² If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have sin; but now they have no excuse for their sin. ²³ He who hates me hates my Father also. ²⁴ If I had not done among them the works which no one else did, they would not have sin; but now they have seen and hated both me and my Father. ²⁵ It is to fulfil the word that is written in their law, 'They hated me without a cause.' ²⁶ But when the Counselor comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness to me; ²⁷ and you also are witnesses, because you have been with me from the beginning.

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Chancel well, Bible open. Jesus Says, "Be Civil, In an Extraterrestrial Kinda Way." *Star Wars theme.* WHERE does Jesus say that? (Bible "pages" to floor) I don't see it anywhere. So, what DID Jesus say? "...Love one another as I have loved you. You didn't choose *me*, but I chose *you*... to bear fruit that lasts! *Because you are not of the world*, I chose you. *You are my witnesses.* ... *You* heard me answer when the lawyer asked, 'Teacher, which is the great commandment?' And I said, '#1, Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, and mind. And #2, Love your neighbor as yourself. Everything that matters to God depends on these.'" REPEAT. Mtt. (22: 34-40) Biblically, *this* is

the CIVILITY we've been discussing for weeks, And Jesus tells us *all*, 'This kind of *civility* is, well, outta this world!'

Now, after 4 or 5 weeks of *any* sermon series, *some* folks get to feelin' like kids in the back of the car. "*Are we... there yet?*" Take heart! Jesus has a phrase. "Yet a *little* while...." But for now, *Civility's* our watchword. Though not a *Bible* word, it's deeply Biblical. For Bible folks, *civility's* not mere politeness, or "go along to get along". *Civil* derives from *civic*. *Civic* owes its life and breath to *community*... for believers, the *Beloved Community* of both Testaments, whose bedrocks are justice, kindness, mercy, hospitality to the stranger, love of God and one another. *This Civility* seems *outta this world* when actually encountered *in* this world. 'Odd, it's often easier to see in times-not-our-own. Take a look at *Little Women*, not the current TV show about non-tall ladies, but Louisa May Alcott's old book. There's now a sequel, about *Mr. March*.* It's the Civil War period. This abolitionist band-of-sisters-and-mother resists the Fugitive Slave Law, their Massachusetts home a stop on the Underground Rail Road. Sister Beth has answered the heavy rap of an officer at the door looking for runaway slaves he's been told may be there. Beth reports to her father-returned-from-the-war. "I told him his informant was mistaken. It wasn't a lie, Father. I told him I'd never seen a *slave* in this house, and that is the simple truth. ...There *are* no slaves in God's eyes... God sees everything, and if *he* sees no slaves in this house, how can there *be* any?" Wow! *Biblical civility* outta this world. But that was then. This is now. *Now* what?

It's hard to show respect, patience, courtesy-and-trust to those *we know* (or barely so), just to get along. And so many, especially those unknown to us or different from us, can be so difficult, such a *pain*. (Can we say that in church?). I mean, it's *tough* to be *ordinarily* civil, much less to follow *Jesus'* command actually to *LOVE* each other. Wouldn't that be... just... *other-worldly*, *extraterrestrial*, almost like an *actual* outbreak of heaven... here upon earth?! **O, HOW do we make sense of Jesus' command to love as he loves? What would be the consequences... the results? Especially today?**

Let us be *deeply* Biblical here! This isn't just ethics, politics, or partisanship. But it *is* Live, Late-Breaking News, and *has* been, ever since Adam and Eve had kids. You remember *them*. Cain and Able. *Jesus* remembered, too... right there at that Last Supper with his own. "I command you, love one another as I've loved you." Love *extraordinarily*, he's saying. "No greater love than this, my life for yours." ***This is the exact reversal of Cain for his brother.***

Cain slays, *delivers* the blow. Jesus saves, *absorbs* the blow. The second cancels the first. The whole human story, hereafter reversed. This is RADICAL. And WE are to become that very radicality. GET THIS. Jesus *next* words are... *conditional*. “You are my friends *IF* you do what *I* do. O, I’ll die for you no matter what,” says Jesus. “But do as I do and you’re no longer merely my servants (*doulos*, servants/slaves). I mean, the servant does as told, even without understanding, but you GET IT! You’re my disciples, friends, intimates, my beloved because every last word I’ve heard from my Father I’ve made known to you. After that, *how could-you-dare-say* you chose me first? [Remember, some at that very Table, like some of us, dare ask for special treatment in the Kingdom, arguing, “After all, Jesus, look at all I’ve done for you since I ‘signed on.’” Jesus punctures *their* balloon *and* ours.] “*You* didn’t choose me, I chose you: to bear fruit that lasts! FRUIT. GET THIS, Cain the tiller of the garden, tender of vineyards finally gets to give a gift God rejoices to receive (not reject), and now whatever he/we ask, the Father will give. Why? First, for Jesus’ sake. But then too, because God knows we will *no longer ask*, “Am I my brother’s keeper?” *if* we are keepers of Christ’s command to love as Christ loves. Utterly. Wholeheartedly.

Why wrestle with this heavy stuff now? Because: ***church oughta be where we learn to think like Christians so we can find the grace to act like Jesus.*** + And because: our current world course brings us full circle, *back* to that primary question, “Am I my brother’s keeper?” Cain’s not asking God for information. His question’s entirely *rhetorical*. Not so for God. *God* knows, the question is *apocalyptic*... all about the end of human time. Because God has known at least from Cain and Able: if we *are* not each other’s keeper, we *will* be each other’s murderer. Keep each other or kill each other, fast or slow. That’s the beginning and the end of it/us. Families should know this. Neighbors. Communities. Yes, countries and all their leaders. Even the *earth itself* should know. For we shall either keep *it*...or kill it. It is the last question. Maybe the only question. (For Christians, our answer to the question, “To keep or to kill” is our only *real* response to *Jesus’* question, “Do you love me?” Jesus says, “If you love me, keep my commandments. ‘Love God with your ALL, and your neighbor as yourself.’” Now, *Jesus* says, “I and the Father are one.” And the very *first* command of God the *Father* to us all is... to *tend* the earth, for fruit and for growth. Not for diminishment, exhaustion, extinction or death. Every week, every believer needs to be confronted with the uncomfortable question of how she or he is answering Jesus, how he or she is obeying God.) This is the Bible’s call to the highest

civility of all. It's outta-this-world, yet our own deepest murmur of the prayer Christ commands, "Thy Kingdom come on earth as in heaven."

Christ's Table Talk makes sense of his command to love. ***Our life depends on it.*** So what on earth might be the *results*? What'd be different? More from Jesus in a second. But let me quote a more whimsical Extraterrestrialist. *Yoda*. He's pretty Biblical. HE says, "Fear is the path to the dark side. Fear leads to anger. Anger leads to hate. Hate leads to suffering." Yoda's got the sequence just right. Jesus knew it and taught it. Fought it and defeated it. Now Jesus is inviting us to claim his victory for ourselves. Over fear, anger, hate and suffering. And the GOOD news is, he has already paid the cost in our behalf!

Like it or not, these *civility* sermons have sent us headlong into current events. For some, we preachers done quit to preachin' and got to meddlin'. As for me, I 'been at this 50 years. And many the times I've been told, "Rev., what you need to do is preach more about sin!" By decade 2, I finally understood, changed m' ways, 'began to ask, "*Whose* sin? 'Theirs'/or yours?" That usually closed the subject. But today, we just can't be faithful here and not keep open the subject of *fear*. It's all around. Some fear gov't. failure, others its success. Russians, immigrants, terrorists, liberals, conservatives, N. Koreans, cholesterol, calories, commentators on TV: all feared, anger-making, hated. ***It's the Yoda trifecta!*** Surely suffering lies ahead. Or... NOT! Let's go to Jesus, the Table Savior who says over and over, "Fear not; don't be afraid." And let's go to John, the Beloved Disciple beside him, in whose name are written these words, "We know and believe the love God has for us. God *is* love, and he who abides in love abides in God.... There is no fear in love, *but perfect love casts out fear...* and those who fear are not (yet) perfected in love. ⁺⁺And don't forget, *Jesus* says, "You be *perfect*, as your Father in heaven is perfect." Anything less... is sin!

In Jesus' name I permission, remind, implore, guide and direct you, DON'T BE AFRAID! ***Don't let fear be your Lord, because it will never be your Savior.*** Fear is the face of the Tempter-of-Jesus-in-the-desert saying to us as to Christ, "Bow down and worship me, and I'll give you all the earth's kingdoms." Like Jesus, let *us* respond in word and deed, "Be gone, Satan! For, 'You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve.'" ⁺⁺⁺

The gravest, greatest mark of sinful INCivility is not rudeness but *fear*. Fear of "the other", the different, the unaccustomed, the not-like us. To be *civil* for the sake of Christ is to refuse the very construct of "the other". (What or

whoever is not like us). We lose our *excuse* for fear or anger. We have NO *PERMISSION* to see any other person as less than one for whom Christ died! ‘Whether they acknowledge that sacrifice or not. The offspring of fear is anger, born into this world as our defense against any and all that frightens us. ***This why our present time is so angry, because it is so frightful. Fear is not the child of anger, anger is the child of fear!*** It has *less* to do with partisan politics than any of our news or tweets will show or tell. It has *more* to do with a pervasive culture of *fear-for-profit*. It is SIN. And quite frankly, it rises, not just from politicians, but also advertisers and yes, even religions. SO: the antidote for incivility is not politeness, but, of all things...LOVE. *This* is revolutionary... *Because as Jesus knows, perfect love casts fear AND Satan out.* And as fear fades, anger cools. Conflict collapses into the waiting arms of blessed assurance. And you and I are enabled to make those sacrifices, unnoticed to unparalleled, that allow for that civility the Scriptures call ***Justice*** and ***Peace***.

And what would be the result, the consequence of such a holy civility? **What on earth would happen if “otherness” were destroyed?** *Oh. Wait a minute. It already has been.* God wrote it into the Christ-child that *not even God* is utterly Other-than-we. *God in Christ* fled into Egypt, the lowest and most powerless of undocumented political refugees, and knew himself *something* of an alien all his life, because his Kingdom was not of this world. Yet we hear at Christ’s table, God’s Anointed declare, “I and the Father are one.” And then, God seals us as God’s-own at the cross, where, “Even while *we* were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” What if “otherness” were destroyed? Between Heaven and earth, and between us *on* the earth? “The blind see, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor get good news. (from Lk. 7: 22) The wolf and the lamb feed together, the lion eats straw like the ox; only dust becomes the tempter’s food. And none dare hurt or destroy in all God’s holy mountain.” (Isa. 65:25) And the leaves of the tree-of-life are for the *healing* of the nations. (Rev. 22: 2) **At the cross,** the **Golden Idol of Otherness has already been [Break “Idol”] destroyed.** It is utterly UNGLUED. [Reveal shards] It is not for us to try to RE-glue the shards so we can continue to hate one another or deny the Redeemer-come-to-claim-us-all. That would be more than uncivil. It would be ungodly. Thanks be to God who has shown us a more excellent way! **Star Wars theme.**

**March*, Geraldine Brooks, alt.

+*Fear of the Other*, William Willimon, alt.

++1 John 4:16, 18 +++Matthew. 4: 10

