



## 19 PENTECOST

A05 (PROPER 21)

26th Sunday in Ordinary Time

25 September 2005

Pastor Kevin Maly

Ezekiel 18:1-4; 25-32

Psalm 25

Philippians 2:1-13

Matthew 21:23-32

At first, they thought he was great, and they were ready to follow him anywhere. OK, he was from Nazareth in Galilee, and that was a bit of a problem since Galilee was full of gentiles, and Galilean Jews tended to intermarry with them, and the result was a sort of losers' version of the true faith. And Scripture does skeptically ask if anything good can come out of Nazareth. But all of that could be overlooked seeing as how Jesus was of the house and lineage of David, and he was—supposedly—born in the City of David, and all of that was a definite plus as far as his candidacy for Messiahship was concerned. On the other hand, there was that matter of his inner-circle being comprised mostly of Galilean fishermen—but that too might have just been a sign that this Jesus could reform anyone—and it was possible that the whole Galilean fisherman thing was simply a cover, that they were really bodyguards and advance agents, sons of powerful religious leaders from Jerusalem ready to throw off their disguises and become freedom fighters when the time became right for revolution.

What really spoke in favor of Jesus' qualifications for Messiahship, however, were the miracles. Big "WOW" factor. Definite sex appeal! Giving sight to the blind! Hearing to the deaf! Making the lame walk! And then those food miracles—making a single basket of loaves and fishes feed thousands of people! Awesome. Casting out demons was a good sign too. Lots of power there—obviously Jesus had what it would take to cast off the yoke of Roman oppression and restore right religion. And that news of him calming the storm—true mastery of the elements—power over nature—it couldn't get much better. What's more he had a way with the crowds, and that would be very, very useful for commanding the kind of revolutionary force that would allow Messiah to vanquish the Roman army and rebuff all of the worldly powers that would be set to prey upon the nation. Yes, this Jesus looked like genuine Messiah material and those who knew exactly what God's will for the world was were ready to follow him. Time to build a truly Christian nation—one led by a Messiah of power and might—one who would restore capital punishment for adulterers, homosexuals, and prostitutes, one who would keep women in the home where they belonged, one who enact the death penalty for tax-collectors and other collaborators, one who would respect traditional family values.

But then things started going sour. The Galilean fishermen turned out to be just that—ignorant working-class peasants who reportedly never fasted and were seen in public breaking the Biblical dietary laws right and left. And then there was that whole business with the women. Jesus and those filthy Galilean fishermen allowed women to speak with them of God, allowed to travel around with them, allowed women to eat with them—in clear and blatant violation of scriptural principles. What was more, some of these women seemed to be supporting the men—something no self-respecting male would ever, ever, ever allow. Supposedly Jesus even allowed a prostitute to kiss him and give him a foot massage.

Then there was the stuff he said—talked about giving to everyone who asked, about lending money without expecting anything back. And get this—he said if anyone wants to sue you and take your coat, give that person your cloak as well. And it got worse: do not resist an evil doer, but if anyone strikes you on one cheek turn the other also. And just when you thought it couldn't get worse?—it actually, really, seemingly impossibly did: he said go, love your enemies, and pray for those who hate you. What sort of Messiah says that sort of thing? How could a person be the anointed one of the most high, powerful God and, at the same time, advocate a total renunciation of power? It's one thing for a Messiah to be a bit unconventional—another one for a Messiah to act like . . . to act like . . . well, to be blunt about it, a loser, wimp, a woman. That is what those who knew what a Messiah should be couldn't handle. And so, the powerful and the truly religious began to fall away. Winners do not back losers.

What drove the final nail into the coffin was the way that Jesus treated the sinners, those whose sins were responsible for the nation's woes. Jesus seemed to welcome prostitutes, tax collectors, and other completely disreputable types. If this man were truly the Messiah, he would know what sort of people these were. But he not only welcomed those people, he seemed almost . . . well almost like their servant rather than their judge. Next thing you know, he'd be washing their feet instead of treating them like the immoral people they were. And of course, they ate that up.

And so as the days went on, the powerful and respectable, the upright and those imbued with family values—they defected from Jesus in droves, while the numbers of the riff-raff and of the great unwashed grew by leaps and bounds—seems they had the gall and effrontery to believe that God actually loved them. They had the gall to trust that somehow this Jesus made them righteous before God. They had the unmitigated gall to trust that they were somehow dear to God—to actually trust that the almighty, omnipotent one would sink so low as to consider them precious, that the almighty, omnipotent one would kneel to serve them. Can you imagine!!!!?

Put all of this together and of course both the right and the left, both the sensible religious folks and the radical revolutionaries lost all their trust in Jesus. How could you trust a Messiah who would rather die than fight, who, if you took him at his word, would do something so foolish as to offer forgiveness to his murderers rather than strike them dead? And so as the end drew near, the only ones who really had any trust in him were the widows, the orphans, the prostitutes, the hustlers, and the thieves—the losers of the world. And they actually believed they had some sort of “new life” in him—that they were filled with his Spirit—that they were being reborn in his image. Why would anyone with any reason or strength want to be reborn in the image of some fool of a Messiah who empties himself of power and takes the form of a weak and womanish slave?