Reimagining the Church – as an iconoclastic revolution (May 5, 2024)
Reading: Galatians 5:1-9

1. What a title! Let's define a term: iconoclastic. Iconoclastic means "idol breaker." When armies would conquer a great city, they would enter their temples and break their enemies' idols. That is why you see so many idols of the ancient world missing their arms or heads or both.

2. Iconoclasm is not something we usually think of when we think of Christianity. Christianity is conservative, nothing changes here, don't rock the boat, get in line and become disciplined…you get the idea. But there is nothing more iconoclastic than Christianity. Nothing has kicked over as many idols and broken as many "unbreakable rules" as Christianity.

3. Think of the list: woman as property? As Jesus about that. Attack women who have fallen into sin? As Jesus about that. Slavery? Ask Jesus. The value of a single human life? Ask Jesus. His answer has always been the opposite of that of the world…until he wins them over.

4. He continues to kick over idols in our lives: fallen stars, disgraced politicians, broken and forgotten celebrities, jobs, economies… even our own bodies. Everything fades away except the Messiah, the King of Kings, our Lord.

5. Think about the world Jesus entered that night in Bethlehem and the world he encountered after he left the desert, being tempted of the devil, and climbed the Mount of Olives to deliver what we call the Sermon on the Mount.

6. Have you read the first 5 books of the Bible? Some of it is quite exciting and some of it seems tedious and repetitive. We love the stories of the heroes and the bad guys but we do not care for the list of ceremonies, details, sacrifices, pomp, clergy and their clothing, etc.

7. For a thousand years and more, that was the only way to approach God. You had to live in His approved community and follow the 600+ laws and customs they were given. No one could even imagine another way to live in a relationship with God and in fellowship with other believers. This was THE way. Period. End of discussion.

8. And then… Jesus came. The Lamb of God was, from the very first, an iconoclast, a revolutionary and he did not hesitate to make that known in that first recorded sermon, sat there on the Mount of Olives.

9. He started by standing the world on its head. Through the Beatitudes, he broke the system, declaring it null and void. He declared that his people were blessings and irritants: salt and light. They do NOT swim with the flow and they do NOT bow down to culture or the cultural norm.

10. Then, in Matthew 5:21, 27, 33, 38, 43 he blows a hole right through the traditions and assumptions of the last 1000 years. "You have heard it said…but I say to you." What scandalous talk! Who can this be who dares to contradict everything we've come to believe came directly from the hand of God? (he's ruining our church!)

11. This is nothing less than revolutionary. He stakes out a position and then calls us to join this minority, for he has never relied on huge numbers of horses, chariots, swords or people. History tells us that the minority, when motivated, moves the majority. We have seen that in the Revolutionary War (30% max), the Bolshevik Revolution (less than 20%), or our current revolutions attacking sexual norms and marriage (less than 3% 20 years ago), etc. Revolutions are rarely popular with everyone and can be for good or evil.

12. The leader of this revolution claimed authority (Matthew 7:28,29). He had authority to lead this new movement, to change the whole look, feel, and sound of church, to upend what they thought marked them as God's people.

13. When the colonists rebelled against Great Britain, one of the reasons cited in the Declaration was the outrageous taxes levied on the people without their consent. It was nearly 2%! The income tax then came in during the Civil War and went in and out again as crises arose and abated. Then it came and stayed. And no revolution.

14. My point? Merely this: revolutions will fail if they are not remembered and the reasons for the revolution forgotten. If the memories fade away, what will maintain the goals of the revolution? When civics in grade through high school vanished, when statues

and markers were taken down, and when vast swathes of literature and history were erased because it wasn't convenient to remember them, the goals of the earlier revolutions were forgotten and ground was lost.

15. After the Civil War, American blacks gained power. About 2000 held state or federal offices. Sixteen African Americans were elected to Congress. Both of Mississippi's senators were black. Then, a war on truth and history gained political power and Reconstruction ended, Jim Crow began. All of the revolution's gains were lost when Woodrow Wilson, an avowed and open racist, became president. He went to work immediately, making interracial marriage illegal, demoting or firing all black employees of the civil service, segregating the civil service for the first time since the Civil War, making all Cabinet members segregate their workforces after demoting or firing their black employees.

16. It was President Wilson who brought us separate washcloths, fountains, restaurants, real estate, and more. One black clerk who could not, because of the nature of his work, be segregated from his co-workers was placed in an actual cage to satisfy federal mandates. Employers were required to have a photo attached to every resume to make sure black people weren't hired to jobs reserved for whites.

17. Even by the standards of his day, Wilson was terribly racist…but his "reforms" would continue until after the Civil Rights Act of 1968 and the legacy of his counter-revolution remain today. Think about that: all those people who died in the Civil War (700,000-850,000) and it just took a few decades to undo the freedom of black Americans.

18. Revolutions forgotten are goals lost.

19. Jesus stripped believers of the temple and made believers the new temple. He stripped away the priesthood of the few and made every believer a priest. And yet…many churches make their buildings a temple and make church leadership, or priesthood, the function of a few.

20. He stripped away the long, long descriptions and demands of worship and replaced them with…well…no description at all. There

exists no description of a worship service (or the term “worship service”) in the NT. He told us that God was to be worshipped and loved with all our hearts, soul, strength and mind and to love God and love our neighbor as ourselves.

21. And we were warned not to forget this: Galatians 5:1,4,6. There were some in Galatia who wanted to turn the new community of faith back into a temple based community. They missed the location, the ceremonies, the order, the predictability, the knowing what to expect every time they walked in…and Paul warned them that that attitude would destroy the entire revolution (Galatians 5:9).

22. Anyone who knows American history well has to admit that we have fallen far from the ideals of the founders and the intentions of the Emancipation Proclamation and the Civil Rights Act. And anyone who knows religious history knows that we need to become, once again, iconoclasts and revolutionaries. Not with guns, but with noncompliance.

23. We will not bow. We will not resort to violence or any act of power grabbing…we just won’t do what the world says. As Jesus said about himself, we won’t dance to their flute. (Matthew 11:17-19)

24. Be in this world. Love everyone. Serve and share with everyone. But don’t be like everyone. Be in the world, but not of it. Like salt and light, move in this world and have an effect on all with whom you come in contact, just as He did. Jesus, the revolutionary. The iconoclast. Our Lord and Messiah.