

I begin with a confession. The lectionary actually calls for the reading from Matthew to be only verses 18 – 25, but I elected to include the 6 immediately earlier verses because they truly help the whole piece make clearer sense. If we followed the Evening Prayer lectionary every evening, then we wouldn't have had a problem because we would have read those verses last evening. The theme that comes to me from three sections of our slightly increased reading tonight is radical inclusion, and that's not a half bad theme in the week following Pride on Salt Spring.

Before he began his ministry Jesus was baptized by John in the Jordan somewhere between the Dead Sea and Jericho. He then spent forty days in the desert being tempted by the devil, but Jesus responded with *Away with you, Satan....* He proves that he is ready for his ministry. But where does he begin that ministry? Surely it would have made perfect sense to go immediately to Jerusalem to the centre of the Jewish faith, to the Temple in which God was presumed to be actually present in the Holy of Holies. But Jesus goes instead back to Galilee in which he spent his years growing up after the Egyptian exile. In Biblical times, Galilee was regarded by pious Judeans as a highly suspect region in which there was altogether too much mixing between Jews and Gentiles. But even as he returns to Galilee, he does not go to Nazareth his "home town". As our reading makes clear he settles in Capernaum, for as all four gospels make clear, *A prophet is not without honour except in his home town*. Capernaum in many respects was a border town. While there were many Jews, there were also many Gentiles. The territory to its north, east, and south was decidedly Gentile dominated. As Isaiah said in chapter 9 verse 1, quoted in our passage from Matthew – it is Galilee of the Gentiles.

So even as we heard last week with the visit of the Magi, Jesus the incarnate Son of God was made manifest to Gentiles as well as Jews, so at the beginning of his ministry some 30 years later, he begins among both Jews and Gentiles. Had he tried to build those bridges in Jerusalem he would have immediately been pronounced unclean and most probably been stoned. But he has work to do and many to whom to teach before he can be lifted up. He begins at the margins in a region regarded as highly suspect in the "pure" bounds of the Temple and with a mixture of people that was unheard of for a Jewish teacher. A contemporary example of the magnitude of his task would be to imagine someone who could make followers of both Bernie Sanders and Donald Trump.

But Jesus' radical inclusion goes a great further than just the inclusion of other ethnicities. He calls his first disciples. Are they distinguished scholars of the law and the prophets? Are they civic officials, ministers of Herod Agrippa, Tetrarch of Galilee? Are they military leaders with great authority and influence? No! They are fisherman: uneducated, unlettered, and of social standing little better than shepherds who were the first in Luke's Gospel to see the Christ child. Again ministry to and from the margins among the most unlikely everywhere.

The final section of our reading this evening, chronicles the great variety of those to whom he taught and those to whom he brought healing: Syrians, Galileans of every ethnicity, inhabitants of the Decapolis who were mostly Gentiles of considerable variety, Judeans, inhabitants of Jerusalem, and from beyond the Jordan – exclusively Gentile territory. Many of whom made their way to Galilee as Jesus' reputation grew. The reaction of the priests, the scribes, and the Pharisees to Jesus was significantly formed by this extraordinary radical inclusion in his ministry. Think of Nathaniel's reaction to Jesus in the first chapter of the Gospel of John, can any good come from Nazareth? Radical inclusion led to the cross and radical inclusion was redeemed in the resurrection.

Radical inclusion could not be a more timely subject for our reflection. Think of the ICE raids in the United States; think of the outrageously illegal attach on a Venezuelan ship in international waters; think of the racist, exclusionary Unite the Kingdom Rally of more than a 100,000 people in London on the weekend; think of the success of the AFD *Alternative für Deutschland* In Germany; think of the opponents of immigration here in Canada; think of how many supporters of these despicable efforts pronounce themselves Christian.

Our Lord became incarnate, lived and died, and rose again to proclaim radical inclusion. Not because it is easy, not because it is profitable, not because it doesn't change us, but because it is entirely required if the Kingdom of God is ever to prevail amongst us. Of course radical inclusion changes us: it can rob us of prejudice, it can destroy our self-satisfaction, it can overcome misunderstanding; it might actually bring peace.

I walked with some of you in the Pride parade on Saturday. What impressed me most about the parade was not the wonderful variety among those who marched. I was most impressed with the folk who lined the streets to cheer on those who marched. Salt Springers young, old on their own or with their families – straight, gay, lesbian, trans, etc. lined up to celebrate a diverse group of fellow Salt Springers who for at least those who were middle-aged and older they had been in earlier life taught to despise. There was radical inclusion at work on Saturday that was impressive especially for someone like me who was, indeed, taught to despise who and what I have long since acknowledged myself to be. But even on Salt Spring let us not delude ourselves that radical inclusion is complete. There is much more to be done. Reconciliation, yes with Indigenous People, and with so many more. Reconciliation with all whom the church and the state have persecuted, reconciliation with the victims of imperialism around the world, reconciliation with all who are marginalized for economic and social reasons. Reconciliation is an essential ingredient for radical inclusion. We are well started, let us not flag, and let us not be diverted by those who peddle division and exclusion even as they proclaim their so-called Christianity. Jesus asks no less of us. Amen