

Who Would Jesus Insult? Matthew 5:21-26

I have four stories to share with you. All of them may tell us bad news. But they may also explain why we are such a divided world. But we will not end there, we will then remember the good news Jesus offers us. Good news which can help us live faithfully in spite of our chaotic and fragmented world.

Story One: Our seminary professor friend, Don White and his wife Carolyn recently told us of a Grandchild's spouse who had planned to pursue an academic career, but who was offered a job by Facebook. A job that paid too much to turn down. They moved for that job, and Facebook paid for that move, and when the couple prepared to look for an apartment, the Facebook staff said, "Oh don't worry about that, just give us your wants (bedrooms, baths, views, styles, etc..) because we have people on staff who will find your house for you." They ended up moving to a beautiful new apartment with big windows facing the water in a city that is slowly being transformed from more affordable middle class housing to housing for Silicon Valley.

Story Two: A Florida church used to have 75 new members twice a year, but are now getting 25 or less. More members are dying than are coming in. This church also has a state of the art, youth center with a 3 story climbing wall, but families with kids are still not coming to the church.

Story Three: Last summer at a High School reunion a friend talked about his 40 year career at the Ohio Art factory, which used to and now again manufactures Etch-A-Sketches. He told me that over his career, he saw the end of the traditional assembly line. At Ohio Art 98% of the work is now being done by automation. Ohio Art used to employ hundreds, and dozens of high school kids in the summer, including me. It now employs only a handful. And he said, this automation is becoming common in Japan and China

Story Four: In the mid-1980's I video-taped Alvin Toffler, author of Future Shock. At his death, his ideas were briefly summarized in the NY Times: *Alvin Toffler, the*

celebrated author of "Future Shock," the first in a trilogy of best-selling books that presciently forecast how people and institutions of the late 20th century would contend with the immense strains and soaring opportunities of accelerating change, died on Monday at his home. He was 87. I was mesmerized as Mr. Toffler talked on camera about the information age replacing the industrial age and how that would change everything.

As I pondered these Four stories, I realized they address the concern I expressed last week about declining state of our culture. In my lifetime the world seems to have become more divided and more extreme. We are unable to get together to solve any issue. Instead of rolling up our sleeves and working together we spend our time tearing each other down, vilifying those with whom we disagree. And it is not just happening here. Our whole world seems upside-down. And do you know why? Because it is.

Alvin Toffler was right about the strains of change. We are seeing his predictions come to fruition. 300 years ago the world faced the same chaos when the industrial revolution moved millions of people and families off farms and into cities. This major change in our economic life, led to the rise of slums, the use of child labor. This major shift combined with the enlightenment's growing distrust of long time institutions which led to the American and French revolutions and upheaval around the world. It took us a long time to understand that new paradigm and we are in a very similar time now. Think about it, the young man working for Facebook does not make a product. You can't go down to the store and buy a Facebook. Google, Facebook, -insert your favorite tech company here - all deal in information. As Alvin Toffler told us, we are changing at such a rapid pace, we can't keep up. Everything is changing and we are running scared... we are anxious, because the world we knew; the world where daughter followed father in the factory; where small family businesses were passed on from one generation to the next; a world where we knew the UPS driver who delivered our packages is coming to an end. Replaced by drones, on-line retailers, and the biggest companies dealing in

information. And it is not only in business, the church with the state of the art youth center isn't getting more families with children because the majority of young families with children are not going to church, or synagogue, or mosque.

As I thought about our chaotic world and great divisions, a study came to my mind that may help us understand why we are fighting so vehemently with each other. In it rats were put in a cage. The researcher then sent an electric current to the floor, shocking the rats. This action resulted in the rats attacking each other. The rats did not cause the shock, but they attacked each other in response. Is our fractured fighting our response to the shocks that are shaking our world? Is our deteriorating civility and our increasing polarization a natural response to changes over which we have no control? Maybe we have become star struck, as we talked about last week, because we are searching for a strong Mother or Father figure who will make it all go away. Someone who will restore our world to how it was and bring back the familiar. But no matter how much we may want that, the really bad news is that is not going to happen. No one, no group, no government or NGO can turn back the clock of the information age. Like those who followed King Ludd in destroying mechanized looms in the Industrial age: the Luddites — any who try to stop the forward motion of history will fail. We cannot stop this chaotic transformation, we cannot change the world. That is the bad news

But here is the good news... we can change ourselves. God's power can transform us, enabling us to face chaos with faith. And Jesus shows us the way. In today's scripture Jesus says, "*You have heard that it was said ... 'You shall not murder'; and 'whoever murders shall be liable to judgment.'* But I say to you that if you are angry with a brother or sister, you will be liable to judgment;" Wow, let's see a show of hands - who has not been angry with someone in 2017? Anyone? If so don't hold up your hand cause it will just make the rest of us angry! Jesus asks us to do this, but can we not get angry with those with whom we disagree - even about important things? Can we refrain from insulting our enemies? In the 26th chapter of Matthew, Jesus himself fails to do

so. He gets so angry he says to religious leaders, "*You blind fools!.. You say, 'Whoever swears by the altar is bound by nothing, but whoever swears by the gift that is on the altar is bound by the oath.'* How blind you are! *"Woe to you, hypocrites! For you tithe mint, dill, and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel!"* So if even Jesus doesn't keep this command how can we? Commentators suggest Jesus' words set up a tension between God's realm and the reality in which we live. In the Realm of God- None will be angry... In reality we will get angry... but that does not get us off the hook. The Apostle Paul says, "In your anger do not sin": Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry."

What would happen if we do not let our anger get the best of us? What if we resist the temptation to demean, dehumanize or vilify those with whom we disagree? Proverbs tells us "*A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.*" What if we talked with respect to those crazy... oops, to those other children of God who happen to have a very different opinion about things? What if we take the problem and separate it from the person on the other side of the issue? Respectful, compassionate, and grace-filled communication may be the brightest light we can shine in a world where anxiety and fear seem to rule the day. When we act as a conduit of God's love and grace, we offer a picture of how the world can be different. A world where violence doesn't have to breed more violence and hate doesn't have to kindle more hate. In the words of Martin Luther King, Jr., "Darkness cannot drive out darkness: only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate: only love can do that." Let us go from here taking God's love in all our interactions. May God pepper our words with grace and love And we just might make the world a little better. AMEN