

“Jesus Was a Protester”

Acts 2:17-21

This is my last day as your pastor. Through my Digest articles this year, I've been thanking you for serving with me and preparing us for my departure. No need to do more of that now. It's Pentecost Sunday and the Holy Spirit is in our midst when we listen to the words from the Prophet Joel . . . Acts 2:17-21 . . . ¹⁷In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams. ¹⁸Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy.

¹⁹And I will show portents in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and smoky mist. ²⁰The sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the coming of the Lord's great and glorious day. ²¹Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.'

If Christians are honest with ourselves about the gospel message of Jesus, we should know that protesting can be a holy act of righteousness empowered by the Holy Spirit.

Protesting is the antithesis of being apathetic, complicit, callous, and passive, and Christians should take comfort in the fact that Jesus — the son of God — was very good at it.

Sometimes Jesus did this quietly, and other times it was inflammatory, provocative, and publicly disruptive. But there's no doubt that Jesus was a *radical*, a person who was eventually arrested, beaten, and sacrificed on a cross because of his words and actions.

Within the Christian life, there may be times when God calls us to complement our prayer *with* protesting, and throughout the Bible we see how Jesus purposefully intervened, acted, spoke, and was present in various situations in order to protest, dissent, demonstrate, object, question, defend, revolt, and challenge. Here are just a few examples:

When Jesus spent 40 days and nights in the wilderness (Matt. 4:1-11), he rejected the temptation of worldly power and boldly stood against Satan's temptations — because Jesus was a protester.

When Jesus stormed into the temple courts, interrupted the proceeding by overturning tables, yelling, and driving both people and animals out of the room using a whip, he was condemning the greed and corruption of religious hypocrites — because Jesus was a protester (John 2:13-25).

Jesus boldly stood up and spoke in the Synagogue — one of many he would speak in — proclaiming things so countercultural and radical that he created a mob so furious at him they eventually chased him with the intention of killing him — because Jesus was a protester (Luke 4:16-31).

Jesus was mocked, ridiculed, abused, intimidated, and arrested because he dared to become a protester.

Jesus took his message to the masses, speaking and advocating wherever he could, and created a movement based on justice, hope, and love — because Jesus was a protester (Matt. 4:23-25).

Jesus garnered fame from the oppressed and notoriety from those in power — because Jesus was a protester (Luke 5:15).

Jesus confronted the leaders about their wrong practices, evil thoughts, and destructive deeds — because Jesus was a protester (Mark 2:1-12; Luke 11).

Jesus asked people to follow him and join his cause — because Jesus was a protester.

Jesus broke the religious expectations and laws of the day, to the point of people wanting him to die — because Jesus was a protester (John 5:16; Mark 3:1-6).

Jesus made public proclamations and tried to change social sentiment through talks, teachings, and speeches — because Jesus was a protester (Matt. 5-7).

Jesus openly rebuked, held accountable, challenged, and called out people who refused to change from their misguided ways — because Jesus was a protester (Matt. 11:20-30).

Jesus empathized and advocated for the oppressed, hurt, abused, downtrodden, abandoned, alienated, and victimized — because Jesus was a protester (Luke 7).

Jesus was viciously challenged, mocked, scrutinized, threatened, slandered, ridiculed, and discredited by authorities and leaders — because Jesus was a protester (Luke 11: Matt. 9:34; Matt. 13:56-58).

Jesus created, inspired, and sent out other protesters — because that's what protesters do (Matt. 10)! And these other protesters (the disciples) were eventually arrested and killed, because they too, were protesters.

Jesus went to places he wasn't supposed to go and talked to people he wasn't supposed to talk to — because Jesus was a protester (John 4).

Jesus was accused by the “experts” of being disruptive and evil — because Jesus was a protester (Matt. 9:2-8).

Sometimes the most Christ-like thing we can do is protest.

Jesus stands alone before a mob that’s ready to kill a woman and intervenes on her behalf, saving her life — because Jesus is a protester.

Jesus devoted his life to speaking, helping, supporting, defending, empowering, healing, freeing, and loving everyone, especially saving those who were in desperate need from the hands of oppressors, rulers, officials, mobs, and those who intended to harm, kill, and destroy — because Jesus was a protester.

Throughout his life Jesus protested and brought awareness about gender inequality, religious hypocrisy, political corruption, racism, hate, segregation, and social injustice. Christ humbly sacrificed and served to advocate for the outcasts, protect the poor, shelter the homeless, uplift the exploited, show hospitality to strangers, energize the weary, and love humanity. Jesus embodied social justice which we now call “woke”. Jesus was the most “woke” person to ever walk this earth.

Jesus was mocked, ridiculed, abused, intimidated, and arrested because he dared to become a protester. Eventually, he was arrested and put on trial, and then he was publicly humiliated, mocked, and severely tortured.

It was in this context where his greatest demonstration of protest happened: *dying on the cross, where God incarnate proved to the world that love overcomes evil, grace overcomes revenge,*

mercy overcomes cruelty, generosity overcomes selfishness, hope overcomes fear, and God overcomes Satan.

So today, when politicians — and the masses that follow them — promote racism, hate, bigotry, deception, and oppressive policies that are inhumane, immoral, violent, and blatantly anti-Christian, we must ask ourselves: What *would* Jesus do?

Will followers of Christ follow in his footsteps and be bold enough to speak against, act against, and protest against sin? Contrary to our religious assumptions about righteousness and holiness, sometimes the most Christ-like thing we can do *is* protest.

Christianity isn't political power, military might, safety, wealth, control, fame, or comfort — it's emulating Jesus. After Jesus departed and the disciples started their various ministries, founding the church as we know it today, most of the earliest believers were ruthlessly hunted down, arrested, persecuted, and horrifically killed for following Jesus, martyred for being Divine protesters.

Defending the gospel for the sake of humanity — people loved and created in the image of God — was the reason Jesus protested. Are we willing to do the same? God help us.

For me it began with a pastor of this congregation, Tim Huffman, teaching us liberation theology in seminary and accompanying us to the inner-city to live with black people - a country boy from Medina County.

In 1988 a trip to Nicaragua with Witness for Peace to experience and write about the contra war, illegally funded by the U.S. under the table.

Numerous trips to Mexico and accompanying a sister parish on the Tex-Mex border where the catholic priest from Africa always had me come to the altar to help distribute holy communion.

Sponsoring refugees in all 4 parishes, from Eastern Europe, from Central America, from Mexico, and most recently Divinity sponsored 2 Afghan families almost 3 years ago whose refugee status was recently revoked and were given 60 days to leave the country or be deported to Afghanistan where they will be murdered. Our veterans are furious because they worked beside them and know our country made a promise to them. Our veterans know its time to protest.

Danette and I taking in over 20 foster children, including Bilan who crossed the border illegally and unaccompanied from Honduras 32 years ago. Now a citizen, blessed with a beautiful wife and 3 grown children, God has blessed him as he has blessed us.

You have asked me what I'm going to do when I retire. I'm going to protest. God help me.

May the peace of God . . .

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