

A Note from Father Phil
April 5, 2020

I wonder if Jesus would fare any better today in this place and time than he did in first century Palestine. Jesus was arrested, tortured and killed because people feared him. They were afraid of what he taught and stood for.

I am deluding myself if I think that I am better than the Romans or the Jewish Leaders or even the fickle crowd that greeted him with "Hosannas" on one day and by the end of that same week shouted, "Crucify him!"

There are aspects of Jesus' teachings and way of life that scare me. Things I try to ignore or explain away. I do not call for his crucifixion, but neither do I follow Jesus or his teachings unreservedly. I am not alone.

Would Jesus fare any better today than he did in the first century? I doubt it. Would not those who insist on force today assail Jesus as a wimpish man because he urges his followers to return good for evil? Would not patriots today attack Jesus as subversive because he teaches that people are all one and God's love knows no national boundaries? Would not the well-to-do of today dismiss Jesus because they are told that they cannot squeeze their wealth and possessions through the narrow door into God's Kingdom? And they are to share their goods—those gifts of God—with others? Would not clerics, religious, and many people of piety denounce Jesus as a heretic because he cuts through the cards of ritual, rubrics, and dogma and simply asks us to love God by loving our neighbor? Would not sentimentalists reject Jesus today because he warns that the way to salvation is difficult and demands sacrifice?

Would not the puritans among us despise Jesus because he prefers the company of outcasts and sinful people to those who are respectable and Godfearing? Would not the beauty and health conscious cringe at the one who sometimes neglects the needs of his body, even fasting for forty days at a stretch? Would not those who are spiritual-but-not-religious be dismissive of Jesus, a practicing Jew who seeks out synagogues on a regular basis, celebrates all the Jewish festivals, and prays the psalms by heart? Would not the successful laugh at Jesus when he tells his disciples that those who want to be first must serve the rest? Would not the wise and educated be aghast to hear that one cannot be saved unless he or she becomes like a little child?

Would not strict adherers of an eye for an eye justice decry Jesus' teachings about forgiveness and mercy as ludicrous and unfair? An affront to the victims? Would not those who have an insatiable appetite for entertainment choke at the thought that solitude and silence were main staples of Jesus' spirituality?

Would not each of us in our own way find some part of Jesus' sayings and doings to be so threatening to our way of life, so much at odds with our own rooted beliefs, that none of us would tolerate the real Jesus for very long? Our own "Hosannas" would soon turn to "Away with him!" Or, more, likely, turn to silence and disregard. We, too, are afraid. We, too, are responsible for Jesus' gruesome death. Yet, we, too, are nonetheless loved. And that may be the scariest thing of all.