

The Chosen One

Reverend Heather Miner

Scripture: Isaiah 45: 1- 8

Matthew 22: 15 – 22

Thanks to Chip, Ruby Bridges has become a familiar name to us here at Community Church, a brown girl who was sent to a white school at the time of segregation. We have spoken of her bravery and of her faithful logic to pray for those being cruel to her because as she said, “I am the one they are hurting.” In some way we all strive to have a Ruby Bridges’ faith.

Yet this is only part of the Ruby Bridges story. Robert Coles in a sweeping study of the people in the South during the time of desegregation often had children draw pictures as a way to talk with them. In his book, *Children of Crisis, A study of Courage and Fear*, are pictures drawn by Ruby. It is striking. At age 6 she draws herself with wavering lines with one ear, differing number of fingers, and a tuft of hair on top. Compare that to the picture Ruby drew of a white girl. The white girl has two ears, a full smile, and all her fingers and toes. The picture makes clear how hard it was for Ruby, even when she was “churched,” to see herself as a full child of God. But then there’s her grandpa. She filled a full sheet of paper with the image of him. Unlike the picture of herself where she refused to give her body any color, her Grandpa is colored unabashedly and completely brown. He has a big smile and all his fingers. Her grandpa lived outside of the city. He owned a farm. Ruby could see him clearly standing tall and proud.

People who lived in the time of the scriptures we read today would have had trouble seeing themselves clearly through the eyes of God. In the Old Testament scripture, the background is the Jews who had been exiled for a long time, away from their temple, living under the rule of the Assyrians. They were the defeated group living among those who had destroyed their temple and taken away their home. Similarly in the time of

Jesus, the Jews lived under the power of the Roman Empire. While Jews were allowed to practice their faith openly, it was clear that they were under another’s rule...and the rule of the other had its own theology, that is the one sent from God was the Emperor for he was the one who brought peace. Neither time was a time when it was anything but immensely difficult for the faithful to see themselves clearly standing tall as God’s chosen people.

Now in this time and place, Saddleback is currently selling the DVD of Warren’s interviews with McCain and Obama, where we see each candidate seeking to define himself as a faithful Christian. Yet, I contend, it is still a struggle to see ourselves as standing tall, complete in God’s realm. For one, God’s realm is not equivalent to this earth. For another, we don’t know how to treat one another as children of God. It isn’t the way of the State, even for those who are supposed to be faithful. It is evidenced when Obama is quoted as saying “McCain wants to win an election but I want to make sure you have a retirement” and when McCain says of Obama “that one.”

We are living in a competitive, argumentative, fear fed culture. Even when Christians seem to be in control, still we are prone to draw each other and ourselves as half human, skewed, unfilled line images. The State is not supposed to be left to fill us out. When we do, we find out over and over, the Emperor, himself, has no clothes.

When the Pharisees came to Jesus, scripture tells us they wanted to trap him. They were in the mood for a debate. “They wanted to help him see the light”-- their light -- that they were God’s light on this earth. They couldn’t understand why Jesus showed them no respect. For them there were only two choices. Either the Emperor was God or God was God. To whom was Jesus loyal? The Pharisees

felt Jesus' attacks. They knew he did not defer to them who were God's representatives. They said, "we know you teach the way of God and show deference to no one," meaning themselves. And showing Jesus the coin upon which was the image of Ceasar Augustus and by his name the word Divinitus, they asked Jesus, "should we pay taxes then to this one who calls himself 'God?'"

Like all good debaters or those lost in a world of limited possibilities, the Pharisees narrow the choices to two which best allow them to make their point. So narrow are their minds that they cannot see the surprising reality of the situation of Jesus, son of God, standing with them. They miss seeing God's miracle. Rather, their voices are simply added to the jeering crowd that knows what's right and that Jesus being there in the temple teaching as if he had authority was wrong. Jesus wasn't wearing the right robes. "You do not regard people with partiality," they say of him.

Through Jesus' enemies, we hear the words of recognition. Only Jesus can stand so completely outside of cultural mores, societal pressure, ego needs, as to view people as themselves...as to allow God the power to break through. While Jesus is the only one who will ever do it perfectly, those of us who seek to follow him on the Christian Way, those of us who say weekly Thy Kingdom Come, well we are challenged to get our ego out of the way, not pretend we know all the possibilities, not paint God into a corner, not circumscribe our faith.

The vision of home is often an example of circumscribed faith. For many there is a picture of the perfect family, a picture often equated to faith. I think it is usually a picture along the lines of a mother and father and two kids praying around the dinner table with a big hunk of meat, beautifully browned and decorated, in the center. Of course the house and kitchen are completely clean and decorated according to the season. When we don't meet this picture of peace, provision, cleanliness, and taste...good children, good food...the adults start arguing about what needs to be fixed. Usually, they start with each other.

When we are single how much further we seem to be from this picture of faith. We erase the

color from our lives and what is left is a broken line drawing. This is far from a picture of faith. Whose world is this?! Moses certainly had no perfect family. He had to go it alone...well there was God.

The value to family in God's realm has nothing to do with the picture. It is a value you all know and have experienced. The value is this: Because of the intimate risky loving relationships forged in families, where forgiveness must exist beside trust and grace beside expectation, family is a space where God must break through time and time again in order to live together, in order for love to nurture and last. Those of you with two year olds and teenagers know. Those of you with more than 10 years of marriage know. Those of you with difficult moms and dads know...God breaks through at the most unexpected times. Thank God!

Some years ago I met with a group of young moms in the nursery. While their babies crawled and explored, we'd play with them and share some God talk along the way. I remember one mom's words. She had two of her three children with her. The other was in preschool. She said, "I used to pray that the baby would stop crying. It didn't work. Now I pray for patience." A quick quip to be sure and yet she spoke as if a great truth had been revealed to her. Of course it had, she had, in that moment stumbled back on The Way.

The Way requires we act in the world prayerfully, looking to see God acting in our families and neighborhoods and the world. Often it requires we allow that God might make a possibility outside of our own. The Bible tells us that God sometimes works through those who would not be classified as Americans or Christians or Jews. God is not limited to those who call Him by name. That's what it means for God to be God. God is greater than all our labels or floundering attempts to follow him. While the disciples certainly are needed, the gospels are filled with outsiders who show the miracles. Even the demons do their part...we know who you are Jesus, son of God.

Cyrus, the man spoken of in Isaiah, is indeed an outsider. You hear God say "I surname you, though you do not know me." He is the Persian leader who will rule all the land held

by the Babylonians and then some. Unlike the Babylonians who feared the Israelites and scattered them throughout the land, the exile, Cyrus will see benefit in people following their God/their gods. History records that he indeed invites the Jews back to their land and they begin to rebuild the temple. I want to linger in the language used by the prophet to describe Cyrus. Be aware that when you read Isaiah you are hearing the voice of God filtered through the understanding of the community of faith. It is as if you are sitting next to them; these people who have gotten word that they may soon get to return home. Prophecy isn't so much a prediction as God's opening an awareness of another dimension of possibility, that is God is making good His promise in way not understood before. At its most basic form, the seed of prophecy, is the mother who realizes her prayers have changed. At its full blossom, prophecy is Jesus.

Of Cyrus God says through the community that...

-He is my shepherd, he shall carry out all my purpose.

-I have grasped his right hand
To Cyrus...

- I will go before you and level the mountains.

- For the sake of my servant Jacob, and Israel my chosen I call you by name.

Thus says the Lord to his anointed, to Cyrus...his anointed, his Messiah

Thus says the Lord to his Mashach...

The same word used for the Messiah, the Messianic prince, the king of Israel, the high priest of Israel, is used for Cyrus.

As was King David, as will be Jesus, Cyrus is the anointed, the chosen one.

This is a full page, full colored portrait of a man God chooses and calls by name. Cyrus stands outside the system that oppressed the Jews. They are able to celebrate and claim him as their own, as God's own. Indeed they are able to recognize that, through Cyrus, God is doing a new thing.

For those who have read through Isaiah or are currently reading through the book, one can't

help but note with relief the joy of the language in this part of Isaiah against the harshness of what has come before. As Israel is able to paint Cyrus in full color so too are they able to again lay claim to God's unique relationship with them.

Cyrus, I call you
For the sake of my servant Jacob
And Israel my chosen

Once this is made clear, God erupts into song.

I am the Lord, and there is
No other;
Besides me there is no god.
I arm you, though you do not
Know me,
So that they may know, from the
Rising of the sun
And from the west, that there is
No one besides me;
I am the LORD, and there is
No other.
I form light and create darkness,
I make weal and create woe;
I the LORD do all these things.

Shower, O heavens, from above,
And let the skies rain down
Righteousness;
Let the earth open, that salvation
May spring up,
And let it cause righteousness to
Sprout up also:
I the LORD have created it.

Oh to hear God's song sung through our faith! May things not yet imagined, people we've not yet met, ideas outside of our realm break through the powers that keep us under foot... then we might see enough to join in God's song celebrating the righteous rain...the righteous reign of God.