

Message by Pastor John Dillon
Ridgefield-Crystal Lake Presbyterian Church
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Charles, Nadia, and Jesus

Charles Darwin was almost finished his studies to become an Anglican country parson, when he was recommended as a “suitable naturalist gentleman, not just a mere collector “to join the expedition voyage on the HMS Beagle which changed his life and that of science forever.

When his “On the Origin of Species” was published, the national Anglican Newspaper invited two Bishop’s to write reviews.

The first was written by one of Darwin’s theology professors at Christ’s College, Cambridge. He assured everyone that he personally knew Darwin, and was certain that Darwin was a man of sound Christian faith whose work was not denying God but simply an attempt to understand the mechanics of God’s creation.

On the page opposite the other Bishop penned a scathing attack, calling Darwin an ungodly heathen whose every word was an affront to the intellect, an attack on the Bible and a denial of God!

The challenge of Darwin’s theories still challenge many people of faith.

Nadia Bolz-Webber is a Lutheran pastor, a contemporary theologian, writer, broadcaster, speaker and until last year pastor and founder of the fast growing “House for All Sinners and Saints “in Denver, Colorado.

She is often controversial, proud of the fact that her congregation was at least one third LGBT and that she had a “Minister of Fabulousness” on staff who was a drag queen.

She is also a divorced mother of two, proud of her array of tattoos, was an addict, has been clean and sober since 1991 and was previously a stand up comedian.

I can't claim to know Nadia personally but I have met her, worshiped at a service led by her, heard her preach and speak at conferences and read her articles.

Last week she shared that someone left the following comment on her website

"A vulgar, foul-mouthed pervert masquerading as a Lutheran minister. Her writings are obscene and heretical filth, fit only to be used as toilet paper"

Nadia can be challenging but I always learn from her and feel the Spirit of God in her ministry.

Jesus was an itinerant preacher and healer from a small village. He helped anyone in need, answered questions, deflected criticism and attacks. His message was one of love, grace, forgiveness, and active concern for the most vulnerable. He often critiqued individuals and institutions but never in a hurtful or destructive way.

On Palm Sunday he rode into the center of Jerusalem, the heart and soul of the nation. His actions issuing a challenge to one and all. At first they cheered but by the end of the week the cheers had changed to insult and threat.

He entered a week of whirlwind activity, action and reaction, resulting in His betrayal, arrest, torture and execution.

What is it about challenge that drives people to insult and accusation?

I was always taught that challenge is good, a way to stretch, to learn.

Do we not regularly set challenges in order to improve? To reach the next level?

Is it OK if it is to improve how you work, cook, or score better-- but repugnant when it involves your belief system?

Is it only acceptable if it brings you personal advantage and profit?

Is it to be damned if it involves responsibility to another?

I was always encouraged by family, teachers and beloved wise mentors to respectfully listen to, read and consider viewpoints contrary to my own.

To take the ideas and words of others as valid and meaningful, bearing in mind at all times that they are sincere in their belief.

Who knows I might learn something or even change my mind!

Yet so often our challenge response is anger and insult. We deride and dismiss if it does not already match what we know.

We are facing one of the greatest challenges to humanity ever to occur, our communities will be changed forever and major adjustments to our lives are urgent and essential.

Yet, in the last weeks I have been increasingly frustrated by the amount of blame-gaming and name calling over Covid 19. Rather than messages of hope and survival advice I keep hearing,

“It is his/her fault” “If only “,”why didn’t they?”

I understand the fear and frustration but do we need to add to the destruction?

Jesus issued a challenge:

to live by God’s ways;
to live in God’s Kingdom;
to remember how God saved and protected the people;
to hold fast to the grace and promise of faith.

He challenged everyone to trust and love and forgive.
To be kind to one another.
To consider the needs of others before your own self/selfishness.

Is it a surprise---

That they attacked him?-

That they tried to destroy him and his wisdom?-

That the authorities felt threatened?

It was a great surprise what happened next...but that is a story for next Sunday.

Jesus is always a challenge, our response can be a Palm Sunday "Hail a Savior has come!"

OR

a Good Friday "Crucify him!"

The Jesus challenge is as real now as then.

What will be your response?

Amen.