

Last Sunday of the Church Year
Text: Luke 23:27-43
Theme: "Jesus Reigns"
11-21-10

Jesus is a vast disappointment to us much of the time. That's okay to admit, by the way. You don't have to pretend that you are thrilled with him just because he is God. God is big enough to take care of himself and if you don't like the way he does things all the time – well join the crowd. But he is God and what are you going to do?

We are simple creatures and we long for a simple God. That's why we like super heroes in comic books. They are simple, predictable and one dimensional. Clark Kent gets the call, jumps into a phone booth and flies out at Superman. There are no complex issues of morality or justice or righteousness. Superman is right and whatever villain he is facing is wrong and that is that.

That is not the way of Jesus. Jesus is complex. Wrong and right have to always be viewed through his holiness and righteousness so that which seems right to us may not be right at all. Look at our favorite sayings. "Finders keepers, losers weepers." "Early to bed, early to rise makes a many healthy, wealthy and wise." We glorify hard work and clean living but is that what God says or have we invented our own system of works?

The thieves on the cross were no exception. One didn't get it because if Jesus was God why wouldn't he jump into a phone booth and fly out as Superman? The other didn't get it because Jesus was God, so why would he allow these people to crucify him like a common thief? Neither of them got Jesus but one doubted him and one believed but simply didn't understand him.

That's okay not to understand Jesus. He is foreign to us. How does a king reign by being crucified? It makes no sense to us. But some are willing to confess "I believe; help me in my unbelief," and others are unwilling to flex their rigid preconceived notions and want God to conform to them. As I get older and grayer, fewer and fewer people challenge me. It is one of the only benefits of getting older. But when I was a young pastor, I found it infuriating when someone would come into my office and start arguing with me about the Church, Ministry or Theology.

You know, I wasn't playing checkers for 8 years while I earned that Masters in Divinity. I was actually learning theology, translating God's Word from the Greek and the Hebrew, reading what the greatest theologians on earth said about God and learning how to apply God's Word to our lives in practical and relevant ways. Then I would have someone who taught English or audited banks come in and tell me how I should be doing my job. It was those

times that I would nearly implode. If they wanted things done their way, what was the point of calling a pastor? They should have just called themselves!

Imagine Jesus hanging on the cross and being challenged by the thief.

“Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!” I would have wanted to come down off that cross and belt him in the mouth. But Jesus suffered silently because that’s the whole point of the cross isn’t it? Jesus does not reign through power and might but rather through humility. It is Superman swallowing Kryptonite for us. He could have come down off that cross and he didn’t. Instead, he stayed and suffered hell so that we would never have to and therein lies more power than I can imagine.

My ego would have been insulted but Jesus had put his ego aside. He had chosen to love us with his very life and soul and he was going to do whatever was necessary to accomplish our eternal lives. It makes no sense to us and that is why he gives us faith through the Baptismal waters and strengthens that faith with his own body and blood. The only way we ever accept Jesus is by his power in us not by our own power.

So it is okay that we don’t always get Jesus. We’re not supposed to. We, unlike him, are corrupted by sin and unable to see

clearly. But like the thieves on the cross, we can either condemn him for not doing things our way or we can call to him, although we do not understand his ways, remember us nevertheless and walk with us, lifting us up and giving us strength until we are in paradise with you.