

Editorial: Which revolution will you join?

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Jesus led a revolutionary life and called us to do the same. In our own time of revolution, we might prefer to take the edge off “revolutionary,” so Jesus’ life can’t be equated too closely with revolutionaries of our day.

Or we might make light of the radical nature of Jesus’ life and commands, so we don’t have to give so much of ourselves to them.

Or we might blend Jesus and the Bible with revolutionary rhetoric swirling today, so we can baptize our anger and lust for vengeance.

All three are a mistake—running counter to the life of Christ. We need to remember the nature of Jesus’ revolutionary life and how he commanded us to live. Holy Week is a good time to do this, when the culmination of Jesus’ revolution stares us in the face.

Jesus’ backward revolution

Jesus led a backward revolution.

From the world’s perspective, turning the other cheek, loving those who hate you—that’s backward stuff. Doing those kinds of things won’t get a person ahead in this world. It will get a person walked on. You know, the whole nice-guys-finish-last thing. This world isn’t about finishing last.

But Jesus said it is the last who will be first. By the world’s terms, this is a backward revolution, indeed. How often are we still trying to go forward—in the world’s terms?

Jesus' backward revolution didn't make sense to the Romans, but they didn't mind as long as the people behaved. Our world still doesn't mind, as long as we stay in our lane.

Jesus' subversive revolution

Jesus also led a subversive revolution.

From the religious leaders' perspective, healing people on the Sabbath, being a friend to sinners—that was subversive stuff. Rulebreakers do those kinds of things, and rulebreakers dishonor God. God is to be honored; religious rules are to be kept. End of story.

But Jesus said the Sabbath was made to satisfy us; we weren't made to satisfy the Sabbath. Using the Bible's words to unbind the rules, that's the stuff of subversion.

Jesus' subversive revolution could be tolerated by the religious leaders, as long as he kept the right rules. Our world still doesn't mind our rule-keeping, as long as we follow the "right" rules.

Jesus' steely-eyed revolution

Jesus led a steely-eyed revolution.

From the start, he was tempted to achieve his ends some other way or to give up his ends altogether. Jesus never flinched. The world knows the odds against the revolutionary, and the world—including Jesus' own kith and kin—thought him a fool. "He's out of his mind," they said.

They tried to trick him, trip him up every chance they could. He saw through their games with steely-eyed commitment. When they stacked the deck against him, trapped him, they tried to get him to say something in his

own defense, but he wouldn't break concentration even then.

The world is still trying to get us to flinch, to blink, to drop our gaze and give up our determination to follow Jesus faithfully. It's not a big deal, they tell us.

Jesus' revolution misunderstood

Our mistake all too often is not flinching, blinking or dropping our gaze, but is falling for the head fake.

The head fake is to think Jesus' mission is to bless us, to make straight the path before us, to squash all opposition to us—even if that opposition is God's own Spirit. The head fake is to think we've fulfilled our obligation by calling him "Lord," so then we can tell him "no" when he tells us to "go."

Like the crowd cheering Jesus as he entered Jerusalem, we think Jesus is going to work a particular kind of revolution in our lives, our homes, our churches, our communities, our world. We think he's come to do *our* will. This is the world juking, faking us out.

Jesus' revolution was misunderstood then as now, because he didn't come to Jerusalem to glorify Israel among and above their neighbors and oppressors. He came to Jerusalem to glorify his heavenly Father and do his Father's will.

When Jesus persisted in disappointing the people and incensing the priests—what so many revolutionaries do—they abandoned and consigned him to the grave.

In Jesus' death, the people's hope died, and the rulers' hope revived. None of them realized his death was the turning point in his revolution. They didn't realize his aim was to undo the very fabric of our existence by overthrowing sin and death.

Jesus' revolutionary call to us

Jesus calls us to a backward, subversive, steely-eyed revolution. But I bet we don't think about that during Holy Week.

As our children wave palm fronds in the Palm Sunday service, do we appreciate Jesus' call to resist the world? As we consume the Lord's Supper on Maundy Thursday, are we fully aware of the revolutionary actions of taking Christ's body and blood broken for us, poured out for us?

In our Easter Sunday pageantry and finery, do we understand just how radical a thing resurrection is in a world that would rather Jesus shut up and stay dead?

Jesus left us with these words: "Go and make followers of me from all people, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I taught you."

He didn't teach us to take up arms against one another. He taught us to do for others what we want done for us. He didn't teach us to dominate others. He taught us to deny ourselves and follow him. He didn't teach us to gain the world. He taught us to find our lives by losing our lives.

Obedying these teachings is backward and subversive in this world. It requires steely-eyed commitment.

Revolution is risky. It cost Jesus, and it will cost us. But there's no avoiding revolution. We either will join the world and revolt against God, or we will join Christ and revolt against sin and death. One revolt has littered the world with graves. The other is already undoing the first. Which revolution will we join?

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expressed are those solely of the author.