

Commentary on the Gospel for Mon, Jun 18th 2018

I have always enjoyed reading stories about women in the Bible. When I read of Esther, Ruth, and Judith in the Old Testament or Martha and Mary in the New Testament, I feel empowered. These women of faith teach us so many lessons about listening to God, following His word, and Trust!! So . . . as I read of Jezebel in the first reading, I was appalled. She was not a nice lady. I was trying to understand how anyone could be so devious as to make up horrific lies in order to not only discredit someone but to literally cause his death. She does not fit my standard of women in the Bible! I certainly remember hearing that the term, Jezebel over the years but never realized that she was a Biblical character – I always thought of the term as indicating a “floozy” so was still curious as to this woman.

In researching about her, I found that she was not a positive influence in many ways; in fact, she was quite evil. She was pivotal in turning the King of the Israelites, her husband, Ahab, away from God and toward Baal, the idol she worshipped. But Ahab was certainly not an innocent victim. He was also of limited integrity and, although very wealthy, still wanted more. Naboth’s beautiful vineyards were the target of Ahab greed. When Naboth was faithful to the Word to not relinquish his lands, Ahab was a pouty, spoiled man-child. Jezebel jeered him for not being much of a king. In other words, not exerting absolute power, so she connived to get the land. Perhaps her only saving grace was her taking action to support her husband, albeit evil action. After reading all this am I to believe that evil will conquer good? Certainly that cannot be! Elijah (in the readings after this segment) does confront Ahab with the harsh reality of God’s wrath. Ahab has accumulated a multitude of sins and this is it! What we don’t see here is that Ahab does repent and is granted God’s grace. Another story for his sons and for Jezebel (who is thrown out the window and eaten by dogs!!). Understanding the rest of the story helped me to make the connection with the gospel reading.

Jesus is clear in telling us to be compassionate and forgiving. We must literally “turn the other cheek.” How do we react when others are unkind and unfair to us? This is a difficult lesson, at least for me. I certainly don’t seek vengeance but I sometimes find it so difficult to forgive. At times, I can do some rationalizing about some behavior and come to a level of acceptance. However, I can’t always do it so easily. The older I get though, the more the words of the Our Father echo in my head. Each time I say it, I am clearly reminded, as I ask for forgiveness of my trespasses, that I must also forgive others. Those words penetrate more deeply these days as I struggle to make peace – we never know when “our time is up” and when it will be me asking for forgiveness and I’m sure I will be asked how I forgave others. Did I turn my cheek? Did I offer my coat? As Matthew West states in his song,

Forgiveness,

It’s the hardest thing to give away

And the last thing on your mind today

It always goes to those who don’t deserve

It’s the opposite of how you feel

When the pain they caused is just too real

Takes everything you have to say the word

Forgiveness, forgiveness

and a great story of forgiveness.

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