

I have a confession to make. (*It is the season of Lent after all.*) There was a time in my life, a very early time, when I was – well, how shall I put it? Not the nicest of kids. In fact, if you had known me back when I was about 8 years old, you would have been thankful that I was not your kid. I'm certain that when teachers found my name on their classroom roster, there was a sudden sense of dread and foreboding. Even my elementary school principal had a special chair in his office that literally had my name on it. If they handed out frequent flyer miles for all the times I found myself in Mr. Taylor's office...

I wasn't a bully and I was never mean to other kids. It just wasn't in my wheelhouse to accept directions from my 3<sup>rd</sup> grade teacher, Mrs. Cody nor later my 4<sup>th</sup> grade teacher, Ms. Wood. By the way, Ms. Wood only lasted a year teaching; I don't think I had anything to do with that. Did I?

Needless to say, I was a bit of a rebel. Now let's be clear; there was no good reason for me to be a rebel. My parents were great; I loved my siblings. I was protesting neither bad lunch food, nor assigned seating in the classroom. I wasn't even protesting the smelly school buses we had to ride on or for that matter the proliferation of nuclear weapons. For some weird reason, I just felt compelled to do the opposite of what these two teachers required of me. By the middle of my 3<sup>rd</sup> grade year, Mrs. Cody literally had to send home daily APRs (*Attitude Progress Reports*) that required a parental signature in order for me to return to school the next day. I was definitely a rebel without a cause!

To this day I occasionally find myself wondering about what might have been behind those rebellious ways of my childhood. Though I will probably never fully understand why I went through that phase, I can tell you that I have always nurtured a soft spot in my heart for rebels. Maybe that's why I'm especially fond of Jesus.

Though he truly goes against the grain in all four gospels, it is in Mark's gospel, that Jesus goes all out into full rebellion mode. As Mark tells it, the very first words out of Jesus' mouth are as anti-Empire rebellious as it gets:

*"Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God and saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near, repent, and believe in the good news.'" (Mark 1:14-15).*

The fancy Greek word for "good news" is "euangelion." It is literally used in the context of a battle victory announcement. It is only ever used by Caesar to declare his victories on the battlefield. So here comes Jesus taking Caesar's word away from him and placing it directly where it belongs – in God's Thesaurus. Mrs. Cody may have threatened that if kids didn't behave, "heads would roll," but Caesar literally meant it. To usurp any kind of authority from Caesar was a sure and certain death sentence.

Not only does Jesus duke it out with Caesar, but he takes on all the other institutions of the day as well. Jesus rebels against every major societal institution; the temple system (*church*), Caesar (*government*), and family – redefining each one in light of God's Kingdom of love and justice. As Mark tells it, God's passion is not for the institutions of our world, but for a world where all have enough, not because of charity but because of justice. Unlike the major institutions of the day which thrive on coercion and end in death, Jesus bears God's Kingdom of freedom and life. Jesus is such a rebel in Mark's gospel, that by the end of it, everyone has abandoned him as Caesar puts him to death.

But we know how the story ends. We know that Good Friday gives way to Easter Sunday – that Jesus doesn't stay dead. God's good news announcement of victory wins the day! Now, I'm not about to equate my childhood rebelliousness with that of Jesus, but maybe being a rebel is not such a bad thing. I can't help but wonder what the world would look like if the church, God's enfleshed messenger of "good news," was a bit more rebellious. What would the world look like if we, the body of Christ, held the world accountable to God's values of love and truthfulness? What would the world look like if we took God's heart seriously enough to insist that all have dignity and a place at the table? What would the world look like if we insisted that no "-isms" (*racism, sexism, and nationalism just to name a few*) have a place in God's vocabulary of grace? What would it look like if we truly believed the words of the hymn "This is my Father's world" and as such we got in the face of all who would callously destroy the environment through selfish and thoughtless actions?

See where I'm going here? I think there may be a place for rebels not only in the world, but in the church. And who better to lead us there than the chief rebel himself? Jesus.

Peace and Love,  
Pastor Doug