

Luke 11:39-54 10/13/13 (Red Letters #5) **Letters of Confrontation**

Folks, let me ask you a question: when you create that picture in your mind of “your Jesus”, does that picture look like this?

Slide: Angry Jesus

Or more like this:

Slide: Jesus the Good Shepherd

Like this:

Slide: another angry Jesus

Or like this:

Slide: Jesus with child

I think I can safely assume that most of you, if you stopped to think about it, would not normally have in your head a picture of an angry Jesus. But hopefully you were listening to the **Red Letter** words of Jesus we’ve read today, and in addition to a “reasoning Jesus”, and a “compassionate Jesus”, a straightforward look at these texts would have to conclude that at least some of these **Red Letters** were delivered by a person who was angry. And how does that make you feel? Does an angry, confronting Jesus work for you, or does that not fit your picture? Of course, one of the problems we have there is that we know what we’re like when we’re angry, and it’s not pretty – inside or out.

Slide: Angry hulk pic

But the fact is that anger itself is not sin. There are many evil sinful things that we have a right to be angry about and that we should be angry about. But the Bible says:

Slide: 26 ‘In your anger do not sin’: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, 27 and do not give the devil a foothold.’ (Ephesians 4:26–27 NIV)

Paul certainly indicates that anger is dangerous and the devil wants to use it against us, but that anger can also be used appropriately when you are confronting behavior that is unacceptable. And that is exactly what Jesus was doing in the Red Letters we look at this morning. He confronted church members for thinking they were more important than “outsiders”. He confronted the leaders of the temple for turning the temple into a marketplace. He confronted the Pharisees for their hypocrisy and the Scribes for leading people to the Law of God’s Word but not to the Gospel. The fact is folks, that sinful people need confrontation. In fact, I’ve got a very simple outline for you this morning that I squeezed into the acrostic P.E.A.C.E., which is what good confrontation can lead to. First, confrontation is...

Slide: Practical

For instance, I think everybody who gets married would like to have a peaceful marriage, right? Well, if you want a peaceful marriage, you’re going to have to learn how to confront each other when you run up against behavior in your spouse that is unacceptable. It’s uncomfortable on the front end, but it’s much better than a lifetime of frustration. If I would have pretended to like fish when I first got married, I’d have had to eat it for the last 29 years. If Joni wouldn’t have spent the first year training me, she might have had to live with seeing the toilet seat up for 29 years. Or how about sauce dipping...

Slide: Buffalo Wild Wings sauce dipping commercial

You wouldn’t want to have to live with a triple dipper all your life, would you? And I’m sure that you could think of far better examples. But the point is, the goal of confrontation in a

relationship is to bring you to a better place, and to reconcile a relationship, not just to get your pound of flesh, to strike back at someone who hurt you.

So, confrontation is practical. And it's...

Slide: Elementary

It's basic to our relationships. But I would say it's elementary as in the show "Elementary", another take off that's been out there on the character of Sherlock Holmes. Here's a quick example:

Slide: Elementary clip

From what I remember about that episode, Sherlock was establishing the fact that the suspect was blind in his right eye and because of the angle of the murder scene and so on, he could not have been the shooter. With Sherlock Holmes the point is, Observation of facts and data is elementary and then by the process of deduction it will lead him to make conclusions that other people wouldn't be able to make because they're just not paying attention to the data at the same level he is.

The point I'm trying to make is that good confrontation requires discernment. It's tricky to figure out when to confront, who to confront and how to confront. So who did Jesus confront? Without question Jesus reserved His sternest confrontations for church people. For instance, in the first reading today, one wonders why Jesus even entered into a confrontation with those folks. I mean look at the way the crowd was feeling towards Him:

Slide: "All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his lips." (Luke 4:22 NIV)

Even when Jesus had a friendly crowd He would sometimes confront. In fact in this case He turned them into raging nutcases who tried to throw him off a cliff. Why? Well, in this case it was because He knew that these church people were caught up in the idea that simply because they were church people, because they were Jews, that made them better than "outsiders". And Jesus came to reach all people and He wanted **them** to fulfill their mission and reach all people as God intended, so He **had** to confront them.

In the reading on "Woes", its almost unbelievable how hard He was on the Pharisees. He calls them greedy and wicked, foolish, hypocrites, unmarked graves. Do you suppose He was trying to get their attention? He absolutely was. The problem was they refused to consider the possibility that there was anything wrong with them or that they needed to change in any way. It's almost funny really, that after He gets done with the Pharisees, the Scribes, the "experts in the law" piped up:

Slide: "Teacher, when you say these things, you insult us also." (Luke 11:45 NIV)

And Jesus says, "Yep." And starts "woeing" on them as well. They were the keepers of the Scriptures and the interpreters. And instead of revealing the God of Scripture, the God who had His prophets proclaim the coming of the Savior, they buried those prophecies, like their fathers buried the prophets, and they were trying to bury Jesus as well. They and their attitude needed confrontation, so that's what Jesus gave them.

On the other hand, to people who were aware of their sin, Jesus was gentle in his confrontation. A perfect example is the woman caught in the act of adultery. And as I get further into this series, occasionally I do find a typo or two in the Red Letter book (feel free to let me know if you find any), and a big typo is that I somehow forgot to put that text into it. And that text really preaches itself...

Slide: Crystal cathedral pic

“3 The teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought in a woman caught in adultery. They made her stand before the group 4 and said to Jesus, “Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. 5 In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?” (John adds the information in case we can’t see it, that...) 6 They were using this question as a trap, in order to have a basis for accusing him. But Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger. 7 When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, “If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her.” 8 Again he stooped down and wrote on the ground.

That was a time where Jesus just laid down a BIG time confrontation, but he didn’t have to get angry about it... it was just there for everybody to see. And then the Bible says:

9 At this, those who heard began to go away one at a time, the older ones first, until only Jesus was left, with the woman still standing there. 10 Jesus straightened up and asked her, “Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?”

11 “No one, sir,” she said. “Then neither do I condemn you,” Jesus declared. “Go now and leave your life of sin.” (John 8:3–11 NIV)

The forgiveness is there, sweetly and gently given: “Neither do I condemn you.” The confrontation is there too, right? It’s just that didn’t have to be harsh, because He already had her attention. She was ready to “Go and leave her life of sin.” Folks, what we’re really looking at here is what I try to preach every week: **Law and Gospel**. In fact, for the Confirmation kids doing their sermon summaries today, you ought to be paying close attention, because I’m kind of giving you your law/Gospel section right now. The Law for us today is that all too often, we’re like the Pharisees and the Scribes. Since we’re church people, we think we’re doing o.k. and so we can look down on everybody else, instead of being honest with ourselves and realizing where we need to repent of our own sins. The Gospel is the good news that God loves us enough to not leave us in our sins, but sent His Son, yes to confront sinners, but ultimately to confront sin itself on the cross. And on that cross to bear the punishment for all of our sins so that He absolutely has the authority and the right to forgive us and make us right with God.

By the way, Martin Luther said that if you can accurately apply Law and Gospel you are worthy of being called a Doctor of theology. But what I’ve found out is if you want to become a doctor, you have to spend time studying and growing. And I’m still working on it. Because it’s worth it. It’s certainly worth it in terms of our eternal relationship with Jesus. It’s also worth it in our relationships with one another. Going back to our acrostic, confrontation

Slide: Always gets a reaction.

In the case of Jesus and the church leaders, their reaction made it obvious that they really didn’t want a Savior. And in fact, they didn’t want God – because they were too busy filling that role themselves. Others fell at Jesus’ feet, saying, “my Lord and my God.”

And then in our relationships, Yes, it makes people uncomfortable to confront or to be confronted, so we often try to avoid it. But if you push past that discomfort you can get through to the other side where there is a more honest, open and loving relationship.

The “C” in Peace stands for the fact that

Slide: Christ always confronts perfectly

In the Red Letters we looked at today, He deliberately confronted the Church leaders to expose their hypocrisy and give them the chance to do something about it. Now understand that

these were church people. They had a basis for understanding the laws they should have kept, and their mission to the gentiles that they should have been fulfilling. And I think that explains some of the harshness of those confrontations. Unbelievers didn't have that foundation, so Jesus is often much gentler with them. Something we need to remember as we reach out to a large unbelieving population today. In any case, we know that Jesus always confronted as He did all things, perfectly.

And please, in your confronting of others, remember something very basic: you're not Jesus. See, confronting runs the risk of producing in you a judgmental heart – which does not help win disciples for Christ. Unfortunately we have way too many examples of that. Starting with the tiny little Westboro Baptist church, which basically consists of the members of one large, hate-filled family. It's not associated with any Baptist denomination, and of course not associated with any of our Christian Churches. Nevertheless, since they claim to be Christian, they are very busy giving the Christian Church a Big black eye.

Slide: Westboro protest signs

They go to funerals of our military and other sites and hold up hate-filled signs like these: “You're going to hell. God is your enemy. God hates you.” And so on – some of them I didn't feel comfortable putting up on the screen. They simply do not represent Christ in any way, shape or form.

Now, I don't think any of you are confronting anyone in quite that dramatic a fashion, but unfortunately in our day people somehow feel free to unload in written form on email or Facebook, or in texts. Folks please don't say something on Facebook that you wouldn't say face to face with the person you're speaking about. We already saw Jesus' words in the Red Letters of Forgiveness:

Slide: “If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over.” (Matthew 18:15 NIV)

So our confronting needs to be done humbly and personally, recognizing our own faults as well. And recognizing in those moments of confrontation that we are representatives of Jesus Christ.

Finally, to fill out the acrostic, it should go without saying, but

Slide: Everybody needs confrontation

We may not like it, but we need it. We need it from God and we need it from each other, when it's done humbly, with compassion and with the goal of winning our brother back.

Folks, I hope you've resolved to stick with us through this whole series. I hope that you'll pick up a Red Letter book out in the Narthex to work through all of the words of Jesus - at home with your families, or together in a small group. As you do, you're going to continue to see the picture of Jesus get clearer and clearer and Bigger and Bigger with each Red Letter. Let's Pray: Lord Jesus, there is so much in my life that is not peace-filled. And often its because I have not received, nor had the courage to give compassionate confrontation with others in my life. Forgive me. Open my heart, mind and soul to your Red Letters today and make me into the person You would have me be. Amen.