

There's a trend going around where people respond to the question "What radicalized you?" It's a tongue-in-cheek way of calling out the shift in what "radical" now means. And while you may expect all these radicals to say things like The Communist Manifesto or The Anarchist's Cookbook, what you get instead are things like "Jesus loves the little children," "don't believe everything you see on TV," and "do unto others." If I'm radical, what's radicalized me isn't belief so much as the rightward shift of American politics; in other words, I didn't begin believing radical things. What I've believed has become radical because the goalposts keep moving. I don't think it's all that radical, for example, to love my neighbor or to care for the poor or to reject the profit-seeking, dehumanizing tendencies of the exorbitantly wealthy. I don't think it's all that radical to declare that human beings are human beings, that unavoidable health problems shouldn't lead to bankruptcy, that no children of any race or nationality or creed should be targets of military attacks. I don't think it's all that radical to follow Jesus and give heed to the Prophets, and I don't think it's all that radical that what Jesus said and what the Prophets said shouldn't be the end-all, be-all of political discourse. But apparently it is radical.

So what "radicalized" me? My conservative family's insistence that the Bible is true; those old bracelets that said "What Would Jesus Do," the church's promise to seek justice and respect the dignity of every human being, or, if you prefer, the 1928 Book of Common Prayer's promise to "keep God's holy will and commandments and walk in the same all the days of my life." What radicalized me? The Greatest Commandment to Love God and love my neighbor. What radicalized me? The hundreds of passages of scripture emphasizing the evils of the wealthy, the protection of the poor, the embrace of immigrants, and the prioritization of those whom society assigns nothing more than suffering. What radicalized me? The tradition of well-studied people of faith across the millennia, the brilliance of dedicated saints and their actions, the models of Christian life who gave up their own comfort or status or wealth to lift others out of horrible fates. What radicalized me? Lay people, bishops, priests, deacons, non-Christians, and non-theists who put themselves in harm's way so that others might live. What radicalized me? Mr. Rogers, Dolly Parton, Martin Luther King, Desmond Tutu, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Jesus. Micah 6:8, Acts 2:44, John 10:16. CS Lewis, the Magnificat, orthodoxy. The Geneva Convention, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, history learned so as not to repeat it, and what I was taught were American Values. What radicalized me? Basic, foundational beliefs passed on by the same folks that're now shocked when I say things like "love your neighbor" or "don't commit genocide." That's what radicalized me.

Perhaps we've forgotten just how radical religious claims can be. The prophetic insistence that wealth and unchecked power ruin societies remains radical, so too the apocalyptic insistence that the powers-that-be aren't as in control as they like to imagine, the messianic insistence that underdogs can win, the apostolic insistence that it's okay for people to live out their faith in other gods. We've always been radical, at least, we always should have been. And the sooner we realize that Christian scripture, theology, and tradition were radical, the sooner we can get on with the radical work of caring for each other now.

Paul reminds us to live our lives "in a manner worthy of the Gospel," and in that Gospel reading, Jesus tells us a particularly radical parable. The Kingdom of Heaven, he says, is like a landowner who pays all his workers the same, regardless of how long they worked. It's so radical he even angers the hypothetical workers in his own story! Some assume this parable's about getting into Heaven and use it to justify death bed confessions and late-in-life conversions. Everybody gets the same amount of Heaven. Great. That's pretty radical on its own, and while we all kinda nod our heads like "why yes, of course that's how it works," we also have this little voice in the back of our minds that's a little mad about it. "Yes, that's how it works, but shouldn't

my Heavenly reward for a lifetime lived in a manner worthy of the Gospel be a little better than a latecomer's Heavenly reward?" That'd be more fair, at least in terms of human fairness, but Jesus isn't all that interested in human fairness. He's interested in Grace, which does away with that concept of human fairness altogether. Instead, Jesus replaces it with divine fairness that's more concerned with what people "deserve" by the sheer virtue of being part of God's Creation. We don't deserve inequality or exploitation or the commodification of our bodies. We deserve the unquestioning, unfathomable, incomprehensible glory of loving communities fully reflecting the image of God.

Okay, but what if the parable isn't about getting into Heaven? Remember, the "Kingdom of Heaven" has two meanings at the same time, and neither of them are about getting into a place called Heaven. The first meaning is a sort of Christian utopia on this planet that'll come in the future. The second is our best approximation of that future Christian utopia right now, flawed but on its way to something better. Jesus doesn't say "Heaven is like;" he says "the kingdom of heaven is like," and that distinction matters. Because we can't do anything about Heaven, but we can do something about the Kingdom of Heaven, at least the right now part of it. Jesus says in the future utopian Kingdom, all workers get the same regardless of time or ability or status or nationality or political party. And that's a gap between future perfection and today's reality. In that parable, Jesus describes an outrageously unfair system, at least, unfair by human standards that say you get paid for the work you do. But the Kingdom of Heaven ensures all get what they need -- which is enough -- not because they've earned it but because they need it.

It's the same thing as that unearned manna in Exodus. In fact, the verses right after that Exodus reading say that while some gathered much, and some gathered little, when they weighed out the miraculous harvest, no one had more or less than what they needed. And those who put in even more work and tried to hoard leftovers saw their excess turn to worms. The gift of God's grace is enough, plenty even, and it's fair because all get what they need, not because all get what they can. What radicalised me? Right there, in the early chapters of the second book of the Bible, nothing less than radically sufficient generosity. And it's radical, in part, because our world doesn't understand the word "enough." Now, it would be one thing if our big debates centered around how to insure people got enough. But these days that future perfection of the Kingdom of Heaven feels more distant. In place of ensuring people get enough, many insist the so-called "right kind of people" get harmed. Too many call for those arrested at the beginning of the day and those arrested at the end of the day to get just as detained, just as deported, just as tortured. It's only fair, after all. And as the dominant seek greater oppression and court increasingly cruel followers, common human decency gets more radical by the headline.

So, what radicalized me? If it wasn't Jesus (and it was), if it wasn't the Prophets (and it was), if it wasn't moral exemplars and saints and heroes my faith and my nation once upheld (and it was), then it was the litany of cruelty intended to take from those who've had so little, it was the executions of helpers, it was the demonization of those who protect children, the girls who've become pregnant in ICE custody, the toddlers serving as their own counsel before immigration judges, the scare tactics depicting trans people in bathrooms as a greater threat to humankind than an island's worth of powerful men operating under the assumption they'll never be held accountable for what they do in secret. What radicalized me? You're looking at it folks. That Bible, those books in your pews, those hymns, those prayers, those readings, those people trying to live and those helping them. Put differently, what radicalized me is nothing less than those who believe God when God says, "the last shall be first and the first shall be last." That's what radicalized me.