

A Lover and a Fighter

Mark 1: 21-28

Dec. 2, 2007

Want to make something of it?

Do you remember when the playground bully would challenge you to a fight by saying, "do you want to make something of it"? You didn't then. You were a lover, not a fighter. You didn't want to solve your disputes with your fists. And, at the time, the dispute was not worth getting hurt.

So you walked away. And wondered if that meant you were chicken.

But later, there were disputes that were worth fighting about. And you found out there are better ways to fight than fists. Sometimes words are better weapons, sometimes medicine or persuasion, or education or organization or fund raising are better weapons to fight the wrong. And when you didn't stand up to what was wrong, you felt guilty. You wimped out. You didn't make something of it.

But you don't want to live the rest of your life that way. You don't want to hide from the evil behind excuses every time. There are lots of excuses. I'm too weak, not smart enough, don't have enough money, have to protect my family, too old, too young. What can one person do? And anyway, Jesus is coming soon so it doesn't matter what's wrong now. Jesus will bail us out.

Those are all excuses, not reasons. It does matter what's wrong now. God uses weak and poor people who aren't too smart to do his work as well as strong intelligent rich people.

So you're tired of making excuses. You don't want to walk away from every fight. There are times it is right to fight.

The Jews knew God was sending someone to set things straight. We heard the message from the prophet Isaiah say "The earth will shake at the force of his word, one breath from his mouth shall destroy the wicked."

Jesus is coming. He knows the right ways to fight. Jesus was a lover, and a fighter. He knew when to turn the other cheek and when to overthrow the money changers. He knew when to take the lashes and when to rise again. He knew how to set people straight by answering unfair questions with his own questions. He stood up against the way people were misusing God's commandments.

We sing a hymn "Fairest Lord Jesus". It is not fairest Lord Jesus, wimp of all nature, but Ruler of all nature.

The more you know Jesus, the more you'll have the right tools when you have to fight against the wrong. Because there are times for us too, to fight. There is a time to make something of it.

When we see wrong going on in our world, how do we make something of it?

Confirmation students heard of some of the positions of the United Methodist denomination on social issues. Against sexual intercourse outside marriage, against

increased carbons in the atmosphere, for the family farm and for the family. Against using war as a substitute for diplomacy and for bans on gambling.

Yesterday was World Aids Day. That disease kills 6000 people a day around the world. AIDS has made millions of orphans in Africa. One way it spreads is through breast milk. In South Africa, there are breast milk banks that receive milk from healthy mothers to feed orphaned babies. A mother in Missouri named Jill Youse had bags of frozen milk left over after her child didn't need it. She found an older South African business man who was willing to take it with his luggage when he flew from the US to South Africa. Then she set up a website, collected more, and now has shipped 55,000 oz., several pallets of frozen breast milk to South Africa.

We see wrong in our communities and in our world and we try to stop it.
We are making something of it.

We see wrong in our town, and we make something of it.

Someone saw that misunderstandings of the immigrants in our town was leading to fear and judgment so they made something of it. And now there are articles in the paper telling us the truth about the immigrants among us.

There are hungry people in Ripon. At one time people in this church made something of it by serving a regular free meal. Now there is a group at St. Peter's that will be giving a free supper the last Friday of each month during 2008.

Lights of love and toys for tots and service clubs and PTO and scouts and Santa Club, United Way and Red Cross and Relay for Life. They all see hurt and want to heal it.

Next Sunday we'll have a play that shows how high school students stand up against the wrong. Some of us have been in the situations that they will tell about.

Kenny Rogers sang about "The Coward of the County". He had promised his Dad to turn the other cheek, so he got the reputation of backing down from a fight. But a time came when he had to defend his girl with a fight. There is a time for it.

When you have a dispute with somebody and decide to make something of it, how do you do it? There are fair ways to fight. Not with rumors and gossip behind the back. But by sticking to the facts. Talking to the person you disagree with rather than someone else.

When you are led to take a stand on a social concern, fight fairly. If you disagree with somebody, criticize their position, not the person. Stick to the issue. Accurately characterize their position rather than criticizing something they didn't say. Answer the questions they ask, not the questions you want them to ask. If you fight fair, you'll be more likely to make a difference. If you don't, you'll be ignored.

The Jews expected a messiah that would fight oppression. And Jesus was a fighter. He fought sickness with healing, he fought guilt with forgiveness, he fought religious hypocrisy with grace, he fought madness by casting out a demon. Jesus was a fighter. But not every time he was confronted. Sometimes he fought and sometimes he didn't.

Why? Why did he cast out the money changers one time and turn the other cheek another time?

Jesus stood up for a woman caught in adultery who couldn't stand up for herself. There's a clue who he expects us to stand up for. The one's who can't stand up for themselves. The ones who are too poor, or too sick, or haven't been born yet, or can't speak the language, the ones who are the innocent victims of the war across the world or the fight in the schoolyard. We stand up for the ones who can't stand up for themselves. That's what Jesus did.

He made something of it when someone else was being hurt. He took the suffering when it was him that was being hurt. And he turned that suffering back on the evil forces to undo them. He used what they did to him, against them. So even when he was taking it, he was fighting back.

He was fighting kingly power by being born in a stable.

We know Jesus by what he fought for. A person is known by what they will fight for. What do you fight for?

Herod Antipas broke God's law by marrying his brother's wife, and John the Baptist stuck his neck out by criticizing him in public. So Herod put him in prison. But he still respected John's words, so he would still listen. He kept him alive. But Herodias, the wife, didn't want anybody telling her what she could or couldn't do. She wanted John dead. At a party, Herod got drunk and Salome pleased him so he told her she could have what she wanted. Her mother used her to get John's head. She was used by her mother and didn't have the guts to say no. Herod had to keep his promise to his stepdaughter, and John lost his head. Because he stuck his neck out, he got it cut off.

John's imprisonment was the start of Jesus' ministry. Jesus said John was a prophet. In Matthew 11 he says, "There has risen no one greater than John the Baptist". It turned out that Jesus was the messiah that John was preparing us for.

Later when people told Herod Antipas about Jesus, he was so paranoid he thought Jesus was John the Baptist who returned to haunt him.

Herod jailed John when he didn't like what he said, but he still respected John's message, and he still listened. Christians have confronted slavery, Christians have confronted violence, Christians have confronted racism and sexism and other evils. Abolitionists and suffragettes and Martin Luther King, JR. have been prophets. People who had a stake in those evils fought back, but they still listened. And those who stuck their neck out, and confronted the wrong, are the prophets who are now respected.

There are times when we have to stick our neck out. There are times when we have to stand against the wrong. Christians get help from Jesus to stick up for the family and to defend ourselves. But we also get help from Jesus when we need to stick up for the rights of others, for the safety of others. We come from a long line of lovers and fighters: prophets, John the Baptist, Joan of Arc, John Wesley, whistleblowers and demonstrators and law changers who acted like Jesus. Lovers and fighters.