

Sermon Easter 5C: 2022

Have you memories of sitting in the “hot seat”? By the question I mean did you feel you were being made the center of attention and it was very uncomfortable. You may have been accused of something which made you really uncomfortable. We have had occasions here in the past when being the rector have made me feel I was sitting in a hot seat. Often problems in congregations are with music and choirs. A joke that was shared in seminary was, “What is the difference between a music director and a terrorist holding people under siege?”– the answer being, “you can negotiate with a terrorist,” There was ;probably an equivalent joke shared in colleges of music for church musicians. Cindy brought wonderful stability to the vocal choir which Laura has maintained as she has with the bell choir. But the Bishop spent a long time on our last clergy zoom call talking about conflict in churches, churches in our diocese of course.

Being in a hot seat often means you are actively dealing with questions as to how and why you did something. I am going to share with you a little skit which highlights challenges Jesus faced and placed him very much in the “hot seat” Your role is to say and say loudly “Can’t do that” when I point at you all (not lady like but it will work, I hope!) The skit is called, “Can’t do that.” Let’s just practice your “Can’t do that.”

Skit “Can’t do that”

Jesus was in the hot seat. But you knew or sort of knew that, did you not? The religious authorities were really angry with all he did which contradicted their understanding of their religious law’s. In their eyes he had to be put to death. Of course, we know that the religious authorities did not win as God raised Jesus back to life.

But we have someone else in a “hot seat” in our first lesson today; it was Peter. To understand the issues, you have to know that Jews had long understood the need to keep themselves separate from other people. They understood this as a requirement God had made of them that they should be separate form other people in every way. By staying separate their nation kept itself alive, kept ongoing and was not swallowed up by intermarriage and mingling which could have happened. Jews understood they did not mix with Gentiles (their name for non-Jews) and did not enter their homes. All contact was avoided at all costs. Yes Roman soldiers were around, obviously they were Gentiles, and the Roman soldiers ordered them around but did not interfere with their religion or religious way of life. But Jesus had flagrantly flouted this law when he wished to do so, showing that all people were God’s people. He did not tell people to intermarry, but as the skit pointed out he intentionally spoke with foreigners, a big sin, according to the current interpretation of the law.

Peter had been a good Jew and as far as we know, he followed all Jewish laws. But Peter in the Pentecost season was a new man; he was open to being taught new ways for him and for the fledgling church. God taught him in the way Jesus taught people in his earthly ministry. Jesus taught using everyday examples. Peter heard all these teachings and knew he could learn from the scene God was showing him. God told him by the vison Peter described that just as all animals were created by God, all were part of creation so carnivores like Peter were allowed to eat whatever they wished to eat and could not say any part of creation was profane. Dietary laws had been imposed upon the people with Moses who were in a very unhygienic situation. Things were different for people of the time when Peter lived. it must have blown his mind away. But it was followed by the visit of the men from Joppa asking

Peter to go and preach to a Gentile centurion and others in the army base at Caesarea. Of course, Peter went; God makes sure people follow God's call.

But Peter was accusing do breaking Jewish laws when he next went to Jerusalem. He was very much in the "hot seat" Why did you do that, why did you do such a terrible thing as to go into a gentile' home base? If you had been reading the whole book of Acts, chapter by chapter, you would have read the whole story in chapter 10 but because Peter is describing what happened we are told it again but with the added addition of describing how Peter was in the hot seat, accused of being a bad Jew. But Peter's accuser's listened, listening is always a good thing to do, and learned how God had changed Peter's heart and their hearts were changed too. Suddenly the light dawned, and they understood that as Christians they were different from Jews. No longer did they need to keep the good news of Jesus Christ to themselves and to fellow Jews but were to share it with everyone, as best they could. What a learning. This is of course how the church evangelized the world so that today there are more Christians in the world than members of any other religion.

Today you are caught up with many challenges, face with making decisions on where you stand on many current issues. Politics of course, now abortion, gun rights and/or gun control, social justice issues, teaching of our history, racism, immigration, climate control. Wow, that list is long, but you could add other issues, I am sure. Sometimes conversation with someone, can be challenging and if you are the lone defender of your position, you may feel victimized. It seems there is no longer a wish to work together for the common good in our nation, But this is where the teachings of Jesus are so important .

In our Gospel today he reminded his disciples that they were to love one another. This is of course the way to live. Little Brayden will be growing up in a challenging world, but Caitlin and Sam will try and teach him that showing love is the best ways to live. From Jesus perspective and from his teaching it is to only way to live. As you heard from the reading in Revelation, God is doing a new thing with God's people. You want to be a part of it, I am sure.

Today you may be in a hot seat where your beliefs are challenged or how you understand God's words to you. But remember how much God loves you and as you pray to God, do ask God to be with you in any hot seat but more importantly, keep showing you how to love others, just as Jesus commanded, today and every day. Amen