

Jesus' politically incorrect way of worship

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On Anzac Day earlier this week... Peace Action Wellington...created some... 'in your face street art'... in honour of conscientious objectors

conscientious objectors were generally following a very politically incorrect God...one we call the Christ crucified...

and this protest by Peace Action Wellington was intended to confront those who are still tempted to glorify and worship a god of Violence.

Introduction to series

Welcome to the politically in...correct guide to being church – otherwise known as Jesus' way of worship. It's a three-part series I'm pretty sure...and

Today in the first part...I'm going to talk about Jesus way as witnessed in the Gospels.

Next time I preach we'll talk about what that means for us...and the way we worship?

And then the next time...in light of everything we've learned ...about Jesus way of worship...together we'll explore the question of 'what... or who is the church anyway?'

But first... Jesus' way.

When your part of a two-thousand-year old faith tradition as Jesus was...with synagogues established throughout the Roman Empire and a grand Temple in Jerusalem... controlled by a powerful religious elite...

Well there's nothing more politically incorrect... than claiming to be the anointed one of God...the Messiah...in Greek, *he Christos*...the Christ

At a time when established religious leaders claim their authority...as the sons of Abraham and followers of Moses...

Well... there's nothing more politically incorrect... than to claim to be the Son of God... To claim an intimate familial relationship with the Creator of the Universe.

And at a time when the Law of Moses strictly governs everything a good Jew must do... and must not do...then there's nothing more politically incorrect...

than for an upstart rabbi... to claim... not only that the scriptures have been fulfilled as he speaks...but that his interpretation of scripture...is a revelation...directly from God.

Of course as a result of all this political incorrectness... it becomes dangerous for Jesus to enter any place of worship.

Remember how shortly before the crucifixion...in the Gospel of John

... there's an angry scene in the Temple Courts right after Jesus prevents an angry mob from stoning a woman to death–

Yes...the mob does put down their stones...as Jesus confronts them...but then a violent argument erupts

We don't often hear about it...

because in John Chapter 8 the language gets really ugly...so ugly... that in the end...the Temple crowd pick up their rocks again...this time... to stone Jesus...

Why do they turn on Jesus at this time...

because he's dared to speak the truth which exposes their hypocrisy... their defiance of God's will their usurping of God's right to judge... and more insulting...what amounts to... their idolatry.

You'll never be free Jesus tells them if you're slaves to a violent retributive god. You'll never be free unless you follow my way...and my truth. 'I know you're Abraham's descendants; yet you want to kill me... because my word has no place in you. I speak the things I've seen with my Father; and guess what... Jesus says... what you do... reveals who your father really is...

"Abraham is our father." The mob insists.

Ah but Jesus says... "If God were your Father, you'd love me, for I've come from God, not even on my own initiative, but God sent me. Why don't you understand what I'm saying? It's because you can't hear my word.

Actually...Jesus tells the mob... given your behaviour ...given you want to justify murder...

I'd say your father is the father of lies... and you want to do what he wants – a murderer from the beginning, with no truth in him. Lies are his very nature.

Well it just goes downhill from there until the mob picks up their rocks once more... this time... to stone Jesus for his claims of truth and authority... and his 'in their face challenge' to their religious fervour in service to a god of violence

But Jesus time has not yet come and he manages to get lost in the crowd... and leaves the Temple...

Throughout his three-year ministry... from baptism in the river Jordan...to preaching in his home town synagogue at Nazareth...and on to synagogues across the region...

and finally to the Temple in Jerusalem ...Jesus' politically incorrect approach...gets him thrown out of... established places of worship

And if Jesus' and his followers are no longer safe in the synagogue and the Temple...well Jesus has to form something completely new...

not only a new way to pray and to worship...but a new congregation...a new people of God... without constraints and barriers...

So what does Jesus' this new people of God look like?

Well the **first** thing that's different... is that Jesus gathers people around himself...not the synagogue or the temple...

Jesus has no library of scrolls...he doesn't need them...because from childhood...he's learned them all by heart...like every other good Jew would have done.

Second... Jesus and his new congregation...offer and receives hospitality...there is wine and food...at weddings, at parties and in

huge hungry crowds...and of course ultimately and most significantly... at the table of the last supper.

Third Jesus gathered a congregation of equals – who **see** that they share the same flesh and blood with one another. Equals...remember the widow's mite...where Jesus signals to his followers... that wealth and status... are not to be... the measure of a person's devotion to God.

Fourth...where ever they gather around Jesus... he would teach them...on a hillside...by the river...at a dinner party...

and in his teaching...he'd continue to fly in the face of religious and political correctness. Often opposing the so called accepted interpretation of scripture... as a rabbi with authority...or what the Jews called schmika... Jesus would say...You have heard it said, but I say...

Jesus claim the right to interpret the scripture...and gave the same right to his followers. That's what a rabbi meant when he gave his disciples the 'keys to the kingdom' as Jesus did...that's a rabbi's idiom...for permission to interpret the Law and the Prophets.

Jesus was indignant at the heavy burdens... placed on people by the prevailing religious authorities...

so he claimed... his interpretation of God's will...his yoke...the one embroidered on his rabbinical prayer shawl ...his yoke... was easy and his burden light.

In Jesus' day when a rabbi told a student ...their interpretation was correct...

the rabbi would say you have fulfilled the scriptures. When they got it wrong...he'd say you have abolished the law and the prophets.

So when Jesus claims the scriptures have been fulfilled in their hearing... what he means is the written word of God is being interpreted ...by him... one hundred per cent correctly...making him the living Word of God...with a capital W...the very revelation of God.

No wonder they threw him out of the synagogue.

The **fifth** thing Jesus does... when the welcome... equal congregation gathers around him...the fifth thing Jesus does which is stupendously politically incorrect... is he would touch them... even if they are labelled unclean by the rest of the religious community... and not only that...he would heal them... even if it meant breaking the law of the Sabbath!

And feed them...even if it meant incurring the wrath of the religious authorities!

And what is the effect of Jesus' healing every time... well it restores people to community who'd been ritually banned from the synagogue or the Temple... because of their so called sinful unclean condition.

And **sixth** when the welcome equal congregation gathers around him for teaching and restoration...Jesus shows them a new way to pray...

a very very ...politically incorrect way to pray...particularly if you happen to live in the Roman Empire...in the first century...where Caesar demands to be recognized as father and holy god of all... and the provider of every good thing.

Listen to how politically incorrect the Lord's prayer is In light of that...when its taught on a hillside in Roman occupied Judea.

Our father in heaven, holy be your name,
Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth
as it is in heaven. You give us today our daily bread...
and forgive our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Guide us
to resist temptation and deliver us from evil. For yours is the
kingdom and the power and the glory forever...

Not only was this prayer politically incorrect...
but it would make the prayer very unpopular ...not only with the
roman occupiers, but with the religious powers... who want to keep
things nice with the Romans.

The **seventh** way Jesus new congregation is different and subversive
is they share what they have in common...
An inevitable outcome of including the poor and the outcast as
equals... everyone must have enough in this caring sharing
community

And **finally** the most politically incorrect of all groups to be
included...in the congregation were the children...
not only were children welcome...but Jesus held them up as the very
model of faith...as the way to enter the kingdom of God as it grows
and takes its place on earth.

And this politically incorrect way of worship...wasn't limited to one
day a week nor to a place... it was... a way of life...

it was... a manifestation... of the kingdom of God on earth, the longed
for Messianic age...where the shalom of God... the wellbeing of
everyone...
was the attraction...was the reason to be part of it!

They were offering people a vision of what life could be like!

Gathered around Jesus...offered and offer-ing hospitality ...equal
before God. A people... taught the way and the truth and the life by
the living Word of God in the flesh...
a people forgiven...healed, and restored to community and to
relationship with God through this politically incorrect guy...

A people... longing for God's will to be done and acknowledging God's
sovereignty over all powers and principalities...over Empires...
A people...seeking the salvation... liberation... rescue... and the
wellbeing of all creation.

A people whose vocation and call...is Jesus' vocation and call...

to bring sight to those blind to the suffering of others, release to
those imprisoned by prejudice and intolerance ...to embody good
news... to the poor in pocket and in spirit

A politically incorrect people for whom worship is a way of life...
from rising to lying down...not weekly religious habit.

A 'called out' people...gathered around Jesus...sharing the same flesh
and blood as Jesus...in Greek an ecclesia...
in English...a church, a living breathing representation of the Body of
Christ.

May it be so for the people of St Ronan's too...