

Matthew 10:16-33
Fifth Sunday after Pentecost
June 19th, 2005

For six years, during college and a few thereafter, I was an ovo-lacto vegetarian. For those of you unaware of herbivore diction, that means that I ate eggs and dairy, but no meat or even fish. I always cited three reasons why I had chosen such a lifestyle, while, mind you, living in Oklahoma and Texas, the very centers of beef cattle industry. I said that I wanted a spiritual discipline. I was opposed to how many animals were treated, and living on a farm I knew how animals needed to be tended versus how they were cared for by most “modern standards.” And I cited health. People in my family usually have high cholesterol. My journey to vegetarianism was, however, a bit ironic. Well, if I am honest, it was hypocritical. During that time, most of my college expenses were paid by my Grandparents, who funded each of their grandchildren’s educations by selling 2 cows every year of our lives. My vegetarian interlude was underwritten by the beef, what’s for dinner, industry.

My ranching roots family was understandably dumbfounded at my choice. In fact, when I would sit down at a meal and didn’t eat any paltry poultry or a nicely marbled steak, people would be astounded. Everyone would act as though I had suddenly surprised them again with a new revelation, which lets be honest, those of a vegetarian persuasion are apt to do. “I’m a vegetarian... thank you”. But THEY would not prepare anything differently for my meal, and there was often almost nothing for me to eat. At the table, I would look sullen, as only college age kids can do, and someone would offer some cheese, or a pickle, or “How about some green beans. Oh wait, those have bacon in them. Never mind.” In the South, even our vegetables have meat. If it were a nicer meal, I would end up having salad for two courses instead of one, and even that had to be made special, without the bacon.

Eventually, people remembered. And they prepared for me. I remember my Mother’s smile when she served up a veggie burger while everyone else partook of fleshy filets. After a few such meals, some of my carnivorous kin even wanted to sample my eats in lieu of their meats. And eventually, many became ovo-lactos themselves, at least whenever I was in town. My Father even said that he would become one full-time as long as I would cook for him. Six years later, I fell prey to a pork chop, and I have been back on the gravy train ever since.

But the point is that one person has the ability to change a whole group, no matter how large. Of course, there is the raucous road-block toward transition that most of us have, and it is no wonder that whistle-blowers often get themselves blown out of the water. But when one person changes, others simply have to adjust. Whether its an addict getting sober and changing the dynamics of a family, someone being honest in a family that hides the truth, or a small thing such as a vegetarian demanding a meat-alternative, change in a group of people is often instigated by one person. After that, nothing else will ever be same. Think Rosa Parks and that seat. And we should think no differently when we talk about our faith and how we relate to the world.

In today’s gospel, Jesus speaks to his disciples. His words are difficult, painful, and oddly inspiring. In all honesty, they seem a little like something from Jonestown or David Koresch in

wacky Waco. We are not used to Jesus speaking so sternly. He says, “Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; and one's foes will be members of one's own household.” A lovely message of traditional family values.

But in a sense, I want to suggest that this is about nothing more than a son hoping for a vegetarian burger from his family. Jesus is showing us that the change which we will experience and evoke as a result of following him and his path of love and forgiveness will also change those around us. And if we think that such a transformation will only result in joy and without a backlash, we are being foolish and forgetting how humans function in comparison to what Jesus offers. And here IS Jesus coming to us like a good vegetarian, asking us to help him change our world, to serve one another vegetarian burgers, and being honest about what that might entail. He even offers us himself as a model, and invites us to this new banquet of bread, wine and non-avenging, non reactive, and unconditional, self-giving love. But in doing so, he is not saying that God is causing the un-peace, but that humanity can sometimes react against God's peace.

And the love of God is threatening. To eat at this table, we must let go of our old hurts, our old pains, the ones that we have been dragging around with us for years like laundry to a closed laundromat. And we have to realize that God only wants to help us do better, only wants us to feel loved, not punish us and not have us punish one another. We also have to love and care, not like, everyone. It is difficult work, this peace of God.

And here at St. A's, we have had a few vegetarians in our midst. What I mean is that we are being invited to change. At least during the academic year, we have outgrown our one service that meets around Sunday School. We now need two to be the welcoming, loving community that we hope that we are. And if you read this month's Bellringer, you will see that the Vestry has decided that effective the first Sunday after Labor Day, we will move toward a different service schedule. We will have a 9 AM service with music, a shared coffee hour between the two services, a 10:30 AM service with music, and a 5 PM Sunday Evening service with newer forms of the service. This is a blend of what parishioners have said that they are willing to do and where we have felt we need to be and my own personal needs.

But this is the change that we are talking about. This change will change parts of who we are. Some will be hurt and disappointed by that. Most, I hope are excited. But our challenge is deal with this change lovingly and caringly with one another. We are called to offer one another a veggie burger in all things.

Jesus continues, "So do not be afraid of them. There is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed, or hidden that will not be made known. What I tell you in the dark, speak in the daylight; what is whispered in your ear, proclaim from the roofs... Even the very hairs on your head are all numbered. So do not be afraid...." This is what we proclaim, the type of love that can undo what is not of God, fear and the sword, by giving ourselves to the love of God. And just as the hairs on our head are accounted for and numbered in the annals of heaven, our actions of how to accept changes happening at St. A's, and every change and move in our lives are important. Every hair counts. And whenever we follow Jesus and the way of peace. Whenever we serve one another veggie burgers, we have the ability to exact change in the world, one burger at a time. In all reality, I would love to believe that I changed my family through my actions, but it was really my Mother. She opened the door to a new reality. She bridged the two opposed worlds of ranchers and greenies. We too get the opportunity to bridge the love of God with the world and our lives. Bon Appetit.