

Resistance to Renewal

Jesus Experienced Resistance to His Gracious Offer of Salvation

Throughout his ministry, Jesus met resistance. He preached the good news of the kingdom of God, he preached the good news of God's love and forgiveness, but he met resistance. Many people, especially some of the religious leaders, refused to accept the gracious offer of salvation Jesus was bringing them from God. And so, on occasion after occasion, they tested him with questions intended to show that his message was not from God: "Is it permissible to heal on the Sabbath Day? Should we pay taxes to Caesar? What is the greatest commandment of the Law?"

Toward the end of his ministry, however, Jesus addressed those who refused his offer of salvation and exposed their hypocrisy. You place heavy burdens on other people, but you do not help them to carry them. You practice your piety for the praise of others rather than the praise and approval of God. You love the first seats and titles of honor, but there is only one Teacher, the Messiah, and one Father, God the Father Almighty.

Why People Opposed Jesus

Why did these people oppose Jesus? What did they find so offensive? The answer is something like this. If Jesus' message was true, and if he truly came from God, then his word was God's Word, and everything was about to change. If Jesus' message was true, then God was doing something new, and when God's Word accomplished its purpose there would be a great reversal: the first would be last, and the last would be first. Jesus' opponents understood this, especially the religious leaders, and so they challenged him at every turn because they did not want to change.

We may wonder why people did not understand what Jesus was doing, but we shouldn't be too harsh on them since we often make similar mistakes. Like the people of Jesus' day, we can become so comfortable with the way we do things that are frozen in our ways. Our understanding of God can be so small and confining that we cannot imagine God doing something new and different. When this happens, we refuse God's gracious offer of salvation. We refuse to hear God's Word that calls us to live in a more profound way, a way fully aflame with faith and love for Christ.

God is Doing Something New

God is always doing something new in Jesus Christ. There is never a moment when God does not enter our life in a new and unexpected way, challenging us to change and reform our lives. There is never a moment when our lives are finally settled and perfect; they are always in need of change and reform. This is why Pope Francis challenges us to become a more faithful church that models the gospel we preach, a church more attentive to the needs of the poor and oppressed, a church that models what it preaches and preaches what it truly models.

The Epistle to the Hebrews says that the Word of God is sharper than any two-edged sword. It pierces the deepest part of our spirit and exposes our hypocrisy. It challenges us to live fully alive in the grace of God. It calls us to a profound understanding of the gospel so that we will be transformed from within. But before that inner transformation can occur, we must respond to the gospel in a deep and profound way. Christ must become the whole of our life not a part of our life. Prayer must be at the center of our life not at the periphery of our life. Concern for those in need must become the hallmark of our faith. When this happens, the grace of God changes and transforms us and we see, for the first time, the new thing God is doing in our life.