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JESSICA EASTER

Be Like Jesus: Flip Some Tables



What are we to do in the face of the growing injustice in our world? Communities around the world are being ripped apart by natural disasters fueled by climate change as we with more privilege continue to consume and pollute at an unsustainable rate. In our own country, women are

being stripped of their bodily autonomy by overzealous lawmakers eager to use their idea of God to continue the subjugation of the female body. Black and brown people are still routinely being murdered by the police, those who claim to keep us all safe, and are enslaved in a cradle-to-prison pipeline designed to keep their bodies oppressed. Queer folx are assaulted by word and deed, whether as gay people told their queerness is “their cross to bear” or trans people assaulted on their walk home from work, simply as they try to exist as their fullest selves.

Mainstream efforts, such as those made in the Suffrage and Civil Rights movements, would guide us to work within the system; women gained the right to vote largely by working through their male counterparts, and black folks, under a media-promoted, deradicalized ideal of Martin Luther King Jr., are said to have persuaded their white counterparts to gain Civil Rights. Each of these examples is memorialized as completed within the system and is celebrated for starting successful movements in large part through their supplication to those who had power within

the system, men and white folks. These both were tremendous steps in the path toward justice, and ones that should not be overlooked; however, the horrendous maltreatment of and violence against the black and brown body, as well as the domination over the female body have not entirely faded into the background to leave a world absent of these forms of oppression. The problem remains in the presence of the systems themselves, systems born and bred to perpetuate harm against those marginalized and to keep those with privilege in power.

So we ask ourselves again, “What are we to do?” In order to address this question, I suggest we revisit how Jesus interacted with unjust systems. In Matthew 21:12-13, it is written:

“¹²Then Jesus entered the temple and drove out all who were selling and buying in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold doves. ¹³He said to them, ‘It is written, ‘My house shall be called a house of prayer,’ but you are making it a den of robbers” (NRSVUE).

The moneychangers and the sellers of goods had formed their own system of oppression, one intended to exploit those who came to worship God and exclude those that couldn’t pay the exorbitant price. The priests of the temple, too, by allowing and gaining from the practice, partook in the creation of this system, profiting off of this exploitation. When Jesus sees this, *he flips the tables*. Jesus does not sit

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back and allow for this exploitation, *he flips the tables*. Jesus does not request the Priests, those with the power to stop the abuse but who chose to profit off of it instead, stop the practice, *he flips the tables*. Jesus does not bargain over the table, asking the moneychangers and the sellers to provide a more equitable service, *he flips the tables*. Jesus physically overturns the system.

We are called to follow Jesus, for whoever says, “I abide in him,” ought to walk in the same way as he walked” (1 John 2:6, NRSVUE). So, in following Jesus’s example, we also are called to flip tables, to disrupt systems, like those in the temple, that perpetuate injustice, but we are not called to do this work alone.

Often when faced with injustice, we as human beings are drawn into community with others to process, to find comfort, and, hopefully, to heal. It is also within these communities that we find the support and resources to drive the type of change that we are called to make, to be like Jesus and flip tables. To be in community with others, with shared values and ideas, even in the diversity of reasoning,

upbringing, and context in the world, gives us the strength to continue on even when it is hard. Further, it gives us the opportunity to take a break when we need to without losing any progress we may have made. Community in this way also makes the vision of a future in which all are seen, heard, and valued, not in spite of, but because of the color of their skin, the queerness of their bodies, the vastness of the image of God we see in the various shapes of human flesh, possible and within reach. Even if these examples are on a local scale, they give us ideas on how to best move forward creating a system that works for all and not just the few. And whether we see it or not, we all are limited by the continuance of systems that oppress any of God’s wonderful creation, even if we are those that are the most privileged by it. We get caught in these rigid binaries and static boxes, unable to express ourselves beyond these and live out our fullest lives. Equity and justice are not problems for those most explicitly marginalized by the lack of them, they are an everyone problem, and to be like Jesus, to flip tables, we need to make them *our* problem.