

Acts 17:1-9
A Right Side Up World
WRCoB 4.21.24

When the play Hamilton was here in Richmond
My family and I should have gone to see it.

I understand it was wonderful.

Disney has its own version of it
As you saw in the video clip.

If you haven't seen it, make it a point to do so.

As I was sharing the topic of my sermon this week
With Sarah, she spoke of this song.

The song concerns the battle of Yorktown.

As the men go into battle
They're singing this song.

The Colonists wanted to create a new and free nation

Their goal was to turn the world upside down.

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The Apostle Paul and Silas
On their second missionary journey
Come upon the Greek town, Thessalonica

Thessalonica was a large city of 200,000.
And very wealthy and influential.

It was the capital of Macedonia in present day Greece.

Paul and Silas had traveled down from Philippi
Through the two cities, Amphipolis and Apollonia
And into Thessalonica.

And on three consecutive Sabbath days
They shared the story of Jesus

And the scriptural evidence
That he was the expected Messiah.

And that the Messiah
Had to suffer, die, and rise from the dead.

Many received Jesus as the Christ.

But many others not only did not
Accept the message of the Gospel
But became quite hostile towards the believers

And with the help of ruffians out looking for trouble
They formed a mob committee

And raised hell to get these folks arrested
And bring them before the city officials.

Poor Jason, whoever he was
Got caught up in the ruckus
Having innocently hosted believers in his home

He, along with those believers
Were dragged before the assembly with the charge

Acts 17:6b NRSV

**“These people who have been turning the world upside
down have come here . . .”**

After hearing this, the city officials charged them with treason
Made Jason post a bond for everyone
And then let them go.

That night, the other believers snuck Paul and Silas
Out of town and on their way to Berea for their safety.

Wow!

Look at the power of the message of Jesus Christ!

Many of these wealthy, influential citizens
Were struck by the truth of the Gospel and believed.

While others, reacted violently to the message.

It goes to show you . . .
Truth threatens the power and principalities
Of the established institutions of the world.

The powers-that-be reacted aggressively
To silence the good news of Jesus Christ.

For it was turning their world upside down.

However, unlike the Colonists at Yorktown
Paul and Silas didn't turn their world upside down
Through war or violence.

They did it through preaching and teaching
The Gospel of Jesus Christ.

They turned their world upside down
By sharing the love of their upside-down king

They turned their world upside down
By threatening the decrees of their emperor.

~~

Donald Kraybill,
Retired Elizabethtown College professor
And scholar on Mennonite culture
Wrote a book named just that.

The Upside-Down Kingdom.

It was and still is a very influential book
That articulated that Jesus and his Gospel
Were a lot more radical in nature
Than was presently accepted and advocated

His book is widely embraced
By the differing Anabaptist communions
As a treatise of their theological position.

Kraybill writes that God's kingdom is not of this world.

In fact, it's the exact opposite of a worldly kingdom.

In explaining Kraybill's position
It's like what Henry David Thoreau said
In his book, *Walden*

*"If a man does not keep pace with his companions, perhaps
it is because he hears a different drummer."*

God's kingdom people follow the beat of a different drummer

Kingdom people are centered on Jesus, his life, ministry
And his death and resurrection.

They follow this Jesus
Who said it was better to serve than be served
That the last shall be first
And the first shall be last

That believers should consider the cost of discipleship
And take up their cross and follow him

This Jesus who said that children were blessed

And so were those who were poor in spirit
Those who mourn, the meek
The merciful, and the peacemaker

Kingdom people were the salt of the earth
The light of the world.

This Jesus said to turn the other cheek
Go the extra mile
To love enemies
And pray for persecutors

Kraybill writes:

In some ways [Jesus] looked like other insurrectionists of his day. But his revolution was upside-down. It touted acts of compassion, not daggers. Love was the new Torah, the standard of his upside-down kingdom. (p.55)

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Ok. But my question, in all of this, is this.

It may be just semantics but . . .

Are these disciples really turning the world upside down?

Should we be turning the world upside down?

Is the world really right-side-up and needs the Gospel
To turn it upside down?

And finally, do we want to live in an upside-down world?

No!

My premise is the world is already turned upside down.

What we want to do is to turn the world right side up
The way it was created to be.

The way we currently view the world
Is that the world is right side up. Right?
But is it really?

No, our world has been turned upside through greed
Through sin and through self-centeredness

We live in an upside-down world that humanity has created.

And what God is doing
Is building a right-side up kingdom
Through a right-side up king
By a right-side up church.

In fact, there is another book
This one written by David Gibson
Entitled

Right-Side-Up Living in an Upside-Down-World.

Now this is more to my way of thinking.

Jesus did not come to turn the world upside down
He came to turn the world right side up!

Note in our lesson today
It was not the believers who were claiming
The world was being turned upside down.

It was the nonbelievers who stated
Their world was being turned upside down.

The upside-down notion was from an outsider's perspective.

Their world felt like it was being turned upside down

But in fact, it was already upside down
And Jesus was turning it right side up!

It was and continues to be God's plan
To establish or re-establish God's kingdom
On earth as it is in heaven.

Jesus comes to earth to show us
What right-side-up living is all about

Jesus is the only authoritative voice
That teaches us what a right-side up kingdom looks like.

All of what Jesus said, taught and did
Reflects a right-side up kingdom.

The Sermon on the Mount is the church manual
For kingdom living.

Jesus' parables challenge peoples' status quo ideas

His' miraculous healings showed compassion
For marginalized people

Jesus empathized with people who were made outcast
In an upside-down world.

Whenever we follow the example of Jesus
In word, deed, and thought
We give testimony to a right-side-up Kingdom.

It's really a matter of perspective.

Nonbelievers look at their world as right side up.

Whereas believers know it is upside down.

Greed and self-interest drive this world
A world in which the better man wins

A world where God helps those who help themselves

A world where violence brings false peace
And power brings control and oppression

Where you better grab it while you can
Because if you don't somebody else will.

But kingdom people bring goodness truth, and beauty
They bring hope to the world

People start to realize they're the ones
Living in an upside-down world.

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The universal church under the Lordship of Jesus Christ
Can be an overwhelming influence in the world today.

It was C. K. Chesterton in response to newspapers
That suggested the church, "get with the times"

W said

*"We do not want a church that will move with the world.
We want a church that will move the world"*

~~

From an article published by BBC, May 13, 2019

Nonviolent protests are twice as likely to succeed as armed conflicts – and those engaging a threshold of 3.5% of the population have never failed to bring about change.

In other words, if you can get 3.5% of the population
To actively engaged in seeking change
Change will occur.

There are, of course, many ethical reasons to use nonviolent strategies. But compelling research by Erica Chenoweth, a political scientist at Harvard University, confirms that civil disobedience is not only the moral choice; it is also the most powerful way of shaping world politics – by a long way.

"Ordinary people, all the time, are engaging in pretty heroic activities that are actually changing the world.

So, what if the church, a billion strong
3.1% of the globe's population
Overwhelmed the world with love?

What if the church, one billion strong
Could show the world they are living
In an upside-down world?

What if the church, a billion strong
Showed the world who the right-side-up king is
And what his right-side-up kingdom is about

Now that would be a foretaste of Gods coming kingdom.

Well, the church won't do it
Unless you and you and me do it.

This upside-down world
Waits for the reign of a right-side up king.

Jesus Christ
Let His will be done on earth as it is in heaven!