

1/29/12

## A Christian Diet

One of the greatest crises going on right now within our schools is bullying. This has been an ongoing saga poured out through the news and highlighted through our own local tragedy. Bullying in and of itself is no new phenomenon. In fact I would bet that this social reality has been a part of our nature since the beginning. But it has also been the case that in prior times there has always been an escape for sure once off the bus and at home. However, as much as we would love to encourage our young people to disconnect and unplug, this is not the world in which we live. And all of us have become reachable at any time through cell phone, text, face book, tweet, and a host of other methods. Unplugging would simply further isolate those being hurt most by the brunt of the bullying.

Unfortunately the bullying that occurs to any of us has to do with things that are beyond our control and usually takes the form of name calling. Perhaps it's out of a fear of what another

does not know or understand, but ways that we talk, dress, walk become sources of ammunition. Where we live, the music and other choices we make, the company we keep, the activities we are involved in, also sources for names that might be lodged upon us. How many of us have at one point or another in our lives ever been on the receiving end of being called a name, being bullied or teased whether by friend, classmate, neighbor, sibling? That's what I expected.

We are taught and try to teach our own children that these names only have power when we give them power. And so we have phrases past down since the beginning of time to help us cope with the stinging reality of being teased. "Stick and stones . . ." But the truth is that the names do have power. It does hurt. While physical wounds heal quickly, especially in youth, the mental and emotional wounds of these names, the demons of these names, stick with us for much longer.

Paul warns in his letter to those Christians in Corinth the danger of knowing too much and loving too little. It is a fair

shot across the bow of our society similarly. We know the pain this reality on bullying, of being called names can impart, yet we prove by way of inaction how little we are willing to do, to love as followers of Jesus Christ. If you think this is an issue merely reserved to our young people, then why does it play out so boldly and vocally in our political arena as well? What are we saying to our young people and to one another about the acceptable way to be with one another when this is promoted among those who generally agree as the way to be to one another? To put down other for the benefit of self. For the church in Corinth among a host of other issues, that community has become so wrapped up in the food they eat, Paul reminds them of the diet which should define their life. And so he says pointedly “anyone who loves God is known by God.” That it’s not about what we eat, or the ritual acts we go through, but the love that is the primary diet of our lives. If this is not the case, then that means that the defining diet of life is something different – wealth, status or a myriad of other things,

the demeaning of others as a way to elevate ourselves. Be aware that our true being, our true diet is ultimately known by God.

So for followers of Jesus, it's supposed to be this steady diet of love, by the way a synonym of diet is regimen, that is the label that does apply. Perhaps that's the exact teaching that Jesus also provides at the temple, this the first real episode of his ministry. Of course, we don't know what he said or what he taught, but it was different enough, controversial enough that it was making some waves maybe because it was a teaching not so much about increasing knowledge, but about increasing love and so connecting with God. And at a time, not unlike our own, so controlled by names and categories, this was an alternative perspective.

It's interesting to look at the gospel story where the response of the man with the unclean spirit follows directly after the comment concerning Jesus teaching as one with authority. Whatever names had imprisoned the man come

pouring out upon this hapless preacher from Galilee. Those names largely have to do with maintaining the way things are. Essentially his question back to Jesus is, “What gives you the right to come in here and upset the established order of things. If you are going to come in here teaching, then teach the way we teach. Don't go setting yourself up as some kind of alternative authority. What have you got to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth?” And that last bit seeks to begin the name calling. Remember how just a couple of weeks back we were reminded that little, if any, good came out of Nazareth. But the man doesn't stop there. Instead he persists by applying labels to Jesus, names to Jesus, to lock him into the system that Jesus has come to reform.

Remember how we already talked about how names have a profound power that they exert on us. Jesus silences the man because if Jesus accepts the name from this man, he accepts the system from which it comes. And that system has a pretty bad track record of naming some as holy, others as unclean,

outcast, and unacceptable. Jesus here takes a stand against this bullying and we can assume by the silence that his teaching, the one with authority, has changed the mind of this bully. His actions, his regime, his diet not of knowledge, but of love has changed this man. It has cast out the demons that have locked him in the system and his place. Jesus has come to free the man from these demons by ridding the names of their power and teaching that in the eyes of God, everyone is acceptable.

Jesus has not come to destroy anyone, he has come to liberate the oppressed and the oppressors alike. And it is precisely his unwillingness to reciprocate the violence and destroy his opponents that unmasks the desperate violence of their system, and of our own. Remember, again, the words from Paul - the danger of knowing too much and loving too little. Let me conclude with this thought – If Jesus is able to continue this campaign of dismantling the system of violence, of naming, of bullying now in us and through us, then maybe, just maybe, there is hope for us and our world which also

suffers under the crippling, disparaging and manipulating names that control and imprison us and our lives. If you know yourself through the eyes of others, through the eyes of those who control the world and its violent ways, then you will be named and controlled by what you know of yourself there. But if you come to know yourself through the eyes of God, and through the name that God gives you, you will be set free by it and given life beyond measure.