

## *What would Jesus Do?*

July 16, 2006

Rev. Nathaniel R. Elliot, Jr

A few years ago, I'm not sure which year, there was a craze, or perhaps I should say *fad*, among a wide range of people, athletes, celebrities in general, a TV pastor or two, not to mention *everyday* Christian people. The fad was elastic wrist bracelets with the inscription: *WWJD*, or *What would Jesus Do?* Not only did wearing the bracelet show the world that someone was trying to follow the way of Jesus, it also served as a constant reminder to the wearer to pursue *Jesus righteousness*.

I have to wonder if those followers of Jesus didn't squirm just a little bit when they came across some of the things that Jesus does....as in the Gospel reading for this Sunday. *WWJD?* He would call his disciples to him and tell them to take off. To broadcast themselves by the wind of the Spirit, and pollinate the villages of Galilee, with his authority, that is, with Kingdom power and glory. This has been the pattern of Jesus, and now it will be the disciples' pattern.

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*Get going, he says. You will be itinerants, as I am. You will live off the roads. You will have no money. No bag, no knapsack. No compass. No maps. No bread. No Bible. No Prayer Book. And only one tunic. You will have each other for support and Providence to guide and provide for you. You will be wholly dependent on the hospitality of others for your physical survival.*

Elsewhere, Jesus had said, *Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head*” (Mt. 8:20), and now Jesus was calling them to a similar kind of “**hoboism**” for the Kingdom of God. They were to bring a spiritual blessing, *a healing*, actually, to those whom they encountered, and those who accepted them, in turn, would give them material assistance. *Freely give; freely receive.*

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As an aside, there is a vivid contrast to *What Would Jesus Do?* and to what the disciples of Jesus *did* do and this contrast is provided by the institutional Church. It has to do with pension funds, housing allowance, health insurance, the best in ecclesiastical furniture, the finest vestments and altar silver, paid choirs, capital campaign consultants, conference centers and the list can go on and on.

In considering this passage in the Gospel, where Jesus sends out the disciples, it's worth noting that whereas John the Baptist created a *monopoly* (since he was the only one in his community going around baptizing people), Jesus, on the other hand, created a *franchise*. Jesus *shared* his authority and agency with others. And when John the Baptist died so did his movement.

As I mentioned last week, life in Palestine was pretty much localized. Travel was dangerous and people didn't move around much. When they did go to

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festivals or make pilgrimages, they went armed with clubs and staffs. Furthermore, life was hard for the peasantry. Busy working the land to eke out a living after paying taxes (sound familiar?); the simple folk had little time for anything but survival. Self-sufficiency was their goal, not spiritual fulfillment.

These disciples had, in a very real sense, been sent out as *lambs among wolves*. They had their work cut out for them. But as Jesus had taught them, ***Blessed are the poor in spirit*** (Mt.5:3). They're the ones who yearn for a Gospel. They are the ones who, having no hope in their lot in life, or their ability to change the system, are ready to turn to a message of Divine deliverance. They are ready to hear not about a *new* God, but a God they might understand.

The people are thirsty for a God who is real and unmediated by an institution, a God of power who will provide daily bread, who can and will deliver them

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from disease and death, and who loves them without any condition or merit or deservedness. It is this God the disciples bring with them and it is this God who *converts*, not the disciples themselves. As Paul would later write about his own mission: *My speech and my proclamation were not with plausible words of wisdom, but with a demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith might rest not on human wisdom, but on the power of God* (1Cor. 2:4-5).

The itinerancy of those early disciples is not just about vagrancy, about a kingdom of beggars. It's more about the refusal to settle down in a central place, and have all come to you in that place, the refusal to give the Kingdom a specific geographical center. How interesting that is, whereas our culture, a century or so ago *located* the sacred in a two block stretch of Kings' Highway, the original Kingdom bearers saw it the other way around. They didn't wait for people to come to them, but went out to the people.

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There is another dimension upon which the Kingdom mission rested and it is *sharing*. It's not a matter of charity or alms giving or a handout at the door. It's about the *just* sharing of food as the material basis of life, of life that belongs to God. The Gospel is communicated best in a relationship. The message is verbalized to be sure. But it is also *incarnated*. The medium and the message are bound together. You eat together, and you sleep under the same roof. You talk, you share. You listen. And in the process, the Spirit infects the others with the Gospel of Jesus. The sharing of Gospel love, unadorned, simple, and free, forms the basis of Christian community.

As to those who refuse to listen, or refuse the message after hearing it...there will always be those around....*don't worry about it*, Jesus tells his disciples, *move on to others*.

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Christianity should be anything and everything but dull...that is *if* we pay attention to ***What would Jesus do?***

**AMEN.**