

April 15, 2018

The art of anger

Who said the following?

“Don’t make me angry. You wouldn’t like me when I’m angry.”

If you guessed the “Incredible Hulk,” you’re right. If you envisioned actor Bill Bixby saying it, then you may well have grown up in the 70s.

For a kid growing up before computer special effects, seeing a green Lou Ferrigno with a really bad haircut smashing his way toward the terrified bad guy was just the coolest. He was a bully to the bullies. He was a crime-stopping monster. It was sort of like if you gave Frankenstein a badge and made him a detective. Which, now that I think about it, is just about the most awesome idea ever! (Note to self: Call Hollywood.)

I was thinking about this on Easter night as I watched the live version of “Jesus Christ Superstar.” You see, earlier that day, at Easter Mass at the little chapel in my folks’ assisted living center in Denver, the priest noted that he doesn’t see Jesus actively working in others, even in himself.

At first, I wanted to respond, “Open your eyes, man! Jesus’s examples are seen every day!” But I knew what he meant. At least I think I did. I think he meant that we need to more actively embody and act on Jesus’s teachings and example. Enough so that people can see us as followers of Christ and not just a faint shadow of his teachings.

And if you think he was preaching to the choir — a group of elderly people cramming for the final exam of life — consider this. Just prior to Mass, an elderly resident who served as a greeter was passing out missals. This is true, by the way:

“She’s a Christian Scientist,” an elderly resident seated next to me told her, referring to a woman a few seats away. “She’s just here to share in the worship. So, don’t try to push one of the books on her!” *Why not?* I wondered.

“I’m not,” the other woman kindly responded.

“Oh, you think you know everything!” the seated woman retorted for no apparent reason. I thought I was going to have to call in a bouncer. I checked for the exits, in case walkers started to fly.

The elderly greeter walked away dejected, but then, in the spirit of the day, returned a moment later: “Please forgive me if I upset you. I’m very sorry.”

The grumpy woman sat quiet for a moment. Father was still getting dressed in his stole. The crucifix hung nearby signifying Christ’s incredible sacrifice. Somewhere a dog barked. At least I hoped it was a dog barking.

Finally, the woman looked up at the greeter who was standing over her smiling and seeking forgiveness. The grumpy woman looked up at her. I expected a little-old-lady smile and a soft-spoken, “Oh, that’s okay.”

Instead, the woman replied with gusto, “You just go sit down!”

I wanted to go to the greeter, give her a hug and tell her, “It’s okay! You’re doing a wonderful job! God bless you!” But I was afraid if I did, the other lady would punch me out.

People don’t always link Christ’s behavior with their own. We think about his teachings, but we don’t consider his actions when he walked the earth as a basis for how we should actually behave. This is a recipe for hypocrisy. It’s also a tad confusing for people on the outside looking in.

Jesus was an awesome guy! Full of laughter and joy and forgiveness and fun! To be honest, those New Testament writers were a bit stiff. I wish they would have included more stories of the joy of Jesus.

We see Christ’s anger, too, in those writings, but just a little: When the apostles can’t stay awake; and with the story of the money changers (as I was reminded of when watching “Jesus Christ Superstar”).

I like the angry Christ! I like the Christ that says, *“Don’t make me angry. You wouldn’t like me when I’m angry.”* I like the Christ who rampages through the market shouting, “JESUS SMASH!”

We tend to be very milquetoast when it comes to issues that should really anger us. Who are the “money changers” who would raise Christ’s ire today? Where do we feel Christ’s absence?

It's a strange world, isn't it? Terms like "pro-life" and even "Christian" are threatened by those who actively preach the words while actively denying them through their actions. It's become an accepted hypocrisy. They don't stop to think how Christ would respond if he was physically walking the earth today.

I guess they think Jesus would approve of separating families, turning away the immigrant, administering the death penalty, eliminating social programs, slashing health insurance, preaching violence against those with whom they disagree. *Are we actively following Christ, or are we the money-changers?*

The money-changers are abundant. Sometimes I think it would be nice if more of us became just a little angry.