

✦ The Priest, Preacher, Rabbi & Bear Story

A priest, a preacher and a Rabbi walked into their favorite bar, where they would get together two or three times a week for drinks and to talk shop.

On this particular afternoon, someone made the comment that preaching to people isn't really all that hard. A real challenge would be to preach to a bear.

One thing led to another and they decided to do an experiment. They would all go out into the woods, find a bear, preach to it, and attempt to convert it.

Seven days later, they're all together to discuss the experience.

Father Flannery, who has his arm in a sling, is on crutches, and has various bandages, goes first.

"Well," he says, "I went into the woods to find me a bear. And when I found him I began to read to him from the Catechism. Well, that bear wanted nothing to do with me and began to slap me around. So I quickly grabbed my holy water, sprinkled him and, Holy Mary Mother of God, he became as gentle a lamb. The bishop is coming out next week to give him first communion and confirmation."

Reverend Billy Bob spoke next. He was in a wheelchair, with an arm and both legs in casts, and an IV drip. In his best fire and brimstone oratory he claimed, " WELL brothers, you KNOW that we don't sprinkle! I went out and I FOUND me a bear. And then I began to read to my bear from God's HOLY WORD! But that bear wanted nothing to do with me. So I took HOLD of him and we began to wrestle. We wrestled down one hill, UP another

and DOWN another until we came to a creek. So I quick DUNKED him and BAPTIZED his hairy soul. And just like you said, he became as gentle as a lamb. We spent the rest of the day praising Jesus."

They both looked down at the rabbi, who was lying in a hospital bed. He was in a body cast and traction with IV's and monitors running in and out of him. He was in bad shape.

The rabbi looks up and says, "Looking back on it, circumcision may not have been the best way to start."

⌘ Apologies

⌘ The Blunt Nature of Jesus' teaching here (with the Matthean "punch")

This is a story unique to Matthew's Gospel. And all of the parables unique to Matthew, except for the brief analogies of the treasure, the pearl and the fishnet, end with someone's downfall, while the minor key theme song of judgment plays in the background (Duke, 49). So the unforgiving servant in this parable ends up being tortured in a dungeon (18:34). The weeds get thrown into a furnace of fire (13:42); the laborer who dared to complain about his wages is sent packing (20:14); the son who didn't go to the fields is eventually excluded from the kingdom (21:32), and those who did not see Jesus in the destitute go away into eternal punishment (25:46).

⌘ The Root and Branch Discussion

⌘ This is the real Rabbi & Preacher story I wanted to tell (actually the priest didn't enter into this discussion ... sorry.)

- ✦ The difference that Jesus makes in the theology: we gain RELEASE.
- ✦ But, how much do we really claim Jesus' words here? Jesus' new RELEASE.
- ✦ How much do we CLING to our MEMORY / UNFORGIVENESS from the events a decade ago, with the same fervor as the folks from the synagogue and their CLINGING to the MEMORY of the HOLOCAUST?
- ✦ We all have some lessons to learn from Jesus, even still. Because we all like to nurse hurt feelings and anger. **Read ending of Psalm 137!**
("Happy shall they be who take your little one and dash them against the rock!")
- ✦ So how do we do it, when we don't feel like it?
 - a. Praying over time helps a lot
 - ✦ Turn back to the Baptismal/Membership Liturgy we used today – Paragraph 4 questions "freedom and power"
 - b. There is the prayer in the moment
 - ✦ The Corrie ten Boom story.
- ✦ Human relationships are difficult.
- ✦ But, as we learned last week, there are eternal consequences.
- ✦ What we BIND on EARTH will be BOUND IN HEAVEN
- ✦ And what we LOOSE on EARTH will be LOOSED IN HEAVEN
- ✦ If we don't allow God to intervene with HEALING, FORGIVING POWER, then we don't let God intervene with HEALING, FORGIVING POWER.

⌘ It's not so much PUNISHMENT, it's just cause and effect.

⌘ What's holding us back from trying?