

This is the Day...Monday

October 4, 2021

A Bruised Reed

“Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him, and he will bring justice to the nations. He will not shout or cry out or raise his voice in the streets. A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out. In faithfulness he will bring forth justice; he will not falter or be discouraged till he establishes justice on earth. In his teaching the islands will put their hope.” (Isaiah 42:1-4)

In June of 1989 I became the pastor of my first church in Clarksville Tennessee. I was to be the pastor of this church for the next three years while I was attending seminary. The days leading up to my first Sunday and my first official sermon were filled with angst and trepidation for me. I wanted to make a good impression. I wanted to speak with authority. But more than that, I did not want to say something stupid or contrary to solid Biblical doctrine. These were good Christian folks who knew their Bible and expected their pastor to know it too.

As I stepped up to bring the message on that first Sunday, I must admit that I was scared to death. The place was packed, and I felt like I was at an inquisition. I knew they had come to judge me and my ability to put together a cohesive, intelligent sentence. So, to break the ice, I began with a joke. But the response was only a brief chuckle from a few. From there it was all up to the Holy Spirit.

In the weeks and months to come, I became more comfortable when delivering my messages. I began to learn more about the people in the pews. And the more I learned, the more I realized that appearances can be deceiving and the people that I initially viewed as my judge and jury were actually people just like me. They were not uncaring justices ready to hand down a sentence upon me. They were people with problems, faults, and insecurities, just like me. I learned that the woman in the sixth row on my right was terrified because she had a medical test the week before to determine if she had cancer. I learned that the young couple in the back were having severe marital problems and were on the verge of separating. I learned that the woman sitting on the front row, singing hymns at the top of her lungs was actually questioning her faith and the validity of those words.

Before that first Sunday, I thought the world was filled with two kinds of people. Normal people and hurting people. Since then, I have learned that there are no normal people. We are all bruised reeds. Churches are filled with bruised reeds and smoldering wicks. People may pretend to have it all under control, but no one's life is exempt from trouble and struggle. The more I knew the people in the pews, the better pastor I could become. And the more I could also understand Christ's love even for the bruised reeds and smoldering wicks. As He said, “In this world you will have trouble. But fear not! I have overcome the world.” (John 16:33)