

Tenth Sunday – Ordinary Time – A

by

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Have you ever walked through a used car lot and seen a car with a price on it that seems like a really good deal, but it has a sign on it: **Take As Is?**...Or maybe you have been in a store that has a special section with prices a lot lower than the same items in another part of the store. Again, there may be a sign that says: **As Is**.... Or it may say: **Irregular**...Whatever the sign says, what it's really saying is: "These are damaged goods....We've given you warning; you are going to find a flaw, a stain that won't come out,...a zipper that won't zip,...a seam that's not straight...an oil leak, ...a part missing...We're not going to tell you what the problem is. You'll have to find it for yourself, ...When you do, don't come whining to us. Because there are No Refunds, No Returns.... If you really want this item you must take it **As Is**... If you're looking for perfect, you walked down the wrong aisle."

Now if we think about it, isn't that the way it is with all of us human beings?...We have to admit, every one of us is at least slightly irregular....Let's face it, we should all walk around with a sign around our necks: **Take As Is** ...*(Put sign around neck)*....We are all imperfect; we all fall short of what we could be...St. Paul in Rom 3:23 says it very clearly: "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."

What today's Gospel is telling us, and what I want us to see, is that Jesus takes us **As Is**...just as we are, scars and all...Jesus came into the world and saw sin as it really is – with all of its filthiness and heartache and pain... He suffered for that sin...He died a horrible death for that sin...But – fortunately for us – He had a great love and compassion for the sinners... In our Gospel, the Pharisees ask His disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with sinners?"...When Jesus heard that, He said, "It's not the healthy who need a doctor, it's the sick who do...I didn't come to call the righteous, I came to call sinners." ...Now if you get the idea that Jesus was soft on sin,...that he coddled sinners, just go through the Gospels. You'll see how tough He was. Look in Matthew, Chap.13 where Jesus warns that all who do evil will be thrown into the fiery furnace...And time and time again Jesus stood before a sinner and told them, "Go and sin no more!"...But He was never so blinded by their sin that He did not see the good in them, their potential, their possibilities – qualities that were worth redeeming....His calling of Matthew the despised tax collector to be His disciple is a prime example of how Jesus accepts a sinner – in Matthew's case, one who betrayed his own people, his friends and neighbors, to line his own pockets. ...Jesus took Matthew **As Is**. He knew what Matthew was, and He also knew what Matthew could become.

And that, my friends, is the key: Jesus loves us as we are...He loves us **As Is**, with all our sins, all our weaknesses...but He loves us too much to leave us that way...He knows what we can become. ..He wants to change us. He wants us to be more like Him...Right now I want you to think about this....What if for one day, 24 hrs, the heart of Jesus was transplanted into your body?...Nothing else is changed...you live in the same house,...have same kids... same parents ...go to the same school...have the same friends...have the same job...same boss...same problems and pains...Nothing changes except that you live your life with His heart?...Your heart gets the day off...His priorities govern your actions....His values drive your decisions...His love directs your attitudes and your behavior...What would you be like?...Would anyone notice a change?...Would your family,...your friends,...your co-workers see any difference? ...And how about the less fortunate?... Would you treat them any better?...What about your enemies? Would they receive more understanding and forgiveness than you usually give them?

And how about you? How would you feel? ...Would your stress level be a lot lower?...your moodiness? ...your temper?...Would you sleep better?... Any chance you'd need less Advil PM or Valium?...Would you start noticing things more,...like sunsets...and moonlight ...and babies...and people who are lonely? ..And how about the way you act in traffic (ouch, hit a nerve, huh)? Would that change?... What about the way you speak about other people, especially the one's you don't like, and the one's who really tick you off? ...You think you'd handle that any differently?...Would you still dread the things you've been dreading? Or would you face them with more confidence and courage?...With Jesus taking over your heart, what other changes would you expect to see?

Maybe now you've got this picture in your mind of Jesus leading your life...If so, what you see is what God wants...He wants you and me to think and act like Jesus... Jesus came to earth not only to save us...He came to change us... He came not only to give us a better life after this life,...He came to help us make this life better ...Yes, He takes us **As Is**; He loves us just as we are...But He refuses to leave us that way, because He knows there is a better way for us to be...You parents out there can relate to this....Were you ever watching your toddler playing in a sandbox and you turn your back for a minute and when you turn back around she has a mouth full of sand and dirt?...Did you love her with dirt in her mouth?... Of course you did....Did you let her keep the dirt in her mouth? ...Of course not! ...Instead, you brought her under the faucet and washed out her mouth even though she probably didn't like it... Why? Because you loved her and you weren't going to leave her that way...You knew that leaving her that way was not good for her; you knew a better way.

God does the same for us. He holds us under the faucet: "Spit out the dirt, it's not good for you." He wants to wash out all the dirt: the dishonesty,... immorality,... prejudice,... selfishness...jealousy ...We don't always like it...Sometimes we even opt to keep the dirt in our mouth..."I can eat dirt if I want to!"...Sure, we can. But if we do, it's our loss...God has a better way. He wants us to be like Jesus...He wants us to live the way we just imagined we would with Jesus' heart in us. ...Tell the truth,...don't you wish you could live that way?...Less stress,...more at peace...less fear and anxiety, more confidence and courage...fewer grudges...more forgiveness...less materialistic...more spiritual?...Sounds good to me...and the Good News is we can do it with His help...Look what He did with Matthew and Peter and the rest of that pitiful gang He called to be His first followers...Look at what He did with them.

The Good News is that we aren't stuck being the way we are?...We're tweakable...We can change to be more like Jesus...If you're a grump, you're not condemned to eternal "grump-ypdom"... If you're always worried and anxious, you don't have to worry yourself to an early grave...If you've been a bigot for 20, 30, 40 years, there's no reason why you have to die a bigot...If you're chained to some sinful habit, that chain can be broken...If you're always losing your temper with the excuse, "I can't help it; it's the way I am,"...well – news flash - you don't have to stay that way...No matter how much we're not like Jesus, it is possible for us to change...Jesus – the heart doctor - CAN change our hearts...He said He came for the sick – for sinners...That's us. He wants to cure our hearts...So, why hasn't He done it?...Why do I still think and act so much like me?...Why do I still have the same hang-ups?...Why haven't I become more like Jesus?

Part of the answer is illustrated in a story about an old lady who had an old house in the early 1900's, and decided to have it wired with electricity. Several weeks after the installation, a meter reader came to her door and asked her if her electricity was working because her meter reading had barely changed...He asked, "are you using your power?"...She told him, "Certainly. Every evening when the sun goes down, I turn on my lights just long enough to light my candles; then I turn the lights off." ... We have all this power at our disposal: **the power of prayer** - too many of

us pray only when we need something...We should be conversing with God, with Jesus, every chance we get. ...**the power of the Holy Spirit** – all those gifts of the Holy Spirit we received at our Confirmation.: wisdom, understanding, right judgement, courage – gifts that for many of us are on the shelf gathering dust...& **the power of the Eucharist** – the real Jesus coming to us...entering us...becoming part of us... ready to change us from the inside out. ...God has put all that power in our reach, but if we don't tap into it, we aren't gonna change! We aren't gonna change.

St. Paul tells us in 2Cor 3:18, “ As the Spirit of the Lord works within us, we become more and more like Him.”...So here is my suggestion...Let's flip on the switch, let the power flow...let it begin to change us, transform us...And keep the switch on...Don't turn it off...Give the power of prayer, the power of the HS, and the power of the Eucharist a chance to work on us. ...Don't expect instant results...Becoming like Jesus is a lifetime project...Give it a few days...a few weeks...a few months...Then let's see how different our life becomes...how different our family and friends see us...I bet they'll like the new us better than the old us...I think we will too...And let this be our daily prayer: *Thank you Jesus for taking me **As Is**, for loving me just the way I am. But, please don't give up trying to make me more like You. AMEN!*