

Making Easter Dangerous

April 9, 2021 Scott Gunn

While Peter and John were speaking to the people, the priests, the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees came to them, much annoyed because they were teaching the people and proclaiming that in Jesus there is the resurrection of the dead. —Acts 4:1-2

Surprise, surprise. Religious leaders were “much annoyed” at someone teaching the people. This is probably a constant from before the time of Jesus right up until the present.

Here, the irritation partly comes from the fact that Sadducees denied the resurrection of the dead. But I suspect the main point of contention has to do with authority. By whose authority is this teaching happening? What does this teaching do to the balance of power in the status quo?

Martin Luther got into hot water for pointing out ways that people could find salvation unmediated by the church. Others have gotten in trouble for suggesting that the church should surrender its wealth. More recently, those who insisted that the church examine its legacy of racism and sexism have found themselves at odds with powerful people.

The fundamental issue is that people in authority and power almost always want to preserve their authority and power. While we can understand this as part of our sinful human nature, it's especially distressing in the church. After all, we follow Jesus Christ, who lived among us in humility and who taught us to reject conventional markers of might and privilege.

I'm sorry to say I've been on both sides of this. At times, I've been the one who annoyed the powers-that-be. (No one has ever locked me up, but that could be because churches don't have jails these days.) At other times, I've been the person in power who was annoyed at some challenge or other.

We as a church have to do better. And it's not just our leaders. It's all of us. Too often, the church finds it easier to align ourselves with the conventional cultural wisdom, with the social powers-that-be. We'd do well find ourselves on the outskirts of society with Peter and James, the ones doing the challenging.

I know I have work to do on this front, both as a leader in the church and as a member of the body of Christ. A good question to ask ourselves is, “Does the thing we are debating liberate people? Does this free them for transformation in Jesus Christ? Do I hold this view because it is comfortable for me?”

Easter is a disruptive season, for it is in Eastertide that we celebrate God's gracious gift of liberating love for all people. Let's make Easter a bit more dangerous, shall we?