

## “The Pain and Healing of Invalidation”

Lenten Service, Feb. 24, 2010

Pastor Tim Eighmy

We live in a very cynical society. And I fear we are gradually getting more and more cynical all the time.

People don't trust authority figures anymore. We don't trust the government. We don't trust the church very much.

Many families and married couples forget about good relationship skills. Generally speaking, people are more rude and don't see any reason why we should say 'Excuse me', 'Please', or 'Thank you'. When we disagree with each other, we speak in condescending tones about the people we disagree with. And if we disagree with a position someone takes, it is not uncommon to attack their character for having the gall to disagree with us.

Cynicism has made us more paranoid, more distrusting, more judgmental, and less forgiving. You see it everywhere. I catch myself being cynical more times than I like to admit.

With cynicism, we invalidate other people's worth. We act like they have less reason to exist than we do! Often times we invalidate them by mocking them and making fun of them.

I grew up as the youngest in a large family and I was a little kid growing up among siblings who were either teenagers or young adults. So I have heard quite a bit of cynicism in my life since an early age. I learned quite early that there is a difference between someone kidding me in a friendly manner and someone teasing me at my expense.

There are times when my family made a joke about something that I did wrong in order to lighten my mood and not take myself so seriously. They wanted me to know that I am loved even with my faults.

But there were other times when someone laughed at me for something stupid that I did. And when I got upset, they laughed even more at the fact that I was hurting. And they would tell other people how stupid I was so they could look down on me as well. And if I tattled on them, they would say, “Well, it’s just a joke.”

I remember something that the comedian Ellen DeGeneres said after she came out of the closet and people made fun of her. She said, ‘If the person you are joking about isn’t laughing with you, then *it’s not funny!* And if you insist that it is still funny when the person isn’t laughing, then you are a terrible comedian.’

A joke isn’t funny just because you insist that it should be funny. And when it’s not funny, then it is just mean.

But we do that a lot.

Look at pop stars for instance. The media works so hard to build up the fame of people. Like Brittany Spears. People just couldn't get enough of her when she was a rising international superstar. Then the pressure of constantly being watched and having paparazzi constantly following to take pictures finally got the best of her. She started to act out in inappropriate ways. Then people watched her all the more and she became an international laughing stock.

Can you imagine what it's like to have complete strangers from around the world adore you for your performances, and then have complete strangers make a laughing stock out of you constantly when you just can't put your life back together no matter how hard you try?

More recently, there is Tiger Woods. He's a golf superstar known and admired throughout the world. When the fame went to his head and he started having a number of affairs, his marriage started falling apart in a very public way. He had his famous car accident which everyone had to talk about continually.

His family can't grieve privately about such a traumatic betrayal. The media and everyone who watches the media takes glee in watching a sports superstar fall from grace. We have made him into an international laughingstock.

When I listen to the average person discuss politics, I rarely hear people trying to understand what the debate is about—instead they are mad that someone doesn't stand for the right thing.

We love to bash Obama. We love to bash Bush. We love to bash Clinton. We get upset about why they can't seem to get anything done.

How much can anybody accomplish when no one even tries to trust them?

Mocking people – making fun of them – putting them down as much as possible – is what bullies do. It gives a sense of power over others.

In Nazi Germany, the Nazis loved to joke about how worthless Jews were and made many jokes at their expense. During the days of the Jim Crow Laws, white people in the South loved to joke about the 'worthless' black people, and laughed when black people thought they should be treated equal to whites.

Before the Women's Liberation Movement, men loved to laugh at how 'a little lady' wanted to be treated like a man in the work place.

Mocking people is an effective way of breaking someone's spirit and it always brings in a crowd.

In this evening's Gospel reading, we heard how the Roman soldiers mocked Jesus as they tortured him.

When that was first read, I bet most of you here were saying to yourselves, 'Isn't that awful? How can anybody do that to another human being? Why I could never do something like that.'

Really? Do you really think those Roman soldiers were so much different than you?

Most of the nations who were conquered by the Roman Empire saw the Romans as liberators who brought in an age of peace. The Romans were loved everywhere—except in two places—and one of those places was Palestine.

The Romans were famous for their system of justice. In fact, many of the things we take for granted in our system of justice in our country today was invented by the Romans. This is why the Capitol building, the Supreme Court building, the front of the White House, and many other government buildings in Washington, DC are built with Roman-Greek style architecture.

But in Palestine, the Roman soldiers who thought they were bringing peace to people, were spat upon, had people throwing rocks at them, and were hated everywhere they went. The Roman soldiers had strict orders not to strike back in any way!

When Jesus was handed over to the soldiers by Pontius Pilate to have him crucified, the one thing that Pilate ordered was for Jesus to be flogged first. The Romans had strict codes of conduct during flogging. If they were to give 30 lashes, then they would give 29. If they miscounted and gave one extra, the soldier would have been executed on the spot.

However, apart from flogging Jesus, the Roman soldiers had the freedom to do whatever else they wanted to do. All of their pent up anger and rage toward an unwelcoming Jewish people came out.

The soldiers did what any of us would do. They beat Jesus and they mocked him. ‘Oh, so he wants to be the Messiah does he?’ They made a crown out of thorns and jammed it down on his head and made him bleed.

And . . . they laughed. They found a scarlet robe and draped it over his broken body. ‘Hail, King of the Jews’. It was just a joke!

*This is how we are. This is our sin. This is what we need to have salvation from.*

*This is why Jesus died on the cross for us! So we may know God’s love all the more.*

*We are called to be a more loving people in Christ Jesus. We are called to not be so quick to judge others, to give people a chance to explain themselves, to look for reasons to forgive.*

*We can laugh at our own faults or with people about their faults. But never in order to tear other people down.*

*We are called to build one another up with honor, respect, and with good humor.*

Amen.