

Free Martyrdom – No Waiting **Luke 4.21-32**

In 1942 Clarence Jordan took his PhD in New Testament Greek back home to Georgia where, instead of preaching impressive sermons, he purchased a tract of land and established Koinonia Farms, a collective aimed at expressing Christ's teachings through common ownership and ecological stewardship. Oh, and racial equality.

When the Civil Rights Movement exploded, Jordan took a pass on the demonstrations, marches, and sit-ins. Not to worry: his white neighbors suddenly decided that Koinonia was a threat, and probably a communist plot. Bombs and economic boycotts ensued.

The story goes that Jordan went to another church to speak, and the pastor gave him a guided tour of the congregation's new facility. Gesturing to a towering gold cross that topped a soaring steeple, the preacher boasted, "That cross alone cost us ten thousand dollars!"

"You got cheated," Jordan rejoined. "Time was when Christians could get them for free."

When Jesus turns up in his hometown fresh from a preaching tour that had earned him an honorary rabbinate, everyone expected learned lectures spiced with juicy miracles. Instead, Jesus preached a sermon about how God loves Gentiles, sometimes in preference for the people of Israel. The upshot was a one-way ticket to the local Lover's Leap, which Jesus narrowly avoided cashing in.

The irony here is that the very last time we saw the Lord he was in the desert hanging with the Devil, who tried to convince him to do something very similar of his own accord. "Throw yourself down from here," says the Tempter after taking Jesus to the center of religious exhibition.

Jesus declines, of course, citing Scripture about not putting God to the test. But I wonder if there isn't something else going on here, a subtext in which Jesus implies, "Thanks all the same, old fellow, but it isn't necessary. I intend to cross the Jordan and preach the gospel, and people will simply queue up to toss me off pinnacles."

In the end, as we know, Jesus gets his cross for free, not so very far from the same tower where the Tempter baited him to jump.

"Build a better mousetrap," Ralph Waldo Emerson supposedly said, "and the world will beat a path to your door." But dare to live out the gospel, and the world will beat you – at its own expense.

Free Crosses!

Doug