

Easter 6, May 1 2016. Acts 16:9-15, Revelation 21:10, 22-22:5, John 14:23-29  
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Judas! According to St. John he was the acme betrayer. The archetype of "Traitor!" Not just a well-intentioned but misguided disciple but an individual whose self-interest and deceitfulness trumped all else, violated the trust others put in him, allowed greed to control him.

John sees Judas' motives as transparent - he wanted to get as close as possible to the inner circles of power, to the dominant culture of the day. That dominant culture was Roman - he could never be "in" with that - but the closest, next-best thing, was with the Temple leadership.

Most cultures have a dominant culture.

"The dominant culture is a culture that's the most powerful, widespread, or influential within a social or political entity in which multiple cultures are present." The dominant culture establishes what language is used, what religion is adhered to, what values, rituals, and social customs represent what dominant culture calls "normal." If you're not a part of the dominant culture you can usually join - you do so by adopting what dominant culture says is normal, you worship using dominant culture's religion, you speak dominant culture's language. You know that a red light means "stop," and that you drive on the right side of the road.

Being part of a dominant culture brings with it a privileged status. You don't have to think about what to say, how to act, what's right or wrong: you know all these things almost automatically.

But if you're not a part of dominant culture then constant vigilance is required - self-policing so as not to contravene cultural norms. When you visit another country, for instance, you're not a part of dominant culture - try driving on the right in England! Or putting your hands in your pockets in Russia! Or using a phrase that, in your home country, is innocuous but which - you later discover - has a quite different meaning elsewhere.

One way of telling if you're a part of dominant culture is to look and see if there's a special day, or month when your identity is celebrated. No need for a special day if you're a part of dominant culture! So when you hear about a special day or month for a distinct category of people, it's worth pausing and asking about that group's status. For example, there's a Black History Month; there's no White History Month. We don't need one - "white" is the dominant culture (at least at the moment, anyway!). Saying you were stopped by a police officer for "Driving While White" is meaningless; but if it's for "Driving While Black"....well, being black means you're not a member of the dominant culture, and all sorts of nasty things can happen as a result.

Then there's Mother's Day - its lie with Julia Ward Howe - the author of the Battle Hymn of the Republic. Her Mothers Day Proclamation was a call to all women to stand-up for peace. But Dominant Culture has converted that radical call into a pedestal-ing of women - a route to the continued disenfranchisement women as equal members of our culture....."there, there, we've even given you a special day!" We should be extremely cautious when we see a particular group being singled out and honored in this way! If we treated women - mothers - on a par with

everyone else in our culture then a day like Mother's Day wouldn't be necessary!

That we continue to do so says to me that the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Dominant Culture in our nation is – at the moment – not only white but also male. And Straight. This dominant culture continues to maintain its dominance by controlling social institutions such as communication, educational institutions, artistic expression, law, political process, and business.

When threatened by multiculturalism – a vision of society where many different cultures are celebrated and respected equally., the dominant culture almost always seeks to suppress or marginalize those other cultures or subcultures. Sometimes it's in mostly passive ways by the reinforcing of cultural norms that favor the dominant culture – “speak English only in our schools,” for instance. But when the dominant culture is put under stress it reacts with increasingly aggressive responses, leading ultimately to violence. For example, the language of one current white male presidential candidate has consistently bordered on inciting aggressive responses, including violent ones. That those who respond in this way are mostly white and male is a marker of how much under stress male, white culture feels.

Allowing a group to act in ways like this is counter to our faith as followers of Jesus. Hebrew Scripture judges the integrity of Jewish culture based on how it treats members of sub-dominant groups: widows, orphans, strangers, foreigners. Jesus does the same. And the gospels continually offer inclusive counter-examples to dominant culture – for instance, of women who are embraced as equals into the family of faith. Paul writes to women as leaders more than to men; he mentions women leaders first; he calls women “apostles.”

Paul and Silas's encounter in today's Acts reading reinforces this. In the traditional patriarchal male-dominated households of the 1<sup>st</sup> Century it was the father/husband who was the master and lord over all members of the household, who were not only legally required submit, with felicity, to the wishes of the master, their culture demanded it of them.

Yet Lydia is the head of her household – an independent business woman, who not only acted as “kyrios” (Lord) for the household members, she also led in worship on the Sabbath (Acts 16:13-14). Paul preaches, and Lydia, in response, asks for baptism. Paul does so on the spot – no burdensome preparation here! And Lydia persuades him to accept her hospitality and visit for a while. It seems likely that Paul was blessed to hear Lydia preach the good news on the Sabbaths he was with her.

Paul, here, lives out his famous dictum from Galatians: “that there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male and female; for we are all one in Christ Jesus.” (Gal 3:27-28). Lydia joins Tabitha, and Mary Magdalene, and all the other strong women in the New Testament whom Jesus and - later - Paul, treat as equals. They're not “pedestalized” – treated like fragile porcelain subject to easy breakage – they're partners in the common endeavor of transforming the world.

Our faith calls us to reject the values of any group or culture that seeks to dominate, control, and manipulate everyone else – including women, racial and sexual minorities, members of minority faiths, even people who don't look like us. This will require intentionality by every person who is

a part of the dominant culture – mostly white or “honorary” white, mostly male. It won’t be easy.  
But our faith demands it.

