Earlier this week my cousin from Hong Kong sent me a news clip concerning a well-known minister in the Hong Kong Methodist church. This popular minister is allegedly being accused of having inappropriate physical contacts with a female staff member of a school, which he was the superintendent of. This news broke and became known worldwide thanks to the digital age we live in today. Almost everyone was caught by surprise not knowing what to believe, whether this story was true or was it a hoax.

As more and more details and information began to surface to the general public, we couldn’t believe how would anyone who had such honorable and esteemed position misbehave like that, or at least being accused of such misbehavior. Although he’s officially retired, his career, his credibility, and his reputation have undoubtedly been ruined. Only time would tell and only time would heal the hearts that are broken and lives that are ruined.

It seems that we are living in a world full of paradox. Things that seem true and legitimate to our eyes and ears, turn out not to be the case but as fabricated claims and scandalous. Conversely, falsehood and lies have been propagandized and framed as the truth through the words of some of political leaders, famous celebrities and such, as well as the media. We do not know what to believe in anymore, because often times we only hear from one side of the story. We are cautioned to reserve our judgments until we search and hear more about the facts and circumstances before we come to our conclusions.

In the gospel lesson that we read earlier, Jesus was continuing his Sermon on the Plain using series of illustrations that also seem too hard to believe or too paradoxical to carry out. Things that don’t seem to make much sense apparently but upon further considerations, there are some legitimate truths to it. Throughout his teachings, Jesus had used parables and allegories so that common grassroot folks can relate to and understand his teaching better theologically.

Furthermore, as you know there were no mass media, no Internet that allowed Jesus to share his message widespread. Everything must be transmitted by the word of mouth as it got pass down from generation to generation. That can sometimes be good or sometimes be bad. It’s good that it forces people to come together to hear it for themselves 1st hand in order to believe. It’s bad that rumors and misinterpretation could spread like wildfire. Before you know it, the message is no longer the same as the original…kind of like the “telephone” game that we often play when we were young. Just like the whole resurrection scene on Easter morning, many of Jesus’s closest disciples believed only after they had seen what was left of the empty tomb.

There’s a seeming fine line between faith and paradox. Often times we accept things because of our faith, even though they might seem paradoxical and don’t make much practical common sense. We come to accept that we are NOT God and that we cannot conceivably know the will of God in its totality. A Paradox, on the other hand, is something that seems contradictory to the truth, but upon further investigation, turns out to be true. Or conversely, things that seem to be true but turn out to be false. Have I lost anyone yet?

As Christians, we too find ourselves living in a world of paradox. We strive to uphold the values of the kingdom of God from this side of heaven while with one foot straddled in our everyday secular world. We have a bipolar complex as our secular values of the world don’t often fit well with the values of the kingdom of God. Somehow, we are called to seek God’s signs of grace and hope in places that are least expected where we find much hatred, violence and evils.

Have you heard the story the other day about a one-year old baby who was trapped inside a hot SUV in Florida. The father had accidently locked the infant inside along with his keys also. So he called someone for help around him to see if anyone could help. He came across a group of prison inmates along with their correction officers, who happened to be out doing some highway clean-up work. So the father came over and asked if they could help. With the permission of their correctional supervisor, the inmates were allowed to help open the car doors. You would think that a few might have had some “experience” opening locked car doors! At the end, they were able to get the child safely out of the vehicle. Talk about a Gospel of Paradox. Who would’ve thought that a group of prison inmates would be doing some goods for the community.

Likewise back in the story today, Jesus reminded his followers never count yourself out, in undermining God’s plan in our lives. Jesus challenged his followers and his disciples not to do what’s easy and simple, anybody can do that, but instead, he challenged them to do the exact opposite…what’s hard and seems impossible…things that don’t quite make any sense at all!!! He asked them to *Love your enemies, do good to those who hated you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. If anyone strikes you on one cheek, offer him the other also*. Who does these things? Seriously?!? It makes no common sense whatsoever to do what Jesus is asking us to do. But yet, that’s exactly the challenge for each of us to take up…a step beyond our boundaries, our comfort zones, and to break out our pattern or cycle of habits and fears. Ultimately Jesus was setting up his stage to lay down his “**Golden Rule**” for all of us to follow in verse 31, ***“Do to others as you would have them do to you.”***

This is the heart of Jesus’s message not only for his followers back then, but for us as well today. Notice the word “**others**” here is a universal and inclusive term. It doesn’t simply imply those who agree with your views and perspectives, or those whom you need a favor of or those who befriend you. The “others” include those who are considered your enemies, those who irritated you, hurt your feelings, or betrayed you in the past. Jesus was saying, we need to “love them just as much as I have loved you.”

I want you to think of the person (or persons) whom you least want to talk to right now, or someone whom you despise the most or have hurt your feeling recently….do you all have someone in your mind? Jesus is asking us to love them, forgive them, and to work things out with them, unconditionally and whole heartedly!!!

**THIS is the kind of radical love that Christ has demonstrated to us, as we live out the Gospel of Paradox that Jesus is calling us to pursue and proclaim in this world.** Our reward may not be seen in the present world but Jesus promised us that our efforts shall not be in vain. We shall be rewarded greatly in the kingdom that is to come. Have faith that the kingdom of God will blossom, even if our faith is as small as a mustard seed!

In our Old Testament reading earlier, we also came upon another gospel of paradox when Joseph came face-to-face with his older brothers who once plotted to kill him, but eventually settled with just selling him off to Egypt. They hated their younger brother to the point of killing him because Joseph was their father’s favorite. After being sold into Egypt, Joseph interpreted Pharoah’s dream and save Egypt from famine. Joseph became a trusted commander in Pharoah’s court.

When the famine came, Joseph’s brother came to Egypt looking to buy food to bring it home. Joseph recognized his older brothers right way. Joseph expressed that he was not here to seek his revenge but he recognized that God had other plans for him when he was being sold into Egypt in order to preserve and sustain life[[1]](#footnote-1) and with a purpose. It was a blessing in disguise, just as we talked about last week.

Joseph was in power to seek his revenge, but he chose not to. But instead Joseph showed his radical and irrational love and mercies upon those who betrayed and persecuted him. Joseph forgave his brothers and sealed it with his kiss to ALL. He embraced them and wept alongside with them. What began as a human tragedy did end up having a happy ending after all.

In light of the current climate and culture of society in which we live, our texts this morning challenge us to see things beyond the most obvious, and to dig deeper into our gifts and potentials for the sake of the Kingdom of God. We can do that by entrusting the Holy Spirit to work within us and around us. And remember, ultimately it is NOT up to us to create or to destroy, to sustain or to abandon. We believe in a sovereign and a providential God who works together for good to those who love God, and to those who are called according to God’s purpose.[[2]](#footnote-2)

We are called to be obedient to God’s gospel of paradox, with his radical hope in this world. God has yet abandoned God’s creation or his people. Ultimately God will achieve what God wills according to God’s timing and purpose.

As God’s disciples of faith, we are called stand firm with our own integrity and beliefs, for the sake of the preservation of the truth! God has called upon us to lead this radically transformed life…something that is out of the ordinaries or the predictable. **By lending, by loving, by giving, by forgiving, by showing mercy towards others, we shall enter into the very life of God.[[3]](#footnote-3)** Thanks be to God, In the name of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, Amen.

1. *Genesis 45:5* [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. *Romans 8:28* [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Darden, Robert F. *Connections, Year C, Volume 1, P. 268* [↑](#footnote-ref-3)