

Jesus

"The Invitation"

Luke 5:1-11

April 11, 2010
The Reverend Fitz Neal

Abraham & Jesus

We just finished learning from Abraham about the greatness of God. Those stories in Genesis aren't really about Abraham and Sarai – they are about how, through Abraham and Sarai, we can get to know God.

There's so much that God reveals through his covenant relationship with Abe and Sarai. This is the God who calls, who makes good on his promises, who is merciful, who is holy, who judges the earth in complete fairness, and who has a good plan to redeem the world in love.

The way God will redeem the world is for this God to send the Son, the second person of the trinity. The whole plan, beginning with Abraham, was to get the world to a point of being ready to receive the Son. The whole story from Abraham to Mary and Joseph is a story of how God keeps the line of descendants going through thick and thin, until Jesus arrives – and then God's work of salvation reaches its fulfillment in Him.

The whole point is to get the story to Jesus. For the next 7 weeks leading up to Pentecost, we're going to take an extended look at Jesus the Messiah – or the Christ.

Why? Because Jesus is unique. "Of course!" you might say. But a lot rides on what I mean by unique. Some use the word unique to describe Jesus as an important person in history. He stands out.

But when Christians say that Jesus is unique, we actually mean something other than that – we mean he is utterly different from anyone who came

before or who followed after him. We mean he is an unrepeatable person. We mean that he spoke and acted in ways that don't merely have an influence on history, but that he is the deciding person of all history. We mean that his claims about himself are claims no one else could make – or if they tried to, they would fail to prove the same claims that Jesus made about himself. We mean that, apart from Jesus, one cannot really know God.

We recite the creeds which affirm that Jesus is “God’s only Son...” But what does that mean? It’s important to reflect on the centrality of Jesus Christ to the Christian faith in an extended way.

This is most especially true in today’s world in which the uniqueness of Christ is constantly questioned and challenged. He is considered by many to be *a* way to God, but not the unique savior of *all* humankind. His teachings are respected – as long as they fit in with the prevailing values of the culture at large. But if they don’t? Well, then, he is set aside as a misrepresented ancient prophet. But that’s about it.

Furthermore, a surprising number of people believe there’s little to nothing we can actually know about Jesus, since the Gospels aren’t considered historically accurate. Are they historically accurate? And how might we determine that? And how do we know that the Bibles we carry with us to church accurately convey what the ancient versions of the Gospels said? Have the texts lost meaning through the years as they’ve been translated and translated?

And how did Jesus redeem the world? How does he rescue us now? We’ll cover all these and other questions about Jesus over the next two months. Once again, I invite you to bring your own Bible to worship so you can learn and remember what we cover – take notes in the margins, or in the front pages, of your bible, which, in many versions are designed for note-taking.

I want to challenge us not to miss a Sunday over the next 7 weeks as we take this extended look at Christ. I know that’s asking a lot - spring is upon us, there’s work in the yard to do, life is busy and sometimes Sunday’s the only day of rest – but what could be more important than learning about Christ? What could be more important than opening ourselves up to him in a new way?

Which is what this story is about in Luke – it’s a good way to begin our focus on Jesus.

Jesus - The Word of God

Here’s a list of what we see about Jesus in this story:

- This is the first personal encounter with Jesus –
 - Before it’s been about crowds and a little bit of distance. This is up close and personal with the fishermen.
 - Our purpose statement – Jesus will come close to you – let him.
- He is appealing – the crowds gather
- He brings the Word of God – he IS the Word of God, he teaches the Word, he lives the Word
- He knows all about creation – Jesus, a carpenter, knows where the fish are
- He brings something out of nothing – the catch of fish.
- He is powerful
- He is holy -

The Response to Jesus

What is the response to Jesus in this story? That’s the real point. Peter falls on his knees before him and says, “Depart from me, Lord; for I am a sinful man.”

This is curious. Just after a huge windfall in profits, you’d think that Peter would say the opposite –

“Would you like to become a partner in our fishing business?”

Or, “Are there any other parts of the lake you could find fish for us?”

Or how about this: “Wow... I must be so important to God that he would honor me with meeting all my needs...”

That last one sounds a lot like what might be the response if Jesus did something like this today. Somehow, over time, it seems that there has been a shift in the life of faith. The shift is from God being at the center of the story to putting

ourselves at the center of the story – all the time. What seems to be important is what happens to us, inside of us, in our experience, as though we’re little more than spiritual consumers, looking for the best spiritual product to buy. We are the center...

As theologian Michael Horton has put it,

“God is used as a personal resource rather than known, worshipped, and trusted; Jesus Christ is a coach with a good game plan for our victory, rather than a Savior who has already achieved it for us; salvation is more a matter of having our best life now, than being saved from God’s judgment by God himself; and the Holy Spirit is an electrical outlet we can plug into for the power we need to be all that we can be.”¹

This story lets us know -- we are not at the center of the story. God is. And God shows up in Christ to confront the world in order to save it. The Gospel, as I mentioned last week, is profoundly thoroughly *disruptive* to our lives. A life-changing relationship with Jesus will challenge us at every level of our existence. And that is because God, in Christ, by the power of the Spirit, is present to redeem.

Peter shows this:

First, Peter says “Depart from me...” His experience in the catch of fish has undone him. He knows he is NOT worthy even to be in the presence of such greatness.

I hope that in our worship, and in our focus on Jesus, we gain a clearer sense than we’ve ever had before of his greatness, of his glory, of his power.

Second, Peter calls him, “Lord.” Though he didn’t know all that that meant at the time, Peter was calling Jesus by his rightful title, he was bowing before him and acknowledging him as God in the flesh.

I hope and pray, that we will call Jesus Lord, and be humble before him, knowing and living out the truth that he knows all things, is the creator of all

¹ Michael Horton, *Christless Christianity: The Alternative Gospel of the American Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2008) p. 19.

things, that we answer to him in all things as the mighty One to whom, one day every knee shall bow.

Third, Peter says, “I am a sinful man...” All belief in Christ, all discipleship, life itself ... begins with this kind of statement of faith—that we are in desperate need of what we do not have in ourselves, and that is righteousness.

We are sinners, in need of a savior. Is there any more peaceful, truthful thing to admit than this? God does not need me, I need God. Jesus the Messiah, the Christ, does not enter the world and bear the sin of the world so that MY story can be made complete, but so that HIS story can reach fulfillment. My life is only gained, when it is given over to HIM.

The Invitation

There is an invitation before us in this story – It’s as though we stand, once again, on a shoreline and there is an empty boat in the water. Jesus walks up to you and says, “Let’s get in the boat. Now, pull out to the deep water...”

What follows is where life is found – in Him, the Lord. The invitation is to follow him, to give our lives to him, to know him, to bow before him as God, to know the Father through him, to receive the Spirit in his name.

There is no other way, there is no other God, there is no other savior.

Peter, James, and John had the same invitation one day – and they received it. Their lives were never the same. They never went back to that boat; they never went back to their previous lives the same way. They eventually left their homes and traveled across the wide world with the same invitation to follow the Lord who had walked into their lives one fateful day...

He stands before you this morning...inviting you to let him into the boat that is your life...

Years ago, now, a lay-leader in another church came and wanted to take me to lunch. She had a question, she said, that was important. As we ate lunch, she said, “Why do you talk about *Jesus* all the time in Church? – in worship?”

I explained to her that Jesus is the second person of the triune God, that he is the way we know who God is, and that in him, we live if we live at all. She replied, “Well, God I don’t have a problem with, but all this *Jesus* talk makes me nervous. It’s offensive.”

I understand how this can be, I really do. When Christ shows up, really shows up, it’s alarming.

Here’s what I said in response, “I want you to know that we are going to talk about Jesus Christ every Sunday. Our goal is to know him and to make him known. I understand your struggle and want to help, but I also want to be honest about this.”

She left the church. We remained friends. But what she clearly wanted was a manageable spirituality, not a life-transforming faith.

Today, we, and the whole world are like the crowds, pressing upon Jesus in order to hear the Word of God. We can only hear it; we can only behold it by hearing the words of Christ, and by following him.

The invitation is in front of you this day.... Will you follow?