

“Who Is Jesus?”

The Rev. Drew Willard
UCC at The Villages, FL
March 11th, 2012

Exodus 3:1-15

Mark 8:27-9:1

‘Moses answered,

“I will tell the people of Israel that the God their ancestors worshiped
has sent me to them.

But what should I say, if they ask me your name?” ’

Exodus 3:13

Let us pray... O God,

Help us to know you better and may we be able to share who you are with others.

May they be able to meet your Son, Jesus Christ, through us –
not as someone to be feared, but as a beloved companion.

Amen

Who is Jesus Christ?

Sometimes we have a better idea of who he is not...

Once upon a time, a man was traveling on a business trip and
found he had some time to get in some golfing.

He joined two others at their tee-time to make it a three-some.

They were all doing quite well until they came to the notorious 13th hole
of that particular championship course –

and all three of them landed in the water trap.

Little did this fellow realize, but he was playing with Moses and Jesus.

So, he took his penalty and put his ball onto the green

As he walked up toward the hole – Moses raised his wedge over his head,
parted the waters, walked over on dry ground,

and chipped his golf ball onto the green.

And the waters closed back up.

While both the businessman and Moses were watching,

Jesus walked out on the water, reached down and picked up his ball,
dropped it and hit it right into the hole for an eagle.

And the businessman said, ‘Wow! Did you see that? Who’s that guy think he is?’

Then Moses said, ‘He thinks he’s Rory McIlroy!’

Well, maybe not...

So, who is Jesus Christ to you?

What questions arise when you try to answer that question for yourself?

Are we supposed to pray to him instead of God?

What about all those miracles – did he do them?

And what sense does it make that Jesus – as the Son of God,

should have been treated so cruelly and be put to death on a cross?

Willard, p.2

I remember when I made the decision to follow Christ as my vocation,
that immediately questions arose and the first one was:

Who is Jesus Christ?

Seems like a rhetorical question a Christian should already know,
but it is an important one for Christians to ask of themselves
to find one's own answer.

And this should come to someone after much study and self examination
and not simply be a memorized 'approved solution'
provided by the Church or Discovery Channel or anyone else.

As Christians of the United Church of Christ,
we can benefit from the 'progressive' scholarship that is 'emerging'.
Our Bible study – which began last Monday, will use a book that seeks
to provide a new orientation for Christians to read the Bible.
It does not mean throwing the Bible out as a collection of fairytales,
but using discernment to find out why it was written a certain way
and why certain stories or details of those stories were included.

Those who are attending this class for the most part are used to the idea
of asking such questions since they attended the previous classes
of the curriculum called 'Living the Questions.'

Rather than a collapse of Christian religious tradition as we know it,
these kind of questions are helping to revitalize our faith
in ways that are desperately needed for the times we live in.

By asking questions, we must also interpret the possible answers
and so, we find that God's Word is flexible and adaptable.

Otherwise, we allow others to define Christianity
as a rigid structure for the sake of moral purity
that neglects a compassionate diversity.

We had a diverse crowd here in attendance last Tuesday night when we hosted
the screening of the film "Little Town of Bethlehem" which featured three men,
a Muslim and a Christian – both Palestinians, and a Jewish Israeli.

Imam Abdurrahman Sykes and Rebbetzin Carol Grae and I served as panelists
for the discussion afterwards.

It was an excellent event and my hope is that it will lead to more such activities
and be productive in building religious and ethnic tolerance.

I have had some conversations recently with conservative Christians
who cannot accept anything short of Christ as the only "Way, Truth, and Life"
that lead to God.

As a Christian minister, I am challenged to reflect on how faithful
I must be to the tradition in presenting it to others.

Willard, p.3

As Christians, we have the mandate found at the end of the Gospel of Matthew to go out and baptize the world in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. So, does that mean not only leading the unchurched to Christ, but also, to actively convert those of other faiths, to Christianity as well?

My belief on this matter is that I should present Christ in such a way that Muslim and Jewish people would welcome Jesus Christ as they would welcome me as their friend.

That is not to presume that they would become part of the Christian "Church" any more than you would become a member of someone else's family just by becoming their friend.

But aren't 'friends' the family we choose, and wouldn't it seem reasonable that the Christ we encounter in the scripture would find them acceptable, too.

That brings us back to who is this Christ?

In his book, Christ Through The Centuries,

Jaroslav Pelikan presents the theme that in every era of the Church's history, certain aspects of Jesus' life have been emphasized so as to portray him meeting the challenges and hopes of that time.

Listen to how Jesus Christ's image has evolved 'through the centuries'...

The Good, The True, and The Beautiful; The Rabbi; The Turning Point of History;

The Light of The Gentiles; The King of Kings; The Cosmic Christ;

The Son of Man; The True Image; Christ Crucified;

The Monk Who Rules the World; The Bridegroom of the Soul;

The Divine and Human Model; The Universal Man;

The Mirror of the Eternal; The Prince of Peace;

The Teacher of Common Sense; The Poet of the Spirit; The Liberator;

The Man Who Belongs to the World...

So, who is Jesus Christ to you?

What questions arise when you try to answer that question for yourself?

Are we supposed to pray to him instead of God?

You can.

What about all those miracles – did he do them?

Who knows, but look at what he was said to have done – he healed and fed people, and drove out evil spirits.

And what sense does it make that Jesus – as the Son of God, should have been treated so cruelly and be put to death on a cross?

That is a question we can continue to explore through Lent.

So, who is Jesus Christ?

Willard, p.4

Dr. Karl Barth, a renowned Protestant theologian, was once asked to summarize the thesis of his comprehensive writings –

and his answer might just as well be an answer for who Jesus is.

Dr. Barth thought for a moment and then said,

"Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so."

Jesus loves me! This I know, For the Bible tells me so;

Little ones to Him belong, They are weak but He is strong.

Yes, Jesus loves me! Yes, Jesus loves me! Yes, Jesus loves me!

The Bible tells me so...

Amen

*Our scripture lesson today comes from the Hebrew Bible is Exodus 3:1-15
and tells about how God was revealed to Moses.*

¹One day, Moses was taking care of the sheep and goats
of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian,
and Moses decided to lead them
across the desert to Sinai, ^[a] the holy mountain.

²There an angel of the LORD appeared to him from a burning bush.
Moses saw that the bush was on fire, but it was not burning up. ³"
This is strange!" he said to himself.

" I'll go over and see why the bush isn't burning up."

⁴When the LORD saw Moses coming near the bush,
he called him by name, and Moses answered,
"Here I am."

⁵God replied,

"Don't come any closer. Take off your sandals—
the ground where you are standing is holy.

⁶I am the God who was worshiped by your ancestors
Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob."

Moses was afraid to look at God, and so he hid his face.

⁷The LORD said:

I have seen how my people are suffering as slaves in Egypt,
and I have heard them beg for my help
because of the way they are being mistreated.

I feel sorry for them, ⁸and I have come down to rescue them
from the Egyptians.

I will bring my people out of Egypt into a country
where there is good land, rich with milk and honey.

I will give them the land where the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites,
Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites now live.

⁹My people have begged for my help,
and I have seen how cruel the Egyptians are to them.

¹⁰Now go to the king!

I am sending you to lead my people out of his country.

¹¹But Moses said,

"Who am I to go to the king and lead your people out of Egypt?"

¹²God replied,

"I will be with you. And you will know that I am the one who sent you,
when you worship me on this mountain
after you have led my people out of Egypt."

¹³Moses answered,

"I will tell the people of Israel that the God their ancestors worshiped
has sent me to them.

But what should I say, if they ask me your name?"

¹⁴⁻¹⁵God said to Moses:

I am the eternal God.

So tell them that the LORD, whose name is " I Am," has sent you.

This is my name forever,

and it is the name that people must use from now on.

Bless the reading and the hearing of God's holy Word...

Mark 8:27-9:1

[27] And Jesus went on with his disciples, to the villages of Caesare'a Philip'pi;
and on the way he asked his disciples, "Who do men say that I am?"

[28] And they told him,

"John the Baptist; and others say, Eli'jah; and others one of the prophets."

[29] And he asked them,

"But who do you say that I am?"

Peter answered him,

"You are the Christ."

[30] And he charged them to tell no one about him.

[31] And he began to teach them that the Son of man must suffer many things,
and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes,
and be killed, and after three days rise again.

[32] And he said this plainly. And Peter took him, and began to rebuke him.

[33] But turning and seeing his disciples, he rebuked Peter, and said,

"Get behind me, Satan! For you are not on the side of God, but of men."

[34] And he called to him the multitude with his disciples, and said to them,

"If any man would come after me, let him deny himself
and take up his cross and follow me.

[35] For whoever would save his life will lose it;

and whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it.

[36] For what does it profit a man,

to gain the whole world and forfeit his life?

[37] For what can a man give in return for his life?

[38] For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words

in this adulterous and sinful generation,

of him will the Son of man also be ashamed,

when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels."

9[1] And he said to them,

"Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here

who will not taste death before they see that the kingdom of God

has come with power."