

Sunday, September 16, 2018

Proverbs 1:20-33

James 3:1-12

Mark8:27-38

### Who is Jesus to You?

In this Season of creation we are being challenged to consider Matthew 6:25-33 and particularly our focus of why we worry about life and those matters which seem somewhat trivial in nature yet are not. Did you stop and think about what you were going to wear this morning? We all do it- will it be hot or cold, is it ok to wear white after Labour Day- even though it is really warm? For some people this is a difficult decision every day- but as we read in this passage, there is more to this in life. However, our retail markets do try to tell us otherwise. What is the latest fashions? What is acceptable to wear today and is it in style or is it retro styles of the past. Why do we worry about this? Because we often worry about what other people think as they look at us—wearing styles of long ago, or even colours that are just not so good. We worry about other people's opinions and just only want to be accepted for being ourselves. Yet we also know that there are many people who often put function before fashion and cannot afford to wear the 'latest' in fashions. So what are we to do? We are to cherish our bodies as the indwelling place of God's Spirit and to respect it with clothing that is appropriate, functional and even classic in nature. What Jesus is saying is simply don't worry, life is more than the basic necessities, but when you need not worry about these either. Trust in Him, to provide you with what is needed and more. Have faith in him and believe for if we look to Jesus, he will help under every circumstance.

Do you have faith in Jesus? Do you believe in Jesus? Just who is Jesus to you? This is a simple question yet it asks us to think deeply and to answer with accumulated knowledge, that is, with wisdom. In whom do you have faith? We read in Proverbs 1, that wisdom is personified as a person in the street crying out to those who she deems as sinful and calls them to listen. But this vice of wisdom has been rejected because many have turned away and do not want to listen. Yet when calamity, destruction, or disaster strikes, people do not know what to do. And if they are wayward or unsure of who they are what they value, these situations might lead to death or they will be destroyed by complacency. They are uncertain about their faith and so walk a different way, away from God.

Yet those who are wise, are willing to learn, listen to the Spirit have faith and believe; they trust and are not deceived by others because they follow Jesus. God's Spirit has touched

their hearts and they are willing to tell their story and how Jesus has made a difference in their lives.

In Mark 8, Jesus went to different villages in Caesarea Philippi and as they walked Jesus asked them, "So, what's the word on the street? 'Who do people think I am?'" The people did not have any Super Heroes to look to compare Jesus to; There was no Superman, Batman, Iron Man or even Wonder Woman or the Flash. So they answered, using the super heroes of their time and their history- some say John the Baptist,, others say Elijah- descended from heaven and still others say one of the prophets of old come to life because you are so wise.

But then Jesus stops walking, looks into the eyes of the disciples and asks, a simple question and is hopeful that they know who he is and his purpose on earth. Who do you say I am?" Peter answered without hesitation, "You are the Christ, the Messiah- the Anointed One, You are the Christ."

Is Jesus Messiah? What does this mean? Jesus did not fit the expectations of a Messiah. They were to have power, take charge, set things right, free the Jews from oppression. Yet he refused to do this or take up arms against the powerful.

Is he Saviour? Yes but what is he saving us from and to do? Some people clearly had no interest in being saved. When Jesus said the poor are precious and the rich are going to have troubles, only the poor understood. Is he teacher, yes, but is that all? Who do you say he is? Messiah, Savior, Lord, shaman, teacher, friend, prophet, prince of peace?

To state that Jesus is sometimes downright incomprehensible or enigmatic, ambiguous is also correct because from the beginning, who Jesus was, what he was about, was far from self-evident. There were people who stood face-to-face with Jesus and said, "This is God incarnate." There appear to be many more who said, "This man is nuts." Although I think that for most of us, the biggest issue is not that we have listened to the stories of Jesus and found him incomprehensible; it's that we've listened to him and found him difficult. How could God's Son come to earth to live and die for other people? How brilliant was he as a storyteller that even 2000 years later we are still telling his stories with questionable wisdom. How charismatic was Jesus that people followed him and committed to his teachings, yet when he was to die they denied him? Who do you say that Jesus is?

Jesus and the disciples continue to walk and as they continue to walk, Jesus continues to speak. He then tells them that he will suffer and die at the hands of the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law. He tells them that he will die, be buried and rise again. Jesus spoke clearly and precisely. The disciples upon hearing this, became angry and rebuked him. Don't talk like that- you are the Christ, the Messiah how can this be? But Jesus turned to Peter and

told him, you are not thinking of the things of God but of men, Satan is before you. Listen to what I am saying. You said I am the Christ, this is what I must do.”

Then Jesus explains what it means to truly be his followers his disciples, his faithful people.

And yes, it does take some effort on your part. After all, Jesus gave his life, you need to give him yours.

True disciples are to

1) lay something down; “deny themselves” that is to follow the example of Jesus incoming to this world. We are to live our lives as one alive to God, dead to sin and to the world.

2) we are to pick something up “take up his cross”. It is not just bearing the difficulties and pains of life—these are problems of life, but we are to believe and live out our everyday lives. We are to let our old selves go so we might follow Jesus wherever He leads. It means carrying all those things of life and leaving them with Jesus who was on the cross for our sake. We are to leave these with Him. The disciples knew what taking up the cross meant- they had watched many people march to their death at the hands of Roman soldiers carrying their cross knowing they would die and that they had no hope. But in faith, we believe that because we are Christ’s followers the cost is temporary, and the rewards are eternal.

3) we are called to Follow Him and live out our lives in faithful witness.

Jesus did not die to make this life easy or prosperous for us. He died to remove every obstacle so that we might live in everlasting joy. He calls us to follow him in his sufferings because this life of joyful suffering shows that he is more valuable than all earthly rewards that the world seems to say we need to worry about. IF we profess our faith in the Messiah, the saviour, we suffer with Jesus in the pathway of love. Because Jesus is our focus in this life, we need not search for other treasures, for we know that we will pass away from this earth only to live in glory with him. This is why Jesus demands that we deny ourselves and take up our cross and follow him.

If you wonder if you are ready to take up your cross, consider these questions:

- Are you willing to follow Jesus if it means losing some of your closest friends? your family?
- Are you willing to follow Jesus if it means the loss of your reputation? your job? your life?

In some places of the world, these consequences are reality. But the question asked is “Are you willing?” Just because you follow Jesus, doesn’t necessarily mean all these things will happen

to you, but are you willing to follow Him? If there comes a point in your life where you are faced with a choice—Jesus or the comforts of this life, which will you choose?

Commitment to Christ means taking up your cross daily, giving up your hopes, dreams, possessions, even your very life if need be for the cause of Christ. Only if you willingly take up your cross may you be called His disciple. This is the cost of discipleship. And the reward is worth the price. Jesus followed His call of death to self “For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it”

As followers of Jesus we hold on to the symbol of the cross: whether empty because the tomb is empty or with Jesus body on it as a crucifix, because the cross is a symbol of hope. It is both a symbol of suffering and defeat but also of triumph and salvation. It is a universal Christian symbol which is acknowledged by all denominations as the single visual identifier of faith. While Good Friday marks the Passion of Christ and his crucifixion, Christians also reflect on the cross as a symbol of salvation.

Today crosses come in all different forms, media and design. They still hold the faith of Christians around the world because Jesus died in agony on the cross but rose to new life and thus giving hope to all. After the Emperor Constantine converted to Christianity in the 4th Century, crucifixion was abolished as a punishment, and the cross was promoted as a symbol of the Son of God and the hope that he brings to all believers. As faithful followers of Jesus we are to take up our own crosses and live for him. This is a question of faith and a willingness to commit to Jesus as Saviour. Who is Jesus to you?

A Place of Peace and Power. The power of the cross is shown in this video which is the Hill of Crosses a pilgrimage site about 12 km north of Siaulia, Lithuania. People began placing the crosses on this hill in defiance of an atheist government after an 1831 uprising. The government responded by getting rid of these crosses and of course the faithful people returned more crosses to the sight. This kept repeating until 1990 when Lithuanian independence was restored and over 14 000 large crosses and 41000 small crosses were counted, covering an area of 4602 square meters. There is well over 300,000 crosses on this sign and are brought as a symbol of peace, for prayer, for devotion to Jesus and as a way of expressing “taking up one’s cross” as Jesus asked. The sound you hear is the wind lifting up some of the crosses- like wind chimes as this is a place of peace and power in Jesus Christ. Let us watch and enable Christ to move you. Let us see how we are called to Take Up our Cross and follow. Amen.