

Getting to Know Jesus, the Christ

Aug 10, 2014

More on the Saviour

**Ps 85:8-13 and John 3:16-17
(759, 324, 399, 371)**

Jill and I are Downton Abbey fans.
It's a period drama on PBS, usually on Sunday evenings,
Dealing with the dramatic changes that took place
within the English aristocracy in the first 3 decades of the twentieth century.
The 5th season starts on Jan 4, 2015, 148 days from now,
but then who's counting.

They have already started showing promotional programs on the new season –
a review of the past 4 and hints at what might happen in the 5th.
Last night, actress Susan Sarandon hosted such a show.
It was a good review of the interwoven stories thus far.
At one point in the commentary, Ms Sarandon said,
“Love drives all relationships.”

It was a simple thought.
Yet it captured much of what lies at the heart
of the complex plots that fill the series
and I strongly suspect accounts for much of its world-wide popularity.
We all love a good love story,
especially when it captures some of the complexities First, it enabled people to
celebrate with joy in the midst of disaster and fear. of our own.

And our text this morning points to the heart
of what I think is the world's greatest love story –
God's love for the creation and its creatures,
especially for us human beings,
and all the possibilities that arise from that miraculous reality.

This is what God is doing in the flesh in Jesus, the Christ.
He is saving us so we can be blessings to the whole creation.
I know I keep saying that week after week.
At times, I worry about being too repetitive on this theme.

But it is the core of the Christian faith.
It is the good news that God approaches us with every moment of our lives.
It is what we gather to celebrate together every week.
Witnessing to this reality is the primary purpose
of this 'festival of friends' that is the church.

I just ran across that phrase – 'festival of friends' – in the last month or so.

It's from a song by Bruce Cockburn.
It was sung at the funeral of a friend, Chris Lind,
Who at the time of his death was the director of Sorrento,
the Anglican retreat and conference centre in the Okanagan.
We knew each other from student days back in Toronto.
He was only 61 when he died from brain cancer.

Throughout the 6 months between diagnosis and death,
Chris invited people to reflect with him
on the various meanings Christians find in idea of salvation.
He convened 'a festival of friends' to help him die in grace.
Three themes emerged for me in following this conversation.
Interestingly enough, much of it was on Facebook.

First, it created a broad community with whom one can face honestly
the most daunting realities of life.

Second, it brought to the fore an amazing strength and confidence
grounded in the acceptance of God's loving presence, no matter what was happening.

Third, it enabled people to celebrate with joy in the midst of disaster and fear.

Like the Scriptures, that conversation was a rich tapestry
of various views all trying to capture in words
something that cannot be confined to mere words –
the saving reality of the love of God.

But that variety is key to the power of this message
that God loves us so much

that he went to unimaginable lengths to save us.

God's loves embraces each of us in the unique ways
we need to be embraced in order to be saved.

God know us so well and so compassionately
that he discovers and heals the unique wounds
that prevent us from living the flourishing life of blessing
he created us to live with and for him.

The Greek word John uses here in vs 17 for 'saved' is *sozo*.

Jesus is the *soter* or Saviour.

God takes the initiative by revealing his relationship with us
to help and free us for the full life he intends.

The Hebrew word is *ys*.
It has an interesting connotation – being roomy,
providing space, delivering people from confinement and bondage,
rescue by divine intervention in order to flourish.

There is an important point to be made here
that relates to the nature of God
and just how God works in our lives.
To the human mind working on its own,
none of this makes sense.
That's why Paul admitted that all of this salvation in Jesus Christ stuff
was foolishness to the Greeks and their philosophical traditions.
To the degree that our modern Western culture relies on that kind of thinking,
what God does for our salvation will be foolish to it.

To other human minds, working with a particular view of God's nature,
how God works with us and for us in Jesus, the Christ, is a scandal.
The traditions that dominated the Judaism of Jesus' and Paul's day
demanded signs of purity and power.
There are traditions within Christianity today that demand compliance
to rigid codes of conduct and belief
and that treat the gifts of grace in our lives as rewards for strict obedience.
Salvation as a free gift of grace from God
is a scandal to such thinking.

Yet this free gift of salvation is what our text witnesses to this morning,
just as it witnessed to it in the days when it was first written and read.
It is the initiative of God's love for the whole world
that led him to take flesh in Jesus and reveal what humans were created to be.
That saving revelation delivered and freed us
from the fears that distort and destroy love.
This is not a God who condemns.
This is a God who saves,
who frees us to flourish in his grace for the world's well-being.

Next week we are going to begin a deeper exploration
of what it means to be saved in this way.
In order to do that, we'll dig into the meaning of being holy.
Is it about achieving purity or about loving God freely with our whole beings?
We'll focus on what God saved us **for**.
I hope you can come again to be part of this festival of the friends of Jesus.
We are and will always be enriched by your presence.