

Getting to Know Jesus, the Christ

April 27, 2014

What Kind of Christ is this Jesus?

**Ps 16 and Matthew 28:18-20
(250, 247, 256, 260)**

Last week we celebrated something very strange.

The transforming energy of God's love
raised a human being, Jesus of Nazareth, from the dead.

He had been executed for treason three days before.

Hunted and arrested by the religious authorities of his day,
condemned, at their insistence, by the political authorities of his day,
critical throughout his public life and ministry
of the abuses of religious and political power,
he was not the 'type' one might have expected
to receive this unique favour from God.

One of his leading interpreters immediately following his resurrection
acknowledge that this event was foolishness to the Greek way of seeing the world
and a scandal to the Jewish way of seeing the world.

How could such a person be the Christ,
the anointed One sent by God to be Lord and Saviour?

Let's take a minute to understand what the word 'Christ'
meant for those first followers of Jesus.

Remember, they were Jews living in a Greek culture
ruled over by Roman conquerors.

It was a complex context.

The roots of 'Christ' are Greek.

It literally means 'the anointed one.'

It was used frequently within Judaism to refer to the anointing of a king
as the one chosen by God to rule.

It also had strong overtones of the healing and well-being
that comes from an intimate and consensual relationship with God.

The act of anointing is not common among the prophets,
that tradition in Judaism with which Jesus most strongly identified,
except in Isaiah, the prophet with whom Jesus identified most.

There, the anointing was to a task and implied the gift of the Holy Spirit.

So, out of that rich mix of meanings,
we can summarize the kind of Christ Jesus is this way:

*Jesus, as the Christ, has been anointed/chosen by God
and endowed with the energy of God's Spirit
to undertake the task of ruling the world
so healing and well-being will be enjoyed
by the whole of creation.*

Every effort to stop and eliminate this Christ failed.
Death was and is not the final word.
This divine energy is the most real thing in the world.
It's primary form is love.
It is the way of being that humans were created to enjoy.
It is the ultimate satisfaction for all of our longings.
We remain restless in our lives
until we find our peace/well-being in this Christ.

So, that is the kind of Christ we worship and witness to.
We believe, strange as it may seem to the intellect alone,
that God took flesh in this Jesus
to love the world into flourishing as originally intended.
We have experienced the sense this act of God
makes to our emotions and instincts,
where faith truly begins.
And we are heirs of two thousand years of witness
to how the intellect can make sense and meaning
of this Christ who is God incarnate, full of grace and truth.

In the passage we read from Matthew this morning,
Jesus claims yet again this authority that has been given to him.
It is the authority of God the Father,
given to the Son,
and made real by the Holy Spirit.
That's one way of making sense of this strange dynamic.
It does force you to change your way of thinking.
It does transform the ways you manage your energy.
It does teach you a new way of being,
one in which you die to a more fearful form of being
and rise to the courage that emerges
when you realize you are loved by God.
It is in the light of that way of seeing things
that Jesus commissions his disciples
(literally, those who have learned from God)
to go into the world teaching the message of Jesus
and baptizing people into the Body of Christ,
where they will enjoy the eternal life that he offers.

This is a Christ who invites us to join him
in the task for which he was anointed.
He makes us his partners in bringing about a loving world.
That is how the world is truly blessed – by becoming more loving.
We are called and equipped to model this way of using our energy.
We inspire a shared vision of what a loving world offers.
We challenge all those uses of energy that frustrate love.
We enable others to join us in this task.
We encourage the hearts of Christ's community of disciples
as we nourish souls to flourish in the grace of Jesus Christ.

There is a thread of thought that runs through this passage
that is often missed.
We discussed it a bit last week and I want to pick up on it again.
I was reminded of its importance on Wednesday night
at Jazz Evensong when Chen Zhao Fen came again.
He called this congregation his 'God family.'
He said it with joy and appreciation.
He is an engineer who has taught accounting and management in China.
He has children here in Canada and in New Zealand –
just around the corner here in Burnaby, in Scarborough, and in Auckland.
What he found here at Brentwood was a welcoming community
that gathered around and followed the same God
that he gathered around and followed in China,
half a world away.
Here he is in a strange land, where many people talk a strange language,
and he feels part of this community the moment he walks through the door.

Jesus is the kind of Christ who restores loving community
in a world too often marked and marred
by dissension, exclusion, violence, and abandonment.

Those distortions of our God-given energy
are all too common in every dimension of our lives.
Jesus invites us, commissions us,
to live and teach and invite people into a different way of being.
It's a way of being that begins and ends with community –
community with God, with others, and with our beloved selves.

Let's hope that Easter's transforming energy will strengthen this loving community,
this lively expression of 'God family.'
And let's work together to make that happen ever more faithfully.