

Getting to Know Jesus, the Christ

Aug 17, 2014

What It Means to be Saved – Be Holy

Psalm 133 & 1 Peter 1:13&15
(426, 428, 638, 389)

Christians have gotten a bad name for being 'holy.'
Perhaps not all of us, but a goodly number.
For many in our contemporary Western culture,
this idea of being holy
has to do with an arrogant attitude of being better than others,
being set apart by holding to a stricter moral code.
We reject those who are not as 'good' as we are.
We look down on them and dismiss them.
We don't want our kids hanging around with them
and getting drawn into their circle of 'bad influence.'
And that moral code, whatever particular form it takes,
is often identified as what Christianity really is.

In his comments on this passage in *The Life with God Bible*,
Timothy Brown of Western Theological Seminary captures some of this,
then suggests another approach to the idea of being holy:

*Too often in the media "holy" people have been portrayed
as stiff, sexually repressed, boring, lifeless,
self-righteous, judgmental, and deeply hypocritical.
Yet to be holy is to be transformed into Christ's image.
If so, holiness incarnated would look like Christ.
What is particularly striking about Jesus
is that sinful people flocked to him,
While self-righteous folk tended to avoid an encounter.
Peter himself had experienced firsthand
Christ's penetrating, loving holiness,
and even after his greatest mistakes he couldn't keep away from Jesus.
Peter knew Jesus loved him and would know what to do with his moral failures.
To be holy in our conduct, then, is embody Christ's love
in whatever situation we find ourselves.*

In the Peter's letter, he sums it up like this
with a quote from Leviticus 11:44:
"You shall be holy, for I am holy."

Christians believe that in Jesus, the Christ,
God came to help us see afresh
what he had created humanity to be and do.
That's why we have been taking such a close look at Jesus this year.
What can we see in his attitudes and behaviours
that reveals for us what it means to be holy in our lives?

As I reviewed our reflections over the past 8 months,
one thread of thought that runs through them
is the idea of being whole human beings.

To be whole is to flourish.
To be whole is to be aligned fully with God's intent for us.
To be whole is to integrate the insights of instinct, emotion, and intellect
into a wisdom that guides us moment by moment.
To be whole, for Christians, is to live,
as Paul put it so powerfully, "in Christ."

Stop and think about that image for a minute.

Each of us, according to Paul in Corinthians,
is a member of Christ's body.
We are different members with different gifts and purposes,
but we all exist together within Christ's one body.
Christ is the source of our unity and togetherness.
When we are being holy and whole,
integrated and aligned,
we are flourishing in Christ's body, the church.
And Christ came for the salvation of the whole world,
not to condemn, but to save,
to restore the holiness and wholeness that God first intended.

The only true source of our holiness and wholeness is God.
He makes us holy and whole by incorporating us into Christ,
bringing us into Christ's body, the church.
In that way, God transforms us into the beings he created us to be,
the kind of being we see in Jesus, the Christ,
the kind of being the Holy Spirit is mothering us to be
with every breath that we are given.

I have been paying some attention in my reading and reflecting this summer
to how people understand flourishing.

It's the consequence, in a Christian world view, of God's gift of being holy.

As the consequence, it's the visible sign of our wholeness,
of our life 'in Christ' that has been given to us as gift.

It is how people see us, when they come to really understand us.

Jeffrey Rubin is a psychotherapist whose religious tradition is Buddhism.
In his book, *The Art of Flourishing* (2011), he described what flourishing meant to him.

This is his wisdom about the consequences of the holy attitudes and behaviours
that make us whole and healthy as human beings.

As we flourish, he says, we focus on internal emotional awareness,
insight, transformation, and better relationships.

For Christians, this is what it means to love God, others, and ourselves.

In that love, we come to value the best in ourselves and enrich the lives of others.

We flourish, says Rubin, when
we take great care of ourselves,
connect with our source of spiritual health,
widen our moral imaginations,
cultivate ethical accountability,
and live authentically.

That's a pretty good summary of Christian holiness, Christian wholeness.

Think of the way Jesus was holy and whole.

He cared for himself, especially with times apart for prayer.

In those times of prayer, he connected deeply with his Father God.

He broadened the moral imaginations of his disciples,
helping them see God's love for all creation, not just the good folks.

He insisted on moral accountability for all neighbours.

And he lived in faithful fulfillment of God's calling, to the point of death.

But in that death, his mission was not defeated.

This is what it means to be holy for a Christian,
to one that God has invited to live 'in Christ.'

We are a community of those ones,
nourishing souls to flourish in the grace of Jesus Christ.

Our holiness and wholeness, evolving as it is,
is a response of gratitude for God's holiness and wholeness
made freely available to all, including us, in Jesus, the Christ.

So, in the final analysis, being holy is being grateful to God
for all he has done in everything we do.