

SECOND READING: Mt. 16:13-18

¹³ Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” ¹⁴ And they said, “Some say John the Baptist but others Elijah and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” ¹⁵ He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” ¹⁶ Simon Peter answered, “You are the Messiah,^[a] the Son of the living God.” ¹⁷ And Jesus answered him, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you but my Father in heaven. ¹⁸ And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock^[c] I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it.

FIRST READING: Phil 2:5-11

In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:

⁶ Who, being in very nature^[a] God,
did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage;
⁷ rather, he made himself nothing
by taking the very nature^[b] of a servant,
being made in human likeness.
⁸ And being found in appearance as a man,
he humbled himself
by becoming obedient to death—
even death on a cross!
⁹ Therefore God exalted him to the highest place
and gave him the name that is above every name,
¹⁰ that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
¹¹ and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.

This is the word of the Lord. **THANKS BE TO GOD**

“I Believe in Jesus Christ, God’s only Son, Our Lord”

Continuing on in our study of the Apostles’ Creed, we part ways with the Muslims, Hindus, Jews and many other religions of the world with even the beginning of our next phrase, “*I believe in Jesus Christ.*” Many of the world’s people attest to a belief that Jesus was a prophet or a great moral teacher, but only we, Christians, believe Jesus to have been, to be Savior, Messiah, LORD, and God, himself. C.S. Lewis famously said, “*A man who was merely a man yet said the sort of things that Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic—on the level of the man who says he is a poached egg—or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God or else a madman. Let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.*”¹Right.

*We, Christians, believe that Jesus is greatly more. In fact, in even saying Jesus’ name, we affirm what he is to us. We affirm him as our Savior. For that’s what “Jesus” or Yeshua in Hebrew means... “deliverer”, “savior”. If you recall, the angel who appeared to Joseph, said, “*You will call his name, Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.*” Yes, Jesus is our Savior. He came to save us from our sins. We say that all the time. “Jesus saves us from our sins.” What does that mean exactly? Let’s think about this for a minute.

*How might you explain Jesus’ saving act to someone who has not ever professed, “*I believe in Jesus, my Savior*” before? (*pause*) Well, most people would likely give some explanation having to do with Jesus forgiving our sins, the things we do which are not examples of loving God and neighbor. Some may go on to say Jesus’ saving us has to do with providing us a future life in heaven rather than hell. And sure, “saving humanity from its sins involves forgiveness, and mercy and redemption for all who seek him, but far more too.

*Jesus came to affect those who believe in him, to affect us so deeply that we are also changed. We are changed to resist the ways of sin, to follow a new way, a new life, a Christ-

¹ C.S. *Mere Christianity* (San Francisco: HarperOne;2023 reprint), 55, 56.

like, upside down life which begins now and lasts forever.”² That’s what we mean when we say that Jesus is our Savior.

*Now, the tough question... “How does Jesus, actually save?” “How does Jesus’ life, death and resurrection actually reconcile us to God? How does it atone for our sins?” It’s a good question, one that has been pondered deeply by a lot of smart people for centuries. Theories have been offered based on models and metaphors of Scripture.

*The three most popular include: the metaphor of:

- Christ as the Lamb of God sacrificing, giving his blameless life as ransom, purifying the sin of the world with the shedding of his blood,
- Christ as the victor in a battle with Satan, defeating the ultimate weapon, death,
- Christ as the forever-seeking Father. offering everything, all his love to the undeservedly prodigal son.

These theories all have their strengths and weaknesses...because they are just theories.

My professor, Cyndy Rigby, a daughter of a Presbyterian minister, spotted the weakness of the Penal Substitutionary theory when she was just a child. It is a theory developed in the 11th c by a man named Anselm, founded on the preservation of divine justice following humankind’s dishonoring of God through our sin.³ Cyndy recalls, *‘Jesus died to pay the penalty for your sins!’ they told me. And so. I tried to imagine what I, a really, well-behaved, zealously Christian 8 yr old could possibly have done so wrong that it necessitated the God who created the universe to come down here and die. ‘The penalty for sin is death,’ they told me. ‘So, God had his only Son to die in our place. Jesus died for us because he loves us,’ The idea that the Son had to die so the Father would be able to forgive us has never made much sense to me. If God loves us no matter what, why can’t God just go ahead and forgive us?’*⁴

*Friends, the answer to the question of how Jesus, our Savior, truly saves us, how he makes us one with God, is not found in any one Scriptural model or atonement theory. As I said, they

² Adam Hamilton. *Creed*. (Nashville: Abingdon Press; 2016),51

³ Heather Hahn “*Why did Jesus have to Die?*” United Methodist News Service.(Apr 16, 2014). 4

⁴ Cyndy Rigby. “*The Prodigal Cross*”. Presbyterian Outlook (Apr 9, 2014, Mar 30, 2017).

all have their strengths and weakness, but it lies in holding all of them in tension together at the same time. This allows us to lean on one at one point and on one at another. For example, sometimes, when I'm feeling at a low point, I most need to know that Jesus' death demonstrates the depth of God's love for me. I look at the cross and I am reminded of the extent that Christ has gone because I am his child. At other times I need to be reminded that death does not have the last word. Jesus has conquered it, and I need not fear for when my mortal body no longer has breath, I've only just begun to live. Sometimes I need to know that the punishment I deserve for my sin has instead been suffered by him. I have been forgiven and am energized to then go and live more selflessly for others.

*Adam Hamilton summarizes all of this. He says, *"God did not need Jesus to suffer and die on the cross in order to save us. Rather, we need it, so we can know the depth of human sin, the breadth of God graciousness and love, and ultimately God's triumph over sin and death.... God did not torture his son in order to satisfy or appease his wrath, but because by this dramatic act God hoped to finally break through to us, to change us, to save us from our alienating ourselves from God. Rev. Hamilton goes on to tell a story of a couple he knows who found their marriage nearly destroyed by the husband's affair. The woman came to his church's sanctuary and touched the cross, and as she did, she wept. In that moment, the cross was a sign for her that Christ knew the rejection she was feeling and a sign of the depth of God's love for her. That week, her husband came to that same cross, embraced it, and wept, because for him the cross was as sign that Christ had borne his sin and that, despite the mess he'd made of his life, he was forgiven---if not by his wife, at least by God."*⁵

*Yes, we Christians, profess Jesus to be our Savior. We also identify him as the One who is *"God's only Son"*. Jesus very frequently stated that he and the Father are one, that in knowing him, we know the Father. And on two occasions the voice of God was heard to say, *"This is My Son listen to Him."* In addition, some of Jesus' followers had moments of clear insight. We read today of Peter's bold confession, *"You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God."* We do

⁵ Adam Hamilton, 58.

not believe Jesus to have been born from God nor created by God. No, we believe him to be begotten, “of the same nature”. We understand him to embody God’s divine essence as he comes to be with us. This is part of the doctrine of the Trinity which we spoke of several weeks ago. *Athanasus, the 4th c church father so famously said, *“As the spring is not the stream, so the stream is not the spring. And yet both contain the same water which flows from the spring into the stream. Even so the deity passes on from the Father to the Son without distinction or separation.”*⁶ I like that. Yes, we affirm that Jesus is God’s Son!

*Jesus is also Lord, and we profess this in the Creed, not lord, but Lord, or LORD (all caps). In the OT, the word, LORD (all caps), is read “Adonai” by Jews. It is a code word for Yahweh....a code word because Yahweh was seen to be too holy to be said outloud. In the NT, the same Greek word is *Kyrios*. But whether *Kyrios* or Adonai, LORD means master, ruler, king. And when each of us professes it in our creed we are saying that he is not simply A master, A ruler or A king but MY Master, MY Ruler, MY King. *“He is King of Kings, Lord of lords and at his name every knee should bow, those in heaven, and those on earth, and those under the earth. Every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”* (Phil 2: 10-11) The affirmation that Jesus is LORD was the first and continues to be the basic baptismal affirmation of the Church. It is because it is very personal.⁷ Jesus Christ is our Lord.

**I will close with a story, a personal story. Years ago, I received a Mother’s Day card from our eldest son. The card said something about his love for me and his pleasure in being able to call me “mom”. It came when I needed it, and it lifted my spirits so much, not only because the message was sweet but because I knew that it took great effort for Joel to find the time to go to the store and pick it out. He was an overworked and overwhelmed medical student at the time. But what really made the experience amazing was that the letter came without postage. There was no stamp on the envelope. Joel didn’t remember to put one on it. But yet it was delivered.*

⁶ Schaff. History of the Christian Church. Chapter IX : Theological Controversies, and Development of the Ecumenical Orthodoxy. http://www.biblestudyguide.org/history/schaff/3_ch09.htm. (accessed 6-23-23).

⁷ Craig Barnes. *“I Believe in Jesus Christ, God’s Only Son, Our Lord”*. <https://1stpres.com/wp-content/uploads/I-Believe-in-Jesus-Christ-Gods-Only-Son-Mt.-16-10.6-1.pdf> (accessed 6-23-23).

Hmmm. For the longest time, I kept the card and the envelope on my nightstand to remember that I matter and I'm loved by my son, but also...by my Lord.

*Brothers and sisters, when God sought to communicate his love for the human race, he came to us in Jesus Christ. *(repeat)* Through Jesus, God showed us who he is, what he is like and what his will for our lives is. And through Jesus, he sought to gather us unto himself and be at one with us, forever and ever. He was saying, "In Jesus, you will know that you matter and that I love you!"⁸ *When Karl Barth, the great 20th c theologian was asked by a student if he could summarize in one sentence the voluminous writings he had written on Jesus, Barth responded with this, 'Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so.'*⁹

So, brothers and sisters, siblings in Christ, when we affirm "*I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, Our Lord*", we affirm our recognition of this love, this love that shapes how we live and how we will die, this love that is for you and for me. And that is all that matters. Amen

Let us stand and say the Apostles' Creed. Amen.

⁸ Adam Hamilton., 75

⁹ <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/rogereolson/2013/01/did-karl-barth-really-say-jesus-loves-me-this-i-kinw?>. (accessed 6-23-23).