

Date: Sunday April 25, 2010

Scripture: John 10:22-30

Title: "Exasperation is a Two Way Street"

The Message of Scripture (Sermon Thesis): Jesus is being challenged by religious authorities as to his identity. Both he and the authorities are exasperated.

The Sharing of the Good News (The Sermon Purpose): Those who know Christ know him. Our images and ideas vary about him, but together we are the body of Christ on Earth.

(Remember, it's all about God!)

I read a story this week about a young rabbi. He had just finished his rabbinical training and he went to his first synagogue. He was full of idealism and everything was going to be wonderful, until he walked in the door, and discovered that he is now the rabbi of a quarreling synagogue. It seems that about half the people in his synagogue believe that when it comes time for Friday prayers that they pray standing up. And, about half of the synagogue believes that when it's time for Friday prayers, they pray sitting down. And the ones that stand shout at the ones that sit; and the ones that sit, shout at the ones that stand. And the poor young rabbi didn't know what to do with these people.

So, he made an appointment to go see the aged rabbi who was the founding pastor of the synagogue. The old rabbi was ninety-nine years old, he lived in a nursing home, and the young rabbi came in and got straight to the point. He said, "Rabbi, is it the tradition that we stand when we pray?" The old rabbi thought a moment and then he said, "No that is not the tradition." So the young rabbi said,

“Well, is it the tradition that we sit when we pray?” The old rabbi said, with great dignity, “No, that is not the tradition.”

The young rabbi said, “Our worship is chaos, half the people are standing and half the people are sitting and they’re all yelling at each other all the time.” The old rabbi said, “Ah, yes, now, that is the tradition” (Schneck).

I sense some of the confusion that the young rabbi is feeling. Being church can be confusing. Part of the confusion stems from the fact that as human beings no two of us see things in exactly the same way. I have had people comment to me about what they like in a particular worship service and, literally, within a matter of hours have other people offer that same example as something they didn’t like in the service. Being church is about living life and in life we live and see events from multiple perspectives. That is a blessing for all the diversity that we get to experience and yet it can be confusing and exasperating.

Well, there is exasperation in this morning’s text from John. Jesus’ critics have had it with Jesus. When they have asked him who he is, he has said things like, “I am the vine, you are the branches.” Or, “I am the bread, I am the life, I am the way, I am the Good Shepherd,” and on and on. Now, as we talked about at our Tuesday night Bible study here at Immanuel this past week, part of the reason Jesus uses these various images may be to connect with a particular audience to whom he is speaking. Also, we should note, this is the book of John and John can be evasive, ambiguous, and hard to understand as he is often symbolic, metaphorical, and figurative in his theological storytelling. No matter the reasoning, the tension runs

high as the Jews say to Jesus, “Show us plainly, directly, and clearly who you are.”

Can't we relate? It can be challenging at times to be able to define just who Jesus is and there are as many ideas as there are members of the church. In the novel, *The Brothers K*. author David James Duncan tells the story of the Chance family, a family of four boys, two girls, an agnostic father, and a mother with a passionate fundamentalist faith. They all have a sense of knowledge but yet very different ideas about God, Jesus, and the Bible. In fact, the major theme of the novel is the question, “Who is Jesus?” Each of the Chance family children try and make sense of this question. One of the boys, Kincaid, puts it this way:

“It’s strange the way everybody has their own pet notion about Jesus, and nobody’s pet notion seems to agree with anybody else’s. Grandawma, for instance, says He’s ‘just a defunct social reformer.’ Then there’s Papa, who once said he’s God’s son all right, and that he survived the crucifixion just fine, but after the two-thousand-year-old funeral service his cockeyed followers call Christianity probably made him sorry he did. Meanwhile, there’s Freddie, who’s six now, and who told me she saw Christ hiding under her bed one night . . . And Bet, who spent a whole day making a Christmas card for Uncle Marv and Aunt Mary Jane last year, and then got so proud of the card that she refused to mail it to anyone but herself . . . Then we looked to see what she was so proud of, and it turned out to be this whole army of crayon angles, in these gold sort of football helmets, charging into Bethlehem while in the sky above them huge red and green letters copied from a Christmas carol book Bet couldn’t yet read proclaimed: “JOY TO THE WORLD!”

THE SAVIOR RESIGNS!”

Elsewhere in the book one of the children say:

“Personally, I’m not sure just who or what Christ is. I still pray to him in a pinch, but I talk to myself in a pinch, too – and I’m getting less and less sure there is a difference . . . Mama tried to clear up the confusion by saying that Christ is exactly what the Bible says He is. But what does the Bible say He is? On one page He’s a Word, on the next a bridegroom, then He’s a boy, then a scapegoat, then a thief in the night; read on and He’s the messiah, then oops, He’s a rabbi, and then a fraction – a third of the Trinity – then a fisherman, then a broken loaf of bread. I guess even God, when he is human, has trouble deciding just what he is” (Willimon). Yes, in our humanness it can be a challenge to figure out just who Jesus is and it sounds like we are in plenty of good company.

Well, this exasperation is a two way street. Jesus is exasperated with the people surrounding him wanting to know who he is. Jesus says that he has been teaching them, telling them, but they haven’t seen and heard him. Then Jesus says, “My sheep hear my voice and they follow me.” Sheep? Here we go again, more metaphor and symbolism.

But, perhaps, some of those listening to him knew what he was talking about, just like some of us might know. The question becomes, why were the people in the ancient time paying any attention to Jesus and why do we gather here again this Sunday morning just like we have so many Sunday mornings before?

I think part of the answer is because we hear him. We really hear Jesus and know he is saying something important. We might not know everything about Jesus; we might not know all that the Chance family mother knew about the Bible, and probably even less about theology. But we do know Jesus, maybe not as much as we would like, but enough to know that we want to be attentive to him and to follow him (Willimon).

The past few weeks I have been talking about the adult Christian education gathering and the movie “Lars and The Real Girl.” If you didn’t make it to our gathering, I encourage you to watch the film. It really is a funny, thought provoking, and entertaining movie. At the end of each of the two weeks we were together to watch the movie, we had time for discussion. One of the questions we talked about each week, and I don’t think I’m giving away anything here, so no spoiler alert needed, but each week we talked about what role the church played in the movie. Then last week, with our being in the middle of the Easter Season, basking in the glory of the resurrection, we talked about signs of new life that the movie offered. When I posed that question to the group, what signs of new life did you see, we didn’t miss a beat in being able to describe images of new life found within the context of the movie. Now no one said, “I heard or saw Jesus in the movie,” but when we talk of new life and hope, rest assured, we are talking about Jesus Christ and all that he makes possible.

And that’s a big part of the reason we are here today. Jesus goes on to say in today’s passage, “My sheep know me” (John10:22-30). That statement is offered

with great confidence. It is not, “I hope my sheep know me,” or “We will see if my sheep know me,” but, “My sheep know me.” The world may not know him. His critics and enemies may not want to know him, but his sheep know him and by the grace of God alone, and it is by grace, you and I know him.

That’s today’s good news behind this rather exasperating episode shared by John. The risen Christ comes to us, meets us with all our opinions, questions, doubts, misgivings, misunderstandings, and unanswered questions. Jesus comes to us and calls to us. We have heard him. We hear him. We know him. We follow him. We are the church. We are the body of Christ. And in that regard, we are One, even in the midst of confusion and exasperation. So no matter whether we stand up or sit down, let us pray together.

Holy One,

Thank you for your Holy word. As we get caught up in images and ideas of just who and what you are, remind us that together we are you upon this Earth and that we are called to serve in your name. This we know and so we pray, Amen.

Offering: As the Body of Christ, we are blessed. We are called to share those blessings. The ushers will please . . .

Dedication: With this that we give, we hope to be better able to serve you in all we do. With this that we give, we follow you. Amen.

Benediction: Go forth as the body of Christ letting the words and the deeds, the good news, and the love of Christ be known to all. Go forth. Amen and Amen.

Sources:

Holy Bible – New Revised Standard Version; Harper Bibles: San Francisco; 2007.

Schenck, Carl; Lectionary Homiletics; www.goodpreacher.com; 2010.

Willimon, William; “Pulpit Resource”; Logos Productions: Inver Grove Heights, MN; 2009.