

Christ Community Covenant Church
The Story 25: Jesus, the son of God
Mark 8:27-38
Pastor Randy McNeal - March 25, 2012

Intro

Maybe you are like me and sometimes have a hard time singing certain worship songs. When we sing words like “consume from the inside out” or “take all of me” I sometimes wonder if I really want that to happen. There are things in my life that I don’t want God to know about, things that I don’t want to give up and other things that I know will be extremely painful if I have to deal with them. When I think about these things, I sometimes get speechless during our singing.

I remember the first time this happened to me, my freshman year of college. You see, music had always been a part of my life and in a big way. My dad played saxophone all through college. My brother majored in saxophone performance. I had played sax since 5th grade. My love for music didn’t stop there. I sang in church choir, eventually began leading our youth group’s worship team. I transferred high schools to be in a better music program. I joined an award winning choir, played lead sax in Jazz band, sat first chair in concert band and marched in the top field show marching band in the northwest. In college, I continued by learning new instruments, taking music classes, and joining all the ensembles. Music was my life. My calling was to youth ministry. The two conflicted.

My freshman year of college came and so did the busy Christmas season. Since I was heavily involved in music at school I had to miss many Christmas celebrations at the church I served. This began to weigh on me heavily.

On a retreat to the beach I began to reflect on what I had learned in my Christian Discipleship course. We talked about our tendency to need to control our lives. We used the metaphor of only putting one foot in the water and keeping the other on dry land. Our challenge was to be willing to jump in with both feet. As I was reflecting on this we sang a song called “I Surrender”. Some of the lines are “I’m giving up my dreams” and “I’m laying down my rights for the promise of new life.” The chorus says “I surrender all to you”. I couldn’t sing it. I didn’t want to give up music but I knew God had called me to youth ministry. If I wanted to be obedient I needed to put both feet in the water.

I quit all the musical activities I was doing and focused on ministry. It was one of the hardest things I’ve ever had to do but it was worth it.

And that’s the subject we are looking at today. What does it mean to put both feet in the water, to die to our self, take up our cross and follow Christ.

3 Questions:

1. Who do people say Jesus is?

In Mark 8 we hear Jesus ask his disciples “who do others say that I am”. They respond by naming historical figures like Moses and Elijah and others a prophet. Today. Many people have opinions about who Jesus was as well...**(video)**

A good man

Many non Christians believe Jesus existed. After all there is historical proof of that fact. They liken Jesus to someone like Mohammed, Joseph Smith, and even Gandhi. All leaders of religious movements and all good men. Many stop there.

Lunatic or Liar

Last week Dave mentioned that C.S. Lewis reasoned that Jesus could have been a lunatic or a liar. Here this guy is walking around teaching different things, changing Jewish law and claiming

to be God. Crazy, certifiable would have been an understatement. Even his teachings were mostly things no one understood. So maybe he was just in it for himself, leading a movement for his own benefit.

Now, from what I know about leaders, you are supposed to have followers stand by you through thick and thin. However when the moment came to fight or take flight, everyone left Jesus. He had no more followers. If Jesus' intent was for personal gain then he was not a good leader. Given the choice I'd lean more towards lunatic.

Prophet, Priest and King

But we know from last week, and previous weeks before, that Jesus is prophet, priest and king.

Prophet - he was both foretelling and forth telling. He explained things that would happen in the future and they came true. He even predicted his own death on a cross. He spoke out against hypocrisy, calling the priests robbers and chasing them out of the temple courts.

Priest - he taught the scripture. He taught in temples. He had followers. He was a rabbi. He knew things and had insight that most others seemed to lack.

King - next week we will see how he is King as we celebrate Palm Sunday and his triumphal entry into Jerusalem one last time. He rides in on a donkey; the crowds lay down palm fronds and shout:

"Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David. Hosanna in the highest heaven!"

The word hosanna means "save" and they were shouting it as praise to their King.

(Transition) but none of this fully captures all of who Jesus is. We know there is more to it from a very young age. In fact Jesus says:

"Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it."

So let's consult the experts on this next question (**video**)

2. Who do you say Jesus is?

(Ask audience) What about you, who do you say Jesus is?

Jesus *the* Christ

Jesus turns to the disciples and asks "who do you say I am?" and Peter, in one of his few moments of getting it right, answers "the Christ". You see, Christ is not Jesus' last name but a description of who he was. The Christ, the messiah, the one they'd all been waiting for. He was here to save them, rescue them, and lead them back to the Promised Land.

This confession is where it all starts for us as well. Do you believe that Jesus is the Christ? That he came down from heaven and after living a perfect life, without sin, took on our punishment for sin by dying on the cross. And after dying was buried three days and proving his power over death came alive again. All so that we might be saved from the wrath of God being poured out on us, sinners. Do you believe that today?

If you do, you have a great starting point. If that is not something you believe I'd like to say we are still so glad you are here with us. The people around truly care for you and if you would like to learn more about this belief in a Christ, a savior, ask someone in this room to tell you who they believe Jesus to be.

Jesus is both God and Man

Here our journey gets a little harder to understand. One of those difficult teachings that caused Jesus' followers to turn away. Jesus claims to be God. At first we don't realize what he is saying.

In John we read of Jesus saying:

"I am the bread of life"

"I am the good shepherd"

"I am the living water"

"I am the resurrection and the life"

And to our untrained eye that seems a little strange but we accept it. Perhaps the Jewish leaders thought it stranger. Jesus, in the Greek, uses two words for "I am". He says "ego eimi" which is literally "I am I am". Maybe the Jewish leaders thought he stuttered. "I am I am (stuttering) the bread of life". I tend to think he said it with more authority "I am I am (authoritative) the bread of life".

And then I can just see the wheels turning in the Jewish leaders where Jesus makes it plain saying:

"I tell you the truth, before Abraham was I am, I am"

They probably thought "not only does this guy have problems speaking correctly but he has horrible grammar. He makes it sound like before Abraham was around he always existed, eternally. Only God is like that.....wait.....is he claiming to be God? God said his name was "I am who I am"...maybe he's not stuttering at all. He is claiming to be God. Blaspheme!"

And with that they decide to kill him.

This belief that Jesus was both God and Man is vital to our understanding of who Jesus is. I remember the first time I understood how this could happen was when I was reading through Philippians 2 and God enlightened me.

Jesus is a humble servant
(read Philippians 2:5-11)

The process Paul writes about in this passage is a complete emptying of Christ's own self. He gives up his rights to being God and becomes someone like us.

(Ask audience) What rights do we have?

We believe we have rights. Rights to freedom. Right to happiness or the pursuit of. The right to vote. Right to a job that not only pays well but also makes us happy. We have a right to a family where all the relatives, and especially our own kids, respect us. We have a right to be treated fairly by everyone.

But I ask this: "if we are to be of the same mind as Jesus, are we willing to give up those rights? What are we willing to die for? (**video**)

3. Will you take up your cross and follow Jesus?

Deny yourself, give up your rights

Jesus says:" If anyone would come after me they must deny their self, take up their cross, and follow me". Following Jesus is not for the faint hearted. When Jesus says things like "I came to bring division" or "if you don't hate your brother you don't love me" everything gets a lot tougher.

Or faith goes beyond belief into action. You have to be willing to give up whatever it is you think you are entitled to. You have to give up your rights. Christ wants it all.

Choose a white death

This process is a death of sorts. Os Guinness in his book The Call says there are three types of death.

Green death is what we experience in practicing disciplines because it helps us grow.

Red death is the death of martyrs who spill their blood for their faith.

And white death, the death of our self. Our rights.

I believe white death is the hardest. Green often seems hard as we struggle to read our Bibles and pray but that's only because we haven't died to self yet. Red, the death of martyrs, is perhaps fairly easy. We are blessed to not be confronted with many opportunities to literally die for faith in this country but think about it. Aside from torture when you are killed for your faith, it's all over and you are in heaven. You just answer yes.

A white death, a death of self, means being willing to give up everything. Jesus condemned the rich young ruler because he wasn't willing to sell all he had. The older brother in the prodigal story is condemned for his self righteous attitude. His entitlement. And the Pharisees are condemned because while they look good on the outside, inside they are only about their self.

(Our churches are filled with rich young rulers, older brothers, and Pharisees who are more concerned with their rights than with denying their selves, taking up their cross, and following Christ.)

What is your cross to bear?

We all have a cross to bear. Luckily for us, giving "all" is a process and a journey. The journey is cyclical in nature. It repeats over and over. Think about our church calendar. The Gospel of Christ's Advent, Passion, Restoration and Exaltation is a process that we recapitulate, we repeat, with our rhythm.

The same is so as we die to self. We find our self in many of the same places as we realize the things in our lives that need to die. Maybe it's what you gave up for lent. Maybe it's a past hurt. Maybe you need to forgive someone. Maybe you need to rely on God more. We all have these and we all move forward slowly, one step at a time. We die to one thing and then repeat as necessary.

For me, my white death has been an ongoing struggle with identity. I desperately want to be liked and can't stand the thought of failure. I'm so wrapped up in what people think of me I do whatever I can to please them. I joke that for lent I gave up caring what people think. Really, I've been wrestling for a while now with dying to myself so I can find my identity in the cross of Christ.

It's in this cross of Christ that I hope you will join me for a journey today of identifying where you are in your own white death. The death of self.

Stations of the Cross: Where do you find yourself of this journey?

The Catholic Church has a way of finding ourselves on the journey of Christ. They've created the "stations of the cross" as a way of imagining Jesus' journey to death. Let's take a couple minutes to pray through these stations and see where we find ourselves on this journey.

1. Jesus is condemned to death

- We first need to identify the problem we need to die to.

2. Jesus accepts the cross
 - Admitting is the first step, or in this case the second.
3. Jesus falls the first time
 - We won't do it perfectly, we will mess up. It's more important that we get back up again.
4. Jesus meets His Mother
 - There is nothing more powerful than a mother's love. Maybe you need someone to show you love right now.
5. Simon of Cyrene carries the cross
 - Many times on the journey of dying to self we need a friend to help us
6. Veronica wipes the face of Jesus
 - It gets messy on this journey. We need others to help clean us up.
7. Jesus falls the second time
 - You didn't think you would fall just once did you?
8. Jesus meets the women of Jerusalem
 - These were his faithful followers. I imagine he was encouraged, strengthened to see them.
9. Jesus falls the third time
 - And the 4th, 5th, 6th and as many times as it takes. Just keep getting back up.
10. Jesus is stripped of His garments
 - How humiliating. If we live this way the world will think us foolish. Are you willing to endure such humiliation?
11. Crucifixion: Jesus is nailed to the cross
 - We are getting closer now to being through.
12. Jesus dies on the cross
 - You have reached the end.
13. Jesus' body is removed from the cross (Deposition or Lamentation)
 - Again, we need friends to help.
14. Jesus is laid in the tomb and covered in incense.
 - Now we are buried so that we can come alive again, new, forever changed.

Where do you find yourself on this journey?

Benediction

"If Jesus is willing to be in us, and to let us show him to the world, it's a small thing that we should endure being fools for Christ's sake, and be shown up by the part we have to play" - Austin Farrer