



At A Distance – Wednesday, April 29, 2020

“Who is Jesus Anyway?”

Acts 2:14a,36-41

*Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd, **“Let the entire house of Israel know with certainty that God has made him both Lord and Messiah, this Jesus whom you crucified.”***

Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and to the other apostles, “Brothers, what should we do?” Peter said to them, “Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you, for your children, and for all who are far away, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to him.” And he testified with many other arguments and exhorted them, saying, “Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.” So those who welcomed his message were baptized, and that day about three thousand persons were added.

Greetings Saints and we welcome you again in a good way on this beautiful day in SW Washington to sit back, relax a bit with your coffee and to explore together what learnings the Sacred Stories had for us last Sunday.

As we saw last week in our Sacred Stories, something amazing and powerful has transformed Jesus’ disciples from a disorganized, leaderless band of spiritual stragglers into the strong, assertive and confident evangelizers that we saw on Sunday led by a renewed and motivated Peter. And again, we know that what “happened” was that Peter and the Disciples were sanctified, fortified and blessed by their personal encounter with the resurrected Jesus and with the Holy Spirit. And life for them would never be the same after that Sunday afternoon in the Upper Room.

Before we get into some specifics about our Sacred Stories, I would like to get a bit academic on you for just a bit, if I may. I always like to try to offer a bit of context and a timeline on what we are hearing, as it usually helps us understand the Story. So here goes.

Almost all biblical scholars agree that the same author wrote both the Gospel of Luke and the book, Acts of the Apostles. The author of Luke/Acts was living in Rome when the works were written and was writing in Greek. Most timelines place writing of Luke/Acts somewhere between 70 and 90 CE. Thus, the Luke/Acts stories were written some 40 to 60 years after Jesus' public ministry commenced. The Author of Acts (traditionally said to be Luke the Evangelist) collected, edited, and wrote the various oral traditions of the early Christian movement that were being transmitted person to person and congregation to congregation across the various religious and cultural landscapes of the day.

The early Christians were struggling mightily to try to figure all kinds of things out in those very early years of the Jesus Way. Christianity was slowly but surely evolving from a fringe sub-set of 1st Century Judaism, into an independent theological and philosophical hybrid. The early Jesus Way began to struggle with its Jewish origins and genetics, incorporating some and jettisoning others. Slowly but intentionally, the Jesus Way became a more "gentile focused" orthodoxy, as Jesus' teachings spread from the hinterlands of Galilee to the academic centers of Rome.

One of the most important questions that 1st Century Christians were trying to answer was, "Who was Jesus anyway?" What was the "nature"/ the essence of this itinerant preacher from Galilee? The historical Jesus was an itinerant preacher from Galilee, a cohort of John the Baptist, espousing an apocalyptic world view somewhat common at the time. That the current Jewish world order was in decline, that the Jewish Temple Cult was responsible for the mess and that God was going to fix things by allowing a murky heavenly being know as the Son of Man to bring a Messiah to reign over an earthly Jewish kingdom and get things sorted. Then the Resurrection happened and that's when things got really complicated. So now what, is Jesus human? Is Jesus a divine being of some kind, like an angel? Is Jesus a god? Is Jesus *the* God... the God of Creation? Is Jesus something else... perhaps some divine/human hybrid? Lots of questions and

many evolving answers emerge over time. This understanding of “who Jesus is” changes dramatically from the early 1st Century to the 4th Century when the Christian Church elders establish the orthodox and “official” view of the Christian Church at the Council of Nicaea. Christology is a theological discipline that studies the “nature of Christ”; the nature of Jesus. Who exactly Jesus is and what is Jesus’ Nature to the 1st Century Jesus Way believers, undergoes a dramatic and swift evolution and their understanding transitions from the historical Jesus, the 1st century preacher, to Jesus the Son of God.

Early 1st Century “Christology” deeply embraces Jesus’ humanity. This makes perfect sense as Jesus’ followers lived and breathed and walked and talked with the human Jesus. So, how then did the early Christians factor in the Resurrection of Jesus and Jesus’ Miracles? Something must have happened to turn this very human Jesus into a very extraordinary and unique being.

The earliest Christology of how Jesus changed from being human to being divine is what has been called an “Exaltation” Christology. The basic understanding behind this Christology is that Jesus was understood by his followers to have been a human, and then Jesus came to be “exalted” and “glorified” by God and so raised to the rank of divine. When this “Divine Exaltation” came to be was being debated by Jesus’ disciples from the earliest conversations. Some said that this divine exaltation came at the Resurrection. Other followers, attempting to account for Jesus’ Miracles, affirmed that Jesus Divine Exaltation occurred at his baptism, when God’s voice was heard from the clouds... “This is My Beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.”

Peter, in our reading from Acts today, affirms this early Christology of Jesus’ Exaltation when he says to the crowd:

*Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd, **“Let the entire house of Israel know with certainty that God has made him both Lord and Messiah, this Jesus whom you crucified.”***

God **made** Him... Lord and Messiah. Clearly here Luke through Peter is reinforcing this idea of Jesus’ Exaltational Christology... that Jesus the Human was exalted by Creator God to be divine. That Jesus had not always existed, but that Creator God made a choice to elevate and exalt the human Jesus to a new and sacred nature.

As we know now, this rather simple and direct idea of the nature of Jesus undergoes a rapid, complex and at times quite convoluted evolution into the Incarnational Christology which lands at the Council of Nicaea as one of the primary creedal statements of the later Jesus Way. In this “Incarnational Christology” Jesus is a pre-existent, eternal Divine Being equal with Creator God, who is “incarnated” as fully divine and fully human, equal and co-existent with Creator God, and Sanctifier God. This Incarnational Christology that occurs later ultimately becomes the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity.

So “Who is Jesus” anyway? Well it seems it depends on who you ask and when you asked. What we see here though is believers throughout time, trying to make some sense of Jesus’ both as a person and in the context of his most incredible and amazing journey and Resurrection. How we understand the nature of Jesus is an interesting academic and theology challenge yet today, as it was for Luke and Peter in the 1st Century. But for me what remains most important is “experiencing” Jesus. Experiencing the living Jesus through our lives and in the “breaking of the Bread.” Seeing the face of Jesus in those around us, living into our Baptismal Covenant to “respect the dignity of every human being.” To continue to “do the next right thing.” To continue “be a blessing” and to love one another. We “know” who Jesus is for we have experienced Jesus’ love personally and share that love communally. Like the old song, “They will know we are Christians by our love, by our love... and they’ll know we are Christians by our love.”

Blessings,

Father Joe