

“Our Salvation”

One day, as the disciples walked along the road with Jesus, he stopped to ask them a question. It’s an important question for anyone who decides to follow him. Jesus asked them, “Who do you say that I am?” Let’s be reminded, the 12 sat at his feet as Jesus taught. They witnessed how the touch of his hand brought healing to the broken. They experienced the way in which he challenged the authorities of power in their time. And so, the disciples who were walking him on the road that day were the same disciples who had been with him all along the way. But here’s the thing: just being near Jesus does not guarantee the depth of one’s discipleship. At the heart of a life with him is the question, “Who do you say that I am?” A life of faith is all about Jesus, you know. And to that we say, “Of course it is. It’s obvious. Who else would it be about if it’s not about Jesus?” But just to say this does not communicate who he is to us or why his life and death and resurrection are so important to our lives.

We build churches like this one, a house of worship, and as a congregation we establish ministries in his name. It’s because of him that we do it, so who is Jesus to us? We serve those who are in need and encourage those who are in trouble. It’s because of Jesus that we do it. We make decisions about what we give, involving our time and resources, we participate in bible study and prayer, we gather in this sanctuary on Sunday mornings and connect with a community of fellow believers, and we do it all because of him. So, the question is put before us, who is Jesus to us? Today is Family Worship when we encourage our children and their families to be in the service. Some of our kids are here today. I want them to know that everything they are learning about Jesus in Sunday School is to help them understand what it means to live their lives with Jesus. Kids, you know that when you exercise and eat the food that is good for you your bodies are healthier. When you learn about Jesus it is to help you be stronger in living a life with him. So, who is he to you? Who is Jesus to me?

Now, asking this question isn’t meant to make us more anxious. The Lord knows there is enough anxiety in the world without us increasing our stress because of religious assumptions. No, the question about Jesus is not a test. This isn’t about whether we pass or fail, nor are we setting ourselves up for some kind of eternal judgment if our answer is wrong. Instead, the question about Jesus is more an invitation to be intentional about who he is so that we have the opportunity to receive the deeper blessing of a life with him. When we know who he is and to know what he has done for us it brings a fullness to our faith that is not possible otherwise. On the surface we know his name. Jesus. In a head only kind of way we can read the gospel stories and know about him. But, at the heart of it, who is Jesus to us and how does his life bring meaning to our lives?

The book of the bible we call Hebrews focuses on the impact Jesus makes. As we read the scripture for this morning we find an answer to the question “Who is he?” In these verses we are given specific ways Jesus shapes our relationship with God. This happens in the very first words we’ve read where the writer refers to Jesus as “Christ.” “OK,” we say. “Aren’t we stating the obvious, again? This isn’t new information. We refer to Jesus as Christ all the time.” That is true enough but calling Jesus “Christ” leads to a not-so-helpful misinterpretation that often sneaks up on us. His name is Jesus. His name is not Christ. You know this. Christ is not Jesus’ last name. Let me say that again just to be sure we’re on the same page. Christ is not Jesus’ last name. He’s not Mr. Christ, whom we just happen to know on a first name basis as Jesus. I know it sounds silly to talk about it this way but it’s important. When we use Christ as if it is a last name we miss the deeper truth. He is not Mr. Jesus Christ. Jesus is THE Christ. Jesus is THE ONE who becomes THE CHRIST and the role and function of the Christ points to why Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life for us. This is who he is to us. Jesus is the Christ.

Aren’t we grateful the midterm elections are behind us, if for no other reason than the political advertisements are over? The recent campaign ads on television and social media, the yard signs and rallies, the text messages on our phones, these were like a tsunami of political persuasion that bombarded us daily. The quiet after the storm is a welcomed relief. What’s going on with all of that? Well, at its base political advertising is about name recognition. At the location where I voted last Tuesday there was a man just beyond the indicated distance from the poll entrance who was handing out fliers that had just a name printed on them. It must be worth the effort, the idea that the final name we see will encourage us to vote for that candidate when we step up to the voting machine. I’m not sure about that. I know some folks who are just contrary enough to say that if you push a sticker in my face just as I’m going to vote that will not be the name I will choose. So, I think it can go either way. I don’t how all of that works but we can be sure that incredible amounts of money and advertising went toward flashing lots of names in front of us this past election cycle. The strategy hopes we will associate the names of the candidates with what he or she promises to do if they get elected. And, that’s part of our struggle with the political process, too. Will they really

do what they say they'll do? Cynicism and mistrust take hold of us. We question whether any candidate is sincere in what they say. The names and the promises just aren't enough for us.

The book of Hebrews wants us to know that Jesus is a name we can trust. The Book of Hebrews wants us to know that not only can we trust his name, he has fulfilled the promises of God for our lives. This is true because Jesus is the Christ for us and he wasn't elected to the position. Jesus was selected by God, called by God, filled with the Holy Spirit of God, and as a result what the Christ has done impacts every moment of our lives. This is why we say that Christ is our salvation. Jesus is the Christ because he saves us from a life separated from God. Christ makes direct access to God possible for us. In the old days there was the thought that God was inaccessible. God was too holy and we are too tainted for there to be any direct contact. Christ removes all the barriers and the bible wants us to receive this truth as incredibly good news. Even now there are times when we feel as if there is an insurmountable distance between where we are and where God is. We try everything to close the gap. We try to be better. We try to do good. We pray and worship and study the bible with the hope that God will notice and let us get closer despite all our faults. To this the Book of Hebrews says, let it go. Christ is the way to God. Christ bridges the gap, and when we know that and trust that then our lives are no longer filled with the anxious worry that we may not get there. Because of Christ we live in the presence of God now and this means we can live with joy. Life is a blessing not a burden. Christ connects us to God now. And then, says the Book of Hebrews, what Christ has done has been done for all of us, for all time, and in every way and forever. The sacrifice of Christ's love heals the wounds of our souls and forgives all our sin. As I said before, this isn't new information but we need to hear because we often live like we don't believe it. We keep trying to redo what Jesus has done. We try to save ourselves by convincing God that the sacrifices we are make should prove that we are worthy of God's love. The Book of Hebrews says this, "Let it go." Christ is our salvation. Christ's sacrificial love sets us free. Our task is to receive it, embrace it, and build our lives upon it.

We know who Jesus is and we know everything he has done for us. Christ has done it all, brought us into the presence of God and blessed us by way of a saving love. That's who he is. Now, who will others say that we are because of him?