

Sermon - Mark 1:9-15 Philippians 2:1-11 March 1, 2009  
Catching a Vision of Christ for Our Time

Who is this man Jesus?

Baptized by John, Jesus of Nazareth, is anointed, blessed, by the Holy Spirit, by God, and immediately, it says, that spirit that had blessed him, drove him out into the wilderness, and there he was tempted to be anything but who he knew himself to be... chosen by God, no, formed by God, to be the Messiah, to be Christ, God with us.

Who is this man Jesus?

From the pages of the Bible, our only real record of his life, he comes across as being humble, but also determined to accomplish things for what he sees is the greater good of all people - determined to call people to a new and better way of living, to call people to live in harmony with the creation of which they are so completely a part.

But who was he, and most importantly who is he for us, 2000 years removed from his time and his deeds? Is there some consistent constant sketch of his character that can give us a fix on this person that will fit with the challenges we face to live well now? Can we catch a vision of Christ for our time?

Please pray with me.

Lord of life, guide the words of my mouth, and the thoughts of these your faithful and loving people, that what is said and heard here will be your will for us, this day and through the living Christ. Amen.

Who is this man Jesus? Biblically, it all boils down to a pretty clear portrait of a very very special person – God in flesh appearing. Living fully in, but never fully of the world, in which we live and move and have our being.

And, living in our world, he lived guided by – as we can be too - guided by the Word from the creator of the world, and the universe of which it is a part. Biblically its pretty clear - Jesus the man, who is the Christ, who came and did fully God's will – he brought good news to the poor, he proclaimed release for the captives, recovery of sight to the blind, freedom for the oppressed, and the year of the Lord's favor - all this – by his life - his word – his death and his resurrection.

But historically it has never been so simple or so clear about the prevailing image of Jesus. . . Every age has found something in Jesus it liked or wanted or needed... and would have him be that, if it could. Sainly martyr for some - dying for his cause. The old not so good Crusader spirit. Social activist for some - bringing down injustice anywhere and everywhere.. let's boycott Scouting ... Hm? Rebel with a cause for some - Jesus challenging everything ungodly in life, and everyone ungodly in their living.

Images – projections often of our own wants or needs. And every image has its limits. And - truly – in every image - every vision of Jesus Christ – he is most often viewed as serving the needs of those who hold his image.

But if there is a truth in this - for above all that's who Jesus Christ was and is - a servant – a servant of all and for all - a servant for God, and all God's people.

For the apostle Paul, that's, Christ. God for all, so that all can be for God. "He emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in human likeness.. he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross."

For Paul, that's the message, that's the vision of Christ – for his time, and all time. It's the vision of Christ Paul found set clearly before us in this sacrament. A vision Jesus left the world with, to be shared with the world by his disciples -

Over and over and over. This do in remembrance of me. The vision of a servant... to guide and direct our own living.....Yes – other images abound - teacher, friend, miracle worker, brother, son, healer, carpenter, lord and savior. Names and titles – images -

But a vision - a vision of Christ for our time as servant - is not the same....I think Servant may be the best - a vision of Jesus from Jesus' own words about himself, and so – perhaps - the best vision for us.

Servant - to and for God. To God – yes – You shall love the Lord your God, with all your mind and heart and strength. And for God - you shall love your neighbor as yourself.

That doesn't spell out all the details - of how best to be a servant of God and of each other, But then, a vision doesn't need to. A vision only needs to focus one's attention and direct one's actions, and so help a person live near to the highest and best a person can be.

And that's what the vision of Christ is for us – can do in our lives. Is it enough – this vision of the servant – to guide us in our daily living? I think it is – if we'd think about it more, study it more. Live it more.

Servanthood - would that there were more of it in our society today. Because without it we get the selfish self-centered self-serving leadership in all our institutions that has directly led to our current financial crisis. Greed. For me first – and service to others only as needed – if at all.

How do we call ourselves again, and again, day by day, to living up the servant vision we have been given in Jesus Christ?

Some years ago people tried the wrist band idea – in fact it was one of the first wrist bands, WWJD - What Would Jesus Do?

It was a reminder of how it is we ought to seek to live. ... in everything we put our hands to.

But for Jesus' disciples – then and now - Jesus fleshed out the servant theme with his life and in his death. And he gave us a symbol that serves us still as a reminder of God's call to us in Christ to live servant like lives.

A simple cross - a cross – that reminds us of the two directions of his life and of our lives – loving God and loving each other. In obedient love of God, and love for each of us, Jesus went to the cross to identify with our own pain and suffering and death, and to prove the power of love, stronger than death, forgiving, new life giving love.

I encourage you to make a cross a part of the ritual of what you put on or put in your purse or pocket this Lenten Season. The children of the Church have prepared crosses you this morning.

It is the symbol that has guided us in what we built and how we built right here - building not only for ourselves and our needs, but to share in ministry with and for others .... right now, and for years and years to come. And - yes – the symbol of the cross comes to us, and we adopt it, at some cost. –

A cost, a cross, we bear – and we bear it for good. Serving God and God's purposes - opening ourselves to the world – visibly and in our mission efforts. Servants of the Cross.

And service, servanthood, is the vision that is at the heart of this sacrament Jesus commanded us to celebrate. Here at a table, the heart of Christ-like living is rehearsed over and over and over again.

The cross like directions of our lives are practiced. We give thanks for the gifts of God that sustain our lives - God's love for us – in food and drink. We remember how Jesus gave his body and his blood to prove the power of God's love – stronger than death. And we act it all out for ourselves ..... Servants...

Served by others who bring the bread and cup to us - and then – we - servants for others. A Christ-like vision for us. By which we are called to live in our time... Yes - refreshed here by the signs of God's love us - encircled by hope that such love brings - we can live into a vision of Christ for our time - servants of the living God. A poet said it all this way...

Be thou our vision, or lord of our hearts, be thou our wisdom and our true word, You our best thought by day or by night, waking or sleeping your presence Our light - Heart of our own hearts – whatever befall, still by our vision O ruler of all. Amen.

David W. Robertson, Pastor

Commissioning the Campaign Leadership Team  
Refreshed by faith – Encircled by Hope - We Seek to Secure Our Future

Friends in Christ - called to serve the cause of Christ here thru the life of OLCC,P, ten years ago we began the development of a Long Range Plan - and that led us – 4 years ago – to adopt a Master Plan – and to go forward with Phase I - Building the Faith Enrichment Center. We've been able to add space for music, education and community service – and to remodel areas for youth and adult education programs.

We knew what we were doing would be a challenge - and we planned carefully. And even though we did not know in 2005 what would happen in 2008 - we might have suspected something would occur.

In 1871 when the chapel was started – the worst financial crisis since the Civil War occurred. In 1973 when this Sanctuary was begun – it was on the heels of the last worst down turn. And now - as Yogi Berra said – it's da je vu all over again.

And – again – as before - we can and are trusting in God's grace – God gave us the vision - and we believe God will work through us - to provide for our needs. To help us finish well a work well begun by so many – we have asked Cargill Associates, and their consultant - The Rev. Dr. Scott McKenzie - with experience in guiding Churches doing what we're going to be doing - to work with us.

We've asked Scott to help us secure our future. – to help us free ourselves from as much of our mortgage – and free us for the arrival of new leadership and new ministries....

At Scott's direction we have begun to build a team to help carry out a vision for our future that we will be talking about at the INFOCUS workshop after worship. At this time I am pleased to introduce the current members of the leadership team.... And as I call them forward – I encourage you to consider how you might join them and help them, but also help ourselves in this vital effort. You can see in your bulletin some areas where additional leadership would be very helpful.

Now - our leadership team.

Serving as Co-Directors - Paul and Nancy Lachner, Steve and Sherry Orr, Mark and Becky Sassak, Mike and Brenda Starynchak. Serving in Communication - AnnaMaria Sala, Joanne Ewald, Mike Ray ... Serving in Support Services, Nina and Tom Linebaugh, Mary and Malcolm Pratt. In Children and Youth Activities – Ken and Stephanie Heft, In Hospitality – Mark and Kay Carpenter, In Spiritual Life, Paul and Bev Ayres, ... This group - and all of you who join them - will be sharing in an 80 day adventure in Vision and Prayer and Faith....

Let me now address these questions to the Team – and to you. ....Questions and Prayer....

I have asked Scott McKenzie to share words of greeting with us....