

Sermon: "Who is Jesus? -- Part 1:Life and Work " Lent 2, March 12th, 2017  
( Matthew 1: 18-25 ; Mark 7: 1-2, 17-30 )

Prayer: May the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts, be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, our strength and our redeemer. Amen .

1. Scan:

2. Two Engaging Questions:

a. I want to ask you a hard question this morning. .... Lent is a time of self reflection and for asking hard questions. .... How often do you think about "Who is Jesus for you?" .... Once a week when you come to church? .... Twice a year at Easter and Christmas? The two big celebrations in the church year that focus on Jesus birth, and his death and resurrection.

b. Then after that one I want you to ask yourself "Who is Jesus for you?" ... Is he a wise teacher? ..... Healer or doctor? .... A cute baby? .... "Who is Jesus for you?" .... And then share a bit of that with someone around you. .... Go. .... Please stop. .... **TY** ....

c. .... So what are some of your answers? ... "Who is Jesus to you?"

3. Give name/ Name of Presentation: I am Allan Warren

4. Acknowledgement:

5. W.Y.W.L & K.B.

Today you will:

- learn some background information about when the Gospels were written

- learn about someone else who was considered a saviour, who brought peace to the world.

- learn of a time when Jesus was challenged to face one of his own stereotypes, or beliefs he had inherited.

6. Message/ Info: (remember "suggestology")

How many of you knew, that Paul's letters in the New Testament are the earliest records we have for both Jesus and the church? .... **TY** .... As I mention regularly, in my funerals, the first followers of Jesus expected him to return to set up God's kingdom within their lifetime. Because of that, there was no need to write down the stories about Jesus because he's coming back tomorrow.

Would you like to hear what Paul has to say about Jesus birth? ... It is in Romans chapter 1:3, recognizing that Romans is Paul's Doctoral Thesis. He is near the end of his life. He's going to the church in Rome, that he did not found, and is sending this letter by way of introduction about what he believes after years of teaching and preaching through what is now Greece and Turkey.

Are you ready for it? ... "As to (Jesus) humanity, he was born a descendent of David; as to his divine holiness, he was shown with great power to be the Son of God by being raised from death." .... And that is it. .... That is all that Paul's writes about Jesus birth.

You see without the resurrection, Jesus was just another wise teacher or healer among many. A footnote in history. So it wasn't until 40 or 50, even up to 60 or 70 years after Jesus death that people started saying, "Hey, we better start writing down these stories we have of Jesus, before they are forgotten."

How many gospels are there? .. (4) .... **TY** .... Out of those 4 Gospels, how many include stories of Jesus birth? ... (Just 2. That's right.) .... **TY** .... Which 2? ... (Matthew & Luke). ....

Mark is believed to be the first Gospel written. ... As such, don't you find it interesting that Mark doesn't include any birth stories? ... Mark is the shortest, Coles Notes version, of Jesus life. Get to the point, which starts with Jesus' baptism and ministry.

How many of you were born, after one of your grandparents died? .... **TY** .... How much do you know about their "birth" stories? .... Come to think of it, how much do you know about the birth stories of the grandparents you did know? .... I

know for me it is next to nothing. I know a couple stories of my grandmother when she was a young girl in England, but nothing around the circumstances of when she was born.

So I think that is also true, when Matthew and Luke went to write down something about Jesus birth. They had a few sketchy facts, but they get them mixed up. Matthew mentions nothing about Nazareth until after returning from Egypt. Giving the impression that Joseph and Mary lived in Bethlehem before Jesus birth. Luke on the other hand has them in Nazareth, and going to Bethlehem for the census and then returning. ... So which is it?

For me these birth stories are more theological statements about who Jesus is for those who first believed in him.

He is a like a Star to follow in our lives like the Wise Men did. A Star that makes sense of and lightens the darkness we experience in the world when people like Herod slaughter all the children in Bethlehem right after Jesus' birth in the 2nd chapter of Matthew.

In Luke's Gospel, we are reminded that 'our king', is not one who was born or lives in a palace, far removed from us, but in a humble stable and understands our weakness and everyday life.

Did you know that Jesus is not the only person in history to have a virgin birth? .... Caesar Augustus, who ruled the Roman world when Jesus was born, was also know to have a divine birth and was also known as 'the saviour' of the world.

So the Matthew and Luke, were taking common terminology of the day, to point out to people that Jesus was a new kind of king. A new kind of saviour. ... Your king -- Augustus was a triumphant, military conquer. ... He defeated the warring factions within the Roman Empire and brought peace to the land. ... He rode victorious on a horse and obtained victory through power, bloodshed and violence and rewarded those loyal to him with money raised through taxes that he extracted from people in his empire. ... (Why did Mary and Joseph go to Bethlehem in Luke's Gospel? .... **TY** .... (Census, or to pay their taxes.) .. In other words, the same old, \_\_\_\_\_ (same old). .... **TY** ....

Jesus kingdom was very different. ... He was lowly. Rode in on a donkey. ... Lifted up the poor and lowly and also shed blood. His own, not someone else's, to remind people of God's overwhelming love and grace toward them. A different kind of king indeed.

All four of the Gospel's, try and explain, or give voice to, this different kind of "kingdom". ... You catch pieces of it, from our Gospel reading in Mark today.

Did anyone think about their favourite story of Jesus, this past week? ... What was it? .... (for me it is when Jesus calms the water .... faith in God can help to calm the storms of our lives) ....

There was a big disagreements inside Judaism in Jesus day. ... Not just Judaism but any religious faith. ... Can anyone remember any disagreements inside Christianity? ... (Protestants and Catholics, Communion ... actual body and blood of Jesus or is it a remembrance of Jesus death on the cross ... Baptism. Infants, or immersion as an adult. ... How we read the Bible. ... Is it the 'literal word of God' or is it of how God has been understood and perceived throughout history?). ...

In our passage from Mark today, you are catching a glimpse of a disagreement within Judaism. ... How do you access the sacred in your day to day life? .... Is it through a Holiness Code. .... Cleanliness laws. ... Which was the dominate theological understanding of the day. ... Read the whole beginning of Mark ch. 7. You realize there was a proper way to wash your hands. To wash cups and bowls and things you buy at the market. ... Remember the phrase "Cleanliness is next to \_\_\_\_\_ (Godliness)"

Jesus challenging this teaching, which is nothing new in Judaism. ... Remember the prophets. Isaiah, Amos, Hosea, ... All said there was something more important than ritual and sacrifice. ... Do you remember what it was? ... COMPASSION. .... (be kind to the poor, not cheating people, justice in the courts.)

Now the cleanliness in Jesus day didn't just include how you washed your hands, your bowls or food you bought in the market place, but it also extended to who you hung out with. People. ... Any guesses who was unclean? .... **TY** ....

(women -- couldn't talk to a women in public, .... tanners (blood, animal hides) ... today you might say garbage collectors .... people who were not particularly religious. ... Gentiles, or non-Jews, were also considered unclean.) .... Again, nothing new. ... *But welcoming them into the family, was. ....*

Do you remember the nationality of the women who came to Jesus begging that her daughter be healed? ... (Gentile, region of Phoenicia in Syria ... Also known as the Syro-Phoenician women) ... Was she part of the family of Israel? ... No? ... So was she clean or unclean? ... Unclean. ... Did she have a need? ... (Yes. Her daughter was ill.)

Her answer to Jesus statement, "It isn't right to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs", helped Jesus to see beyond the stereotypes of Jesus own upbringing. .... (Can you remember a time when some of your stereotypes where challenge?) ..... This encounter helped to opened Jesus eyes to see that God's love and compassion was not limited to race, religion or nationality and I will always appreciate Herbert O'Driscoll's who opened my eyes to this understanding of this story.

As time goes on, all organized religion tends to build walls, boundaries. Who is in and who is outside of God's love and grace. Who is clean and unclean. .... Yet in this passage, we see Jesus crossing boundaries of gender, race, religion. ... This women is described as a Gentile, born in the region of Phoenicia in Syria and yet, in the end, Jesus responds with mercy and compassion.

You see, if we can recognize that Jesus was awakened to the stereotypes in his upbringing, then maybe there is hope that we can too. ... Again, this was nothing new in Judaism, read the little book of Jonah and see what Jonah thinks of God being merciful and compassionate to the Ninivites, who were Israel's enemy. .... God's love is inclusive and stretches wide. .. We are all children of God. .... But it is something that *we all need* to be reminded of from time to.

If you continue on to the beginning of Mark chapter 8, you will see Jesus feeding the 4,000. ... Does that sound familiar? ... What is the other story of Jesus feeding a large number of people? .... (5,000). ... Well that story was an 'in house'

story. Teaching and healing people within the house of Israel. ... Fellow Jews. ... The feeding of the 4,000 is an 'out of house' story. .... Jesus teaching and healing in the territory of the Ten Towns which was predominately a Gentile area.

So through Jesus encounter with the Syro-Phoenician women, Jesus heart, eyes, mind is widened and he goes on to interact, teach and heal other Gentiles. .... In short, Jesus welcomes the previously considered unclean, into the family. ...

So "Who is Jesus?" .. Jesus is teacher, healer, .. and he is also one who questioned the dominate way God was understood in his day. .... Holiness Code. .... Be yea perfect, as I am perfect. .... to a new understanding of God whose prime characteristic wasn't holiness, .... but compassion. ... Be yea compassionate, generous, kind, gracious, inclusive, as I am compassionate. ....

Thanks be to God. Amen.

\*Hymn      #560 VU      "O Master, let me walk with Thee"