

“Jesus, You’re Still the One”
Rev. Bill Freeman
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Menifee United Church of Christ

A church is visited by a young family. Their young son stands outside the sanctuary of the church on Sunday morning, looking at some pictures on the wall. The pictures are of men in uniform. The young boy asks an usher, “Who are these people?” The usher says, “Oh, those are our young men who died in the service.” The boy looks shocked and asks, “Well, was that the morning service, or the evening service?”

Laughter helps us get through life. As far as I know, I’ve never killed anybody in a morning service or an evening service. I may have put some people to sleep, but I never killed anybody. Jesus never killed anybody either. Doctors heal bodies. Ministers soothe souls. Jesus did both. Jesus healed bodies and Jesus soothed souls. Those are a couple reasons why we consider Jesus the Messiah, the Christ, the Son of God. Although some people wonder who Jesus was exactly.

John the Baptist wondered who Jesus was. Now you might find that surprising because last week we talked about how John the Baptist was Jesus’ second cousin. Mary was pregnant with Jesus when Elizabeth was pregnant with John the Baptist. Mary and Elizabeth were first cousins, so Jesus and John the Baptist were second cousins. You’ll remember when Mary came in and saw Elizabeth and said “Hi” to Elizabeth, John the Baptist in Elizabeth’s womb leaped for joy. But now, thirty years later, John the Baptist isn’t a hundred percent sure who Jesus is. So he sends some of his people, according to the gospel of Matthew, chapter 11, to go ask Jesus, “Are you the One?” In other words, are you the one who is the Messiah? Are you the one who is the Christ? Are you the one who is the Son of God? Are you the one who’s come to teach us to love one another? Are you the one who’s come to teach us how to live in peace? Are you the one who has come to be our Lord and Savior? Jesus doesn’t answer them directly, but he says, “Tell them what you witnessed: the blind see, the lame walk, the deaf hear, the sick are made well, the dead are raised.” In other words, Jesus is saying, “Yes, I am the Messiah. Yes, I am the Christ. Yes, I am the Son of God. Yes, I am the One.”

Bills that were overdue prompted a woman to come to our church this past week looking for help. I gave her some money from our Pastor’s Fund. She was very grateful. She said we were the 34th church that she’s contacted, and we were the first church to help her. Now maybe those other 33 churches didn’t have a Pastor’s Fund. Maybe those other 33 churches didn’t have any money left in their Pastor’s Fund because it’s the Christmas season and people’s needs are great. Or maybe other churches can only help those who are members of their own church. I am so thankful that you support our Pastor’s Fund so that we can help someone like this lady this past week, because, if we didn’t, I don’t know what we’d call ourselves. I don’t think we could call ourselves the United Church of Christ, I think we’d have to call ourselves the United Church of – Who Knows. But because we follow Jesus, because we follow the Messiah, because we follow the Christ, because we follow the Son of God, we were able to help that woman and we must help people like that, I think, because I believe Jesus is the One.

Mary believed Jesus was the One. Martha probably did, too, but Martha was distracted with other things. According to the gospel of Luke, chapter 10, Martha invites Jesus to come to her home. So Jesus comes and sits at the table. People gather around him as he teaches and preaches. Mary, Martha’s sister, sits at Jesus’ feet, listening to Jesus. Martha, meanwhile, is scurrying around, maybe fixing dinner, maybe cleaning up. Martha always reminds me of Martha Stewart, scurrying around, doing things. I always wonder, if Martha Stewart had been named Mary Stewart, would she have turned out different? I’m not sure. Anyway, Martha is upset that Mary is just sitting there at Jesus’ feet, not doing anything. So Martha says to Jesus, “Jesus, tell my sister Mary to help me.” Jesus says, “Martha, Martha, you are too distracted by other things. You’re too much of a busybody. Mary has found out what is important, and I’m not going to take that from her.” Mary realized that Jesus is the Messiah, the Christ, the Son of God. Mary realized that Jesus is the One. Martha was too distracted.

The Christmas season causes us sometimes to be distracted. We act more like Martha than like Mary. We scurry around, worried that we’ll get the right bargain, worried that we’ll get the perfect price, worried that we’ll get the perfect sale. We’re too much like Martha. We’re worried that our Christmas tree will be just perfect, that our Christmas decorations will be just perfect, we’re worried that our Christmas presents will be just perfect. We’re too much like Martha. We need to be more like Mary. Mary knew the reason for the season. We need to be more like Mary and realize who we are and whose we are. We need to be more like Mary and realize that Christmas is about more than Christmas trees and Christmas decorations and Christmas dinner. We need to be more like Mary and recognize and remember who it is that’s the Messiah, who it is that’s the Christ, who it is that’s the Son of God. In other words, we need to be more like Mary and recognize the One.

Peter recognized that Jesus was the One, eventually. You'll remember that, right after Jesus was arrested, Peter denied Jesus three times, denied he even knew him, but then later, according to the gospel of John, chapter 21, Peter recognizes Jesus. The disciples are out on a boat, fishing. The resurrected Jesus is on the shore, but the disciples don't recognize him. The disciples are fishing, but they're not catching anything. Jesus says, "Put your net on the other side of the boat." So they do that and, all of a sudden, they haul in a ton of fish and then they recognize the resurrected Jesus on the shore. Peter is so excited that he jumps out of the boat and swims and comes to welcome Jesus. Jesus, you'll remember, asks Peter three times, "Do you love me?" And Peter says, "Yes, Lord, I love you." Then Jesus says, "Feed my sheep." Then Jesus asks him again, "Do you love me?" and Peter says, "Yes, Lord, I love you." And Jesus says, "Feed my sheep." Then he asks him a third time, "Do you love me?" Peter, by this time is getting a little exasperated and says, "Yes, Lord, I love you." And Jesus says, "Feed my lambs." Peter recognizes that Jesus is the Messiah, Jesus is the Christ, Jesus is the Son of God, Jesus is the One.

Jesus is the One, as far as I'm concerned. Jesus is my friend. My atheist friends would say that Jesus is my imaginary friend, but I don't believe that. I believe Jesus is real. I talk to Jesus in the middle of the day. I talk to Jesus in the middle of the night. Sometimes, and I know this is going to sound crazy, but sometimes I believe Jesus talks to me. He talks to me in my head. Sometimes he talks to me in my heart. When I listen to Jesus, and follow what he says, then things turn out pretty well. When I ignore Jesus, in my head or my heart, things turn out to be kind of problematic. But I believe Jesus is the One. Jesus is the Messiah. Jesus is the Christ. Jesus is the Son of God. It's what John the Baptist eventually recognized: that Jesus is the One, two thousand years ago. And now, two thousand years later, for me, Jesus is still the One.

Orleans had a hit song, years ago, that I believe kind of speaks to our topic today. Orleans was a soft rock group in the 70s and 80s. They had a song called "Still the One." Orleans sings, "You're still the one that makes me shout, still the one that I dream about. We're still having fun, and you're still the one." That's how I feel about Jesus. We're still having fun, and you're still the One.

What about you? Do you believe that Jesus is still the One? Do you have your doubts? Do you wonder, as John the Baptist wondered, whether Jesus is the One? Or do you believe, as Peter and Mary did, that Jesus is the One. I want to ask you a question that I think is very important: If we believe that Jesus is still the One for us, can we respect others who believe that, say, Mohammed is the one for them? Or that the Buddha is the one for them? Or that some other religious leader is the one for them? In other words, can we agree with the words of Kahlil Gibran. He wrote "The Prophet." Kahlil Gibran proclaims, "I love when you bow in your mosque, kneel in your temple, pray in your church, for you and I are sons and daughters of one religion, and that is The Spirit." I believe the Christmas Spirit tells us that we can believe that Jesus is still the One for us and yet at the same time respect those who believe that Mohammed is the One for them or the Buddha is the One for them or another religious leader is the One for them. In fact, I believe that we must all one day accept that idea if we're going to have peace on earth, goodwill toward all.

Let us pray:

God of love, help us to believe that Jesus is still the One.

Help us to help others believe that Jesus is still the One.

And help us to respect others who believe differently.

Now and forevermore,

By the power of the Holy Spirit,

And in the name of Jesus,

Amen.

*(This sermon was delivered without manuscript or notes
and was transcribed from a recording of it.)*