

“Following the Way of Jesus”

Philippians 2:1-15

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Fortunately, my daughter is at college and so she will not hear me tell this story about her. When we had first moved to Clarendon Hills, the last church that I served, Annie had been of course going to Sunday School in the Preschool classes at our church in Oregon, but this was the first time that she had official Sunday School. At the grand old age of five years old, she went to her first Sunday School class on a beautiful morning in September and when she came out of class, my husband, her father, asked her how Sunday School was. She said, “Jesus, Jesus, Jesus! All we talked about was Jesus! When are we going to do some math?”

The fact is, these days, I wonder whether we talk about Jesus quite enough. We get hung up on the question of what happens to people who don’t believe in Jesus – which I explored earlier this year in some depth in a sermon on other religions (February 8, 2009, found on [www.firstchurchlf.org](http://www.firstchurchlf.org)). I suggested that the Bible doesn’t speak with one voice on the matter, which makes it complicated. In the book of Acts, Peter says “There is salvation in no one else [but Jesus Christ], for there is no name under heaven ... by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). But the Bible also records that “God will treat every person with perfect love and justice” (Job 34:10, cited in Clendenin), and that God “makes his sun rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous” (5:45). God is not only *our* God, Scripture tells us, but the God of “the whole human family” (Ephesians 1:14-15, Dan Clendenin, [journeywithjesus.net/Essays](http://journeywithjesus.net/Essays), 7/24/06).

Nevertheless, Jesus Christ is the unique and ultimate way God extends his love to the world. Through Jesus, St. Paul tells us, God intends to “reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven” (Col. 1:20 and Eph. 1:10); and “The whole creation will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God” (Romans 8:21); even Peter anticipates the “universal restoration of all things” (Acts 3:21). And the writer of I John (2:2) reassures us that Christ is the atoning sacrifice not only for Christians “but for

the entire cosmos” (citations provided in part by Clendenin 7/24/06 and 5/1/06).

How do these two truths fit together -- the universal love of God and the particularity of Jesus Christ? The great evangelical author and Oxford University professor C.S. Lewis said it best:

“Is it not frightfully unfair that this new life should be confined to people who have heard of Christ and been able to believe in Him? But the truth is God has not told us what His arrangements about the other people are. We do know that no man can be saved except through Christ; we do not know that only those who know Him can be saved through Him” (*Mere Christianity*, cited in Clendenin 5/1/06).

Is everyone saved? Fortunately, that is not ours to decide; it is only the decision of our sovereign God. But as Scripture says, “Nothing is impossible with God” (Matthew 19:26; Luke 1:37).

Yet that still begs the question for *us* ... for us who profess Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior. What does it mean for *us* to claim him as Lord? What does it mean for *us* to call him our Savior? What difference does it make for us to promise that we’ll follow him? This morning – when the young people confirm their vows of faith at our 9:00 service, and our elected officers, elders and deacons, make their vows of ordination at 11:00 – this morning is spectacularly fitting to ask what it means for us to follow Jesus Christ, and to profess him as Lord and Savior.

First let me ask, what does it mean that we call Jesus Lord? One of the problems we have these days is that “Lord” is not a word that we use very often. It comes to us from another time and place when there was a hierarchy of land owners and non-land owners -- of those who through birth or through the emperor had power over those who were under them -- and those under had to call the one above them “lord”. We don’t do that anymore, thanks be to God, here in this country. So if we don’t know what it means to think about a

“lord”, what other analogies might we use to explore what it means when we call Jesus Lord?

I want to explore an analogy - perhaps not a perfect analogy, but one that works a bit for me: what it means for us to have “bosses” and for us to have “teachers”. The first thing when we have someone over us (as a “lord”, as a boss, as a teacher), is that we have to know not what *we* want out of what we do. We need to know what the boss or the teacher wants, what the deliverables are. We have to know the syllabus and what the grading scale is. We have to know, if we are employed, what our quantifiable objectives will be in order for us to get raises, or this year, even to have employment at all.

Where would you find what it means for us to look to Jesus, as our Lord, as our teacher, as our boss, to find out what His desires are for our deliverables? To find out what His grading scale will be for the homework of our life that we turn in? Of course, we look first and foremost to the Bible. For those confirmation class members who grew up in this church, I will remind you that you received a Bible at kindergarten and you received another Bible in third grade, and if you don't know where it is, I suggest that today might be a good day to find it! You can't know what Jesus wants for your life unless you know what he says. So go for it. Read it. Pick it up and open it. And I invite you to be a great example for your parents too, who no doubt have a Bible somewhere in your house. I invite all you parents to find yours too. Find out what Jesus thinks about what the deliverables are.

At the very least, if you can't remember anything else about what he said, remember this: keep “the company slogan” in mind: Jesus taught us most of all to love the Lord your God with all your heart and mind and soul and strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself. These are the things that you have to know for the test at the end of the year. These are the things on which you will be graded: how well you've loved the Lord your God, how well you've loved your neighbor as yourself - even the neighbor, and the kid, and the co-worker that you can't stand, maybe, especially, the ones you can't

stand. You know, the “love your enemy business”. That’s the first thing, know what Jesus wants. Jesus is Lord.

Secondly, if Jesus is your Lord, then, you have to remember to whom you are accountable. We, in this country especially, think of ourselves as free agents. We’re accountable only to ourselves. Yes, liberty and individual freedom are precious commodities indeed, worth spending your life for. But there is a higher power than ourselves to whom we are accountable. To forget that we have a Lord, who desires particular things of us, is to forget what the greatest purpose of life is.

Which leads us to our next question: what does it mean to profess Jesus Christ as Savior? Again, this is not a concept we traffic in much anymore ... in part perhaps because we are so self-sufficient that we don’t think much about needing to be saved from anything. So let’s ask it another way: Jesus saves us, but he saves us from what? A century ago, the answer might have simply been, he saves us from eternal damnation, which is still a pretty good statement.

But he saves us from more than what happens after this life is over. He saves us from squandering our life right now. Those of you who are being confirmed today are entering into adulthood in an age of self-absorbed narcissism. Jesus saves us by asking us to give ourselves to something bigger – like caring for the creation God made, or making sure children don’t go hungry. Jesus saves us from materialism by pressing us to care more about people than things. Jesus saves us from the pointless squandering of our lives on empty striving that in the end doesn’t matter – like just what our SAT scores were, or how much we earn in a year – and calls us to compete for better things, like how well we loved, or how capably we used our God-given gifts to make the world a better place. Jesus saves us from the fears that threaten to collapse our courage. Jesus saves us from the question marks that dot our lives, and angry issues that won’t go away. Jesus saves us from the sins that plague us in our own hearts or those that assault us from beyond.

Yes, Jesus saves us from eternal hell ... and he saves us from hell on earth too. He gives us a meaning in life that is so much richer than anything else we can find here. He gives our lives meaning and purpose and hope.

In a few minutes, we will stand and profess our faith once more, using the words that people who have trusted Jesus have used now for two millennia: “I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord.” I invite you, especially you, our confirmation class, that when you rise and say that, you might see it not only as an obligation but a gift, that Jesus is your Lord to whom you are accountable above all else; that Jesus is your Savior who gives you joyful, purposeful meaning for your life right now.

“Jesus, Jesus, Jesus, all we ever talk about is Jesus!” Maybe not as much as we should, but if we start to talk about him more, I suspect that we could do worse. Amen.