
Do you know you have been saved? Do you know when you were saved? Did Jesus die for your sins?

(Such questions resonate with Choir Director Mark Cain as it touches his deep Baptist roots...and yet causes some consternation among some of us Presbyterians...as we are sure we have been saved, but not clear of the precise time, place, and location.) In order to set us all straight - - there is one date that applies to all of us - - AD 33...the resurrection of Jesus Christ was when you and I and the whole world were saved. That first Easter morning was the day of my salvation. So, if you are ever asked that question, here is your answer.

But in reading in John's Gospel today, we have not quite arrived at that point of the story - - the resurrection of Christ. We are just at the start of this Jesus story...being the Messiah and the Anointed One. There is a long story to be told ahead of us. And yet, John the Baptizer, makes some rather bold declarations:

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| <i>Here is the Lamb of God</i> | vs. 29 |
| <i>Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world</i> | vs. 29 |
| <i>I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove</i> | vs. 32 |
| <i>This is the Son of God</i> | vs. 34 |
| <i>Look, here is the Lamb of God</i> | vs. 35 |

John was very clear and John was very bold: This is the one! He is the Messiah! He is the Son of God!

While most of us do not disagree, we are not necessarily so blatant, bold, and authoritative. We are turned off by people who know what God wants to happen in their life. We do not feel comfortable with folks who treat Jesus like their best buddy. We get antsy when people call on Jesus as if he is their servant and guide. We are turned off by some Christian's apparent arrogance of knowing without question what Jesus will or will not do!

And yet, if we are completely honest - - we are a bit envious of that assurance, of that spiritual confidence, of that clarification of Christians in the steadfastness of their faith. So, we get caught - - is it arrogance that John displayed or is it the appropriate way for Christians to be?

Reading further in the passage, we see yet another way persons come to know Jesus. We read about two of John's disciples who followed Jesus and inquired of Jesus, "where are you staying?" a pretty simple and innocuous question. Yet, it was not a question of geography, it was a question of presence.

Note verse 39: "they came and saw where he was staying, and they remained with him that day."

"They remained with him..." It was not a question of location, but of relationship. Not about what we do, but about who Jesus is...not about doing something, but about being with the One.

Being a disciple of Jesus Christ, which these two, Andrew and Simon became, was not about accomplishing something, passing a test, or even knowing something. Being a disciple was about remaining with Jesus. Abiding in Jesus. Knowing Jesus personally. Becoming comfortable in the presence and relationship with Jesus.

It is a different approach to being a disciple of Christ or the Body of Christ. And in this passage, the Greek for *remain* is used several times. Here in verse 39 as well as verses 32 and 33. In those two verses, the content is about the Holy Spirit descending on Jesus and remaining on him.

What about remaining with Jesus as our way of being called to discipleship? It really goes against our grain...to remain, to be, to absorb, to be still, to know God. It goes beyond the tasks, beyond the goals, beyond the objectives, beyond the business by objectives which we have come to know in the church.

I remember as a young pastor serving two small churches of 35 and 13 members in Southwest Georgia. In that ministry, I did a lot of "remaining" with members. Ms. Jennie and Ms. Verlin were two folks I visited regularly. I would go see Ms. Jennie often and would arrive at the wrong time because she was watching her "soaps." And I had to wait until they were over before we could visit...so I remained and watched soaps. After four years of sound theological training at Union Theological Seminary, I was watching soap operas in South Georgia.

But Ms. Verlin was the another person I would visit regularly. She made the most gosh awful instant sweet tea that I would sit and drink...almost like syrup. And I wondered...4 years of theological training for this?

Not to mention gnats and boiled peanuts that I had to endure. Then, about 2 or 3 years into this 'exile experience' as I would label it - - saying I was on the mission field in South Georgia - - people like Verlin and Jennie began to open up and share things that I may be the only person they

ever confided in. Our relationship deepened and I was privileged to enter portions of their lives that may have been off limits even to family members.

All because I remained...through soap operas and horrendous ice tea...they opened up. Now, let's be real clear - - I did not have a soap opera or ice tea pastoral strategy. I did not know any better and Union Seminary did not teach me about such challenges of ministry. Yet God did...throwing me into those experiences so I could experience God's Spirit at work...for it was not me - - as I resisted and tried to figure out all kinds of ways to avoid 'remaining and being.' I wanted to do!

These new disciples, Andrew and Simon, remained with Jesus and I believe are inviting us to take that same approach. To be still with Jesus and get to know him...how he ticks, what is important to him, what he believes, how his life holds together, what is special for him. And maybe that is what we are hungry for...to remain with Jesus.

Your church officers for the past year have been working on mission, vision, and priorities. They will be rolling those ideas out to you in the next month or so and as I have heard the discussion and conversation; they resonate with this notion of remaining with Jesus. While there may be some new programs and activities, there is a strong desire *to be* rather than *to do*. There is a desire to know one another, to support one another, to empower one another, to remain with one another, as we all grow in our faith.

To be a disciple of Jesus is to remain with Jesus in order to come to know him. To be with him watching soap operas and drinking syrupy ice tea in order to be in relationship with Christ as well as in relationship with one another.

This morning, we ordain and install the church officers of this congregation. They will officially be installed and ordained. They will answer in the appropriate manner the questions for ordination and installation. But beyond all of these official actions will be the overarching question, "Will you remain with Jesus?" Will you walk with our Lord? Will you listen to our Lord? Will you let our Lord lead you as you lead the people of God?

We are in a time in the church's history where all the organizational structures of the past are not feeding people. We are in a time when the critical piece is people to people...remaining with Jesus and remaining with one another. We may not get a complete report finished with all the official votes and actions of the Session in Session meetings. But we will be there - - for one another and with Christ. For this reason, many are called and few chosen. Choosing to be with Christ...regardless