



# Hear the Word

from Pastor James N. McEachran



Gather... Encourage... Equip... Send...

## Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost

October 22, 2017

### Whose Image?

Matthew 22:15-22

A moment of silence and words of prayer...

"Build us up, Lord, to be your servant people in the world. Under the image of the Cross we live forgiven, renewed, and kept forever in Christ, Amen."

You have the Gospel Reading before you, fresh to memory and one you have read/heard before. How would you preach it? What might be your points in a world that often says "Never discuss politics and/or religion?" Often seen as a point of controversy, conflict, argument from one point of view to another. Yet, in the first three gospels, this account seems to break that advice. What are we to make of it?

### 1. Conversion to Commitment: Daily Renewal in Mission. (Mission Statement/Joshua Process)

Matthew, 40 years after Jesus' resurrection, has been about the work of recording the life and ministry of Jesus. How this teacher from Nazareth began to build a community around him; a disciple-core who listened and watched their lives change around Jesus.

At each turn, He called them to see their lives as not separate but deeply connected; not locked in their own paths of life, but in an engrafted and engaged way of life that was highlighted by confident faith that they were moving through conversion ("Follow me," Jesus said, and they did!) to commitment (Take up your cross and follow me," Jesus said, and they were beginning to get the truth that meant mission---a place to go and someone to go with them.) Often called "the communion of saints," friends of the Lord who walk with each other.

These past weeks, in the Gospel Readings, they have been moving ever closer to Jerusalem. And they were beginning to find the answer to the question we are called to ask each day:

"Who is this Jesus?

Who is Jesus Christ for us today?" (Bonhoeffer)

## 2. A to Z and Alpha and Omega: Who is this Jesus?

The one they had first thought to be a Teacher, a Rabbi, was becoming so much more as he taught with authority, the ring of truth in His words, and actions which became a power unseen through miracles of healing. Sight and sound and mobility, and a raising or two from the dead!

PIVOT POINT --- Along the way, the storm clouds began to appear. Oh, there were glimpses of heavenly power with storms stilled and three of them went up a mountain with him and heard the words from heaven, "This is my beloved Son. Listen to Him!" But, the words they shared as they walked with Him were exchanged in the face of a growing resistance from the religious leaders. As early as the 12<sup>th</sup> chapter, the news becomes foreboding as he heals a man on the Sabbath. Breaking News: "But the Pharisees went out and took counsel against him, how to destroy him." (Matthew 12:14 RSV)

On the pathway of discipleship, Peter confesses that "Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God." And Jesus begins to teach what that will mean, three times speaking of his death, resurrection, and second coming. Truth deepening that this Jesus is so much more than the new teacher; He is the One who one day would be (and is) confessed as the A to Z, Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end of all who would united us with God and one another.

Then, they enter Jerusalem, the Sunday we call "Palm" and the crowds cry out "Hosanna, (save us) to the Son of David." Which marks Him as a threat to both the religious establishment centered in the Temple and the Romans who rule this province called "Palestine."

He cleanses the Temple and the interrogations begin through a series of questions. The first about His source of authority and, then, the toughest of all because it probably wasn't very wise to talk about religion and politics!

First, the questioners were sent by the Pharisee through their minions and followers of the party of Herod who were deeply intertwined with Rome:

- ✠ Compliments notwithstanding, the question is a landmine: "Lawful to pay taxes to the emperor?"
- ✠ Here is the setting: He has cleansed the Temple, tossed out the sales booths and money changers. Not a bunch of happy priests. And He came into the city with cheering crowds ("Son of David") which would have seemed to be a political threat to Rome. How to answer? Darned if you do and darned if you don't!
- ✠ The question was driven by the poll tax. Among other taxes the money, the imperial tax, a day's wage, to support the Roman colonizers. A coin of Rome!

Jesus' response is pure genius. What else might you expect from the Son of God☺

- ✠ He gets it: "Hypocrites, why put me to the test?"
- ✠ "Show me the coin." He saw it. "Whose image? What icon? What title?"
- ✠ "Caesar's." Either answer was death for Jesus: he either betrays his people or declares war on Rome.
- ✠ "Well, then, give back to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what belongs to God." He did not establish two kingdoms, but gave a clear path to remember the image of the state is not on us in ownership; we are in the "image of God" and bear the image of the Cross in our lives of discipleship as the people of God, the Body of Christ in the world.
- ✠ And this Jesus is the true image of God who died for us, lives for us, and through us that others might know they too are forgiven and set free to serve!

### 3. The Holy Spirit Builds and Guides the Church.

Those who heard the answer marveled, taken back, left him and went away. While He continued to teach, to heal, the plot sickens as they continue to find a way to kill Jesus, get Him gone, and kill his movement too.

Here is the direction of the truth of engagement in the world. This much, we are created in the image of God, the sons of daughters God who also bear the image of God as those baptized into the death of Christ and raised to serve, in peace, under the sign of the Cross.

The Holy Spirit builds us up and guides the Church, "the holy universal (catholic) Church, the communion of saints" in which we are reminded of the image of God in all humanity and the image of the Cross that makes all things new and sends us to be Christ to others loving and forgiving, serving and caring until He comes again.

What does that look like today? It becomes a people who know Jesus as Lord, Savior, and Friend. It evolves into a community of the Beloved which witness to Christ and invite people into the fellowship of the redeemed. It means a people open to change and to be changed by the Holy Spirit that change might touch every place we are found as the Body of Christ in the world.

Paul got that...in what may have been his first letter, to a people who were committed to simply wait until Jesus' return, he called them to remember that they were to live "a work of faith" AND "a labor of love." In more modern terms, to walk their talk!

**A WORK OF FAITH:** To grow in Christ. Where is your Bible today? How is your prayer life? Where are you committing to a deep walk and to be discipleFit? To be with faith mentors and to be "imitators" of those whose lives are strength and power to us as we are built up to be the Body of Christ.

**A LABOR OF LOVE:** Bearing the image of God and signed by the Cross to be known as a servant community whose stewardship is known as a workshop for the Holy Spirit.

PLU Professor, Dr. Sam Torvend, was here yesterday teaching on Luther and the hungry poor. The core teaching: Once we know and confess who Jesus is, where does grace alone become active faith and love in the community?

He taught that once the monasteries were emptied, the place where human needs were met were gone; no refuge for the hungry, the homeless, the sick. In his Church Orders, Luther directed that every congregation work with the government of the city and region (Church and State!) to keep a Common Chest in which were deposited a coin of tax and a coin of offering. It was administered by 10 elders from every class. At the end of each worship service, funds were distributed to meet the needs of both congregation and community.

In the time of sharing, it came to me that our **congregation is a Common Chest** of service in the name of Jesus! That all might know the name of Jesus and walk in His ways.

Dr. Torvend taught that the center of the Eucharistic Meal, the Table of the Lord, and place of Thanksgiving is the launching pad for thanks-living in the world. That becomes a place of steadfastness in hope not by word alone, but that by the power of the Holy Spirit all might know and bear the image of the Cross in loving service.

It is the image of Cross we bear to share, in Jesus' name, Amen.