**Who Is Jesus?**

**Luke 3:15-17, 21-22**

Thought for Meditation:

We have created a culture in which Christians tend to see Jesus as a sort of static mechanism by which salvation is secured rather than the full embodiment of God’s will for the world whose life and teachings we are called to emulate and follow.

Basically, we believe that Jesus died to save us from our sins, but we haven’t yet embraced the reality that Jesus also lived to save us from our sins.  *Rachel Held Evans*

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Last week I started a class on C.S. Lewis, the author of the Chronicles of Narnia. I want to share with you a reading from the fifth book of the Chronicles, “”The Horse and His Boy.” It is a story about a horse named Bree and a young boy named Shasta. As the story opens Shasta is an orphan. He is living with an abusive man who treats him as a slave. Shasta meets Bree, a talking horse, who is also in a bad situation. They decide to run away and head toward the land of Narnia. As they travel they meet up with a young princess and her talking horse, Aravis and Hwin. They go through a series of adventures as they travel toward Narnia.

They discover that an evil army is also going toward Narnia, to attack it and make all the Narnians slaves. The four run-aways race ahead to warn the king. They get to a hermits house, just outside of Narnia. Shasta is the only one who can go on. Aravis has been badly injured and the two horses are completely exhausted. Shasta gets another horse and goes on to warn the king. The king and his hunting party race back to Narnia, leaving Shasta behind. He is in the mountains; cold, tired, hungry and afraid. He begins to feel sorry for himself. Let me read to you what happens. *(Read p 155-157)*

I won’t give you the rest of the story. You’ll need to come to our class to hear what happens next, or read the book on your own. I will tell you that the mysterious creature with Shasta is Aslan, the great Lion, who is the Christ figure in the Chronicles of Narnia. I tell you this story because I believe that Shasta’s question, “Who are you?” is a question that we all ask. We have just finished the Christmas season. Who is this little baby at the center of Christmas? Who is this child who has touched our lives? That is the central question of the Christian faith. Let’s look at our Scripture lesson this morning and see what it tells us about Jesus.

The first part of the passage is about John the Baptist. When he started his ministry people were excited. They hadn’t seen anything like him in four or five hundred years. He spoke like one of the Old Testament prophets, which he was. He spoke with power and with passion, calling people to repentance. People flocked to hear his message. They began to wonder if maybe John might be the long-awaited Messiah, the one who would deliver Israel.

When John realized that this is what people were thinking he made it very clear that he was **not** the Messiah. “You’ve got to be kidding. I’m not even good enough to untie the Messiah’s shoes!” Remember, in Middle Eastern culture feet were the most disgusting part of the body. Untying someone’s shoes was a job that no Jew would ever be expected to do, not even a Jewish slave. John tells us that the Messiah was so powerful and so great that he wasn’t even good enough to touch the Messiah’s feet.

The first thing we learn about Jesus, from Jon the Baptist, is that Jesus is powerful and worthy. There is a story in the gospel of John that makes this obvious. Jesus was in the Garden of Gethsemane with his disciples. Judas, who betrayed Jesus, arrived at the garden with a detachment of Roman soldiers and Jewish temple police. There were 200 – 250 of the meanest and most violent men in Palestine.

There was no way Jesus could escape. Instead he stepped forward and asked, “Who are you looking for?” They responded, “We’re looking for Jesus of Nazareth.” Jesus said, “Here I am. Come and take me.” At that point John tells us that all of the Roman soldiers and all of the Jewish temple police stepped back and fell to the ground in fear. Imagine 200 U.S. Marines, Navy Seals and Army Rangers trying to capture one person. That person steps forward and says “I’m right here.” All the soldiers collapse in fear. That is how powerful Jesus is.

John the Baptist describes Jesus as a man of great power. He will baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire. He is the one who will judge the earth. He will separate the wheat from the chaff and will burn the chaff.

I have a sense that this image of a powerful Jesus is very different than the most common image of Jesus in our culture and even in our churches. At Christmas we sing songs about a helpless little baby. We imagine Jesus as an adult being meek and mild. He never raises his voice. He never gets angry. He is a nice man. He would never speak harshly to anyone or confront someone with sin. He accepts us just as we are and doesn’t care what we do or how we act.

We ignore, or forget, that Jesus got angry and turned over the tables of the money changers in the Temple. Jesus condemned the Pharisees and called them hypocrites. Jesus challenged the conservatives and liberals of his day, and our day. Jesus was and is the Lord of the universe who will someday judge us and all of our sin. Jesus loves us more than we will ever know. But that doesn’t mean that he is weak or timid. Jesus is the most compassionate and loving person we will ever know. He also the most powerful person who ever lived on the earth. He is a man of unsurpassed power and greatness, a man whose presence alone can knock down a whole army just by saying, “Here I am.”

There is a second lesson about Jesus that comes out of our passage. As Jon baptizes people Jesus comes to him to be baptized. After Jesus is baptized God spoke to Jesus. “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased” (Luke 3:22). At his baptism we learn that Jesus is not only the greatest and most powerful man who ever lived, he is also God’s beloved son.

I once read a story about a missionary who was working with a very primitive tribe in an undeveloped country. He told people all the stories about Jesus. He talked about our sinfulness and separation from God. He talked about Jesus death on the cross and the resurrection. For several years he lived with the people and proclaimed the good news of Jesus. No one became a Christian.

Finally, he made a discovery that changed everything. The tribe he was working with was at war with another tribe. The king of this missionary’s tribe wanted to make peace with the other tribe. He sent a messenger to the other tribe, to talk about peace. But he didn’t send just anybody as his messenger. Most messengers would not be taken seriously. In that culture, if you wanted someone to take you seriously you sent your son. The king sent his beloved son to the other tribe to work for peace.

When the missionary learned this he talked about Jesus as God’s Son. God sent his son into our world because God wanted to make peace with us. God wanted a relationship with us. When the missionary described Jesus that way many of tribe members responded and became Christians. The truth that won the tribe to Christ was that Jesus is the Son of God.

Jesus has many names and titles. He is the Christ, the Prince of Peace and the King of Kings. He is the Righteous Judge, Savior and Lord. At the center of his identity Jesus is God’s Son. God so loved the world that he didn’t send a committee, or another prophet, or a warrior. God sent his Son into the world that we might be saved.

Shasta asked the basic question of faith, “Who are you?” That is the question we must all ask. Who is Jesus for you?

That is the end of the sermon, at least how I wrote it earlier this week. As I’ve been working on this sermon I’ve had a sense that there was something more I needed to say. The end of the sermon just didn’t feel like it came together. This morning I came in here to pray, and had one more thought I wanted to share with you.

The question, “Who is Jesus?” is not an academic question. It isn’t a question that you need to learn the right answer so you can pass the test, and then forget about it. That is how I got through college – learn the information, answer the questions on the test, and then forget about the information. I’m good at that, but that isn’t what this question is all about.

“Who is Jesus?” is a question of a relationship, the relationship that we have with God through Jesus Christ. As with any relationship it grows and changes. Who Jesus is different for a 6-year-old and a 16-year-old and a 60-year-old. In my own life sometimes that relationship is a frustration that causes me to struggle. Other times it is a relationship that brings great joy, peace and hope.

Since the question, “Who is Jesus?” is about a relationship; it is a question that you will need to keep asking throughout your life. I invite you today, throughout this week, and for the rest of your life to as the question. “Who is Jesus for you?”