

Telling the Story of Jesus: The Light of Christ in Luke

Charlie Brown and Lucy and Linus are lying on the ground, looking up into the sky. Lucy says, "If you use your imagination, you can see lots of things in the cloud formations. What do you think you see, Linus?" Linus responds, "Well, those clouds up there look like the map of the British Honduras on the Caribbean. And that cloud looks a little like the profile of Thomas Eakins, the famous painter and sculptor. And that group of clouds over there gives me the impression of the stoning of Stephen. I can see the Apostle Paul standing here to one side."

Lucy congratulates him, "Uh huh, that's very good. What do you see in the clouds, Charlie Brown?" Charlie Brown replies, "Well, I was going to say I saw a ducky and a horsie, but I changed my mind."

What do you see when you look up at Jesus? Epiphany is a season of light that reveals the truth of who Jesus is. Last week Pastor Sara kicked off our new series for the Epiphany season by looking at Jesus as Matthew glimpses the light of His presence. Today as we celebrate the Baptism of Jesus, we will consider the perspective of Luke as he tells us about Jesus.

Luke is a physician, a doctor, a man of integrity and intelligence who pulled together all the pertinent facts he could obtain and set them before us in an orderly account so that we, along with Theophilus may know the certainty of the things we were taught.

Luke wants us to see the genuine humanity of Jesus. His description of Jesus birth and his childhood are more detailed than the other Gospel writers. Luke shows us Jesus as a compassionate Savior of the world. His love and compassion are for all people: rich and poor, Jew and Gentile, the marginalized and those in power, the oppressed and those who are affirmed. He is a friend of outcasts. Jesus is one to whom the social boundaries of polite society were irrelevant, but he is relevant to people from all backgrounds. Luke focuses more than any other Gospel writer on the important roles of women as his followers.

Luke sees Jesus as a teacher who both proclaims and demonstrates Grace. The parables of the Prodigal Son and the Good Samaritan are found only in Luke's Gospel. While focusing on the uniqueness of Jesus Luke also helps us to see Jesus as fully connected to his Jewish roots and the Temple. He is God's anointed one, the Messiah, the Christ. Jesus is the fulfillment of all that God promised to his people and to the entire world in the Old Testament. Luke traces the lineage of Jesus back to Adam to remind us of the universal scope of his ministry and the salvation he brings is for the entire world. In the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, the Kingdom of Heaven breaks into our world.

No one can read the Gospel of Luke and miss his focus on Jesus as divine, the Son of the Most High God. Luke exposes the miracles connected with Jesus from the angelic announcement of his birth to his post resurrection appearances. There are more miracles in Luke than any other Gospel and an equally dominant focus on the work of the Holy Spirit. Jesus is one in whom the Holy Spirit dwells fully. Jesus is led, empowered and affirmed by that same Spirit. His miracles

bear witness to his tenderness, compassion and care. His greatest miracle of all is that he broke the power of death, the greatest oppressor, the final enemy, through his resurrection. Luke wants us to be certain of the living, Lord Jesus, whose work of seeking and saving the lost continues in the ministry of His Church. Luke writes in Acts 2:3 “Jesus showed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen by them for forty days.”

Luke’s work in both his Gospel and the book of Acts provide us with the most complete description of the process of discipleship than any other Gospel. The goal of Christian faith is following Jesus, by loving Him, serving Him by serving others and by being obedient to all that he has commanded. That is a perfect transition into the Gospel lesson for today, Luke’s account of the baptism of Jesus. I want to make just two important points.

In her famous book and film, “The Hiding Place” Corrie ten Boom tells the story of her family who had a heart for the Jewish people but were ultimately sent to a concentration camp for helping Jews to escape the persecution of the Nazis. Corrie tells an interesting story about her father Caspar ten Boon. When the Jews were forced to wear the “Star of David,” Casper lined up for one. He wore it because he wanted to identify himself with the people for whom he and his family had been praying. He was prepared to be so completely identified with the Jews that he was willing to wear a sign of shame and suffer persecution for the sake of the people he loved. He didn’t have to wear the Star but chose to.

Jesus was baptized, as Luke describes it, not because it was necessary for him, but because it was essential for us. He did it because he chose to identify with us just as Caspar ten Boom wore the Star of David to identify with the Jews. And Jesus’ baptism was a prefiguring of the Cross of shame which was to come. The Cross on which Jesus would so identify with the human race that he took the penalty of our sins on himself. The writer of the book of Hebrews brings even more clarity to Jesus baptism. (4:15-16) “For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are--yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.” Jesus has identified so completely with us that we can approach Him totally confident that He will understand us and that He is interested in all we do in our lives.

Baptism is not an insurance policy to heaven, but our boarding pass to a lifetime with Jesus. Baptism begins a relationship with Jesus which is nourished, feed, strengthen, enriched and kept alive by faithfully availing one’s self to God’s means of grace, the word and the sacraments and in the faithful presence of a community of disciples. Jesus is not watching from a distance but joins us on the road of our pilgrimage through life and he is interested in all aspects of our lives – our joys and sorrows, our successes and failures.

The second and final point I want to make today has to do with one other element of Jesus baptismal experience. There is a point of divine affirmation. Jesus is praying and the God of all creation opens the heavens and the Holy Spirit descends on Jesus in the form of a dove. And God speaks from heaven, “You are my beloved Son, with you I am well pleased.”

Too often we as human beings seek outward affirmation from those around us. While there is nothing wrong with being liked or thought well of, there is a danger in putting too much value in the affirmation of others. As humans, we are relational beings and it is natural to want to connect with others and not only connect but connect in a positive way. But the issue is do we allow our earthly connectedness to supersede our heavenly connectedness?

Imagine this powerful affirmation. While no human can ever truly understand the mind of God, perhaps we can begin to imagine why the Father showed up in this way. Could it be that God knew that there would be some who would encounter Jesus but reject His ministry? Perhaps it was a sign to remind Jesus that he was not forgotten but an ever vigilant Father was affirming the work that he had begun and would continue to do. Maybe it was a sign for humanity to love what the Father loved, his son and that none of us can accomplish God's will for our lives without His presence, encouragement and affirmation.

While we can never be certain as to the reason the Father showed up in the way He chose, we can be certain as we look at the life and ministry of Jesus, it served His intended purpose. After His baptism Jesus continued to carry out God's plan for humanity with precision and assurance even when confronted by adversaries both human and satanic. Regardless of his opposition, Jesus did not allow anything to deter him from completing his task in this life. And we are all indebted to him with our lives for what he accomplished for us in His life, death and resurrection.

Those who say it was easy for Jesus to do what he did because he was divine miss the weight of his humanity. In this life He faced all that you and I face. He dealt with any issue that you and I have or will ever have to encounter. Jesus led others by showing them what it was like to obediently follow the will of the Father. He commanded his disciples as one who followed the commands of His Father. Luke tells us that God was so pleased that the Father affirmed Jesus before those who needed to hear the affirmation.

Two weeks ago our officiating crew was being evaluated by a veteran collegiate observer at a High School basketball game. During my pregame I reminded the other less experienced officials of one of my early mentors in officiating, Sam DiBlasi. Sam told me lose the rabbit ears or get out of officiating. I was not there to please the fans. Sam's wisdom was "no matter what call you make half the people are going to love you and half the people are going to hate you. And the next call you make the people that love you will hate you and the people that hate you will love you. If you can't look past all of that get out of officiating." He added, "There is only one opinion in the stands that really matters and that is mine. I understand why you are here and what you are supposed to do. It's only my evaluation that makes a difference."

I think Sam's words are important for anyone in leadership and especially those who are called to pastoral ministry. To both those who love me and to those who despise me because we disagree and have gone so far as to equate my leadership to that of a conservative cultic leader, like Jim Jones. Know that I love you all but I am not as concerned about your affirmation or your condemnation as I am about pleasing the One who knows why He sent me and what He has called me to do.

We all have family, friends, associates, and vocational relationships that we cherish. We all want healthy relationships. We want to be liked and we desire the respect of others. Sometimes we may even go out of our way to gain someone's approval. For that reason polarizing politics, clandestine communication or disruptive deeds are all painful. Jesus experienced it and it is our experience as well. There are some people that no matter what you do or how you do it, it will never be good enough. There are others who purposely want you to seek their approval so they can utilize their perceived position of power to manipulate you to act in accordance with their wishes.

Whenever we focus on these things we do greater damage to relationships, harm to our sense of community and compromise trust. Keeping our focus on Jesus, the one whose evaluation really counts will keep us faithful to Him and equipped to work out problems with integrity and compassion.

For officials we have several books that we read every year, a rule book, a case book, an official's manual and handbook. I encouraged those officials before we went out on the floor, to keep our focus on those words and faithfully fulfill them. If we do that I am certain our observer will be well pleased. So too as Christians, I am certain that Jesus will be pleased when we are also faithful to His Word, His commands and His direction for faithful living.

That final point in the baptismal experience of Jesus is simply this, when God is pleased nothing else matters. Would that the Father would say of us, "you are my servant, whom I love, with you I am well pleased." The apostle Paul lived in the midst of strained relationships as well yet he kept his focus on receiving just one word of affirmation, to hear Jesus say of his ministry, "well done good and faithful servant." (Let us focus on what we know is God pleasing, ministry at our Austin Campus, reaching new people, designing new ways to touch the lives of people and lead them into a life-giving relationship with Jesus. Let's focus on the capital campaign that is essential if we are going to get this and other needed projects here completed. Let's focus on lending a hand, saying yes to participating, helping with the calling, being stretched.)

This is the promise of baptism, though the whole world desert us or abandon us, Jesus never will. Though the world attempt to influence in ways that seem popular and win the approval of the masses, there is only One that deserves our allegiance, our heart, our faith and our life, Jesus.

Oh, if we could only assume that mindset! Our lives would be much more fulfilled. The challenge is not easy but can be accomplished as we submit ourselves to the work of the Holy Spirit and seek to embrace and apply what God has left for all of us to use as a guide through the Holy Scriptures. Within both these realities of baptism there is abundant Grace.

In the name of Jesus... A-men

Announcements:

My sermon will be a bit shorter today in order to provide time for a **brief congregational survey** at the close of the service. The goal is to complete it and return it before you leave.

Capital Campaign – set a goal to call on every family in the church. We are still finishing the first phase but in order for us to fulfill this commitment we need many more callers. Dave Hesp and Larry Stockert are offering an informational meeting. They have an information table in the gathering space and I want them to hear from you about your willingness just to give them an hour of your time to evaluate your ability to help us in this process. I pray that you will hear that call today. The Christmas season is now over and we need to gear up and get to work with even greater energy and commitment.