

Aldersgate UMC of Butte, MT

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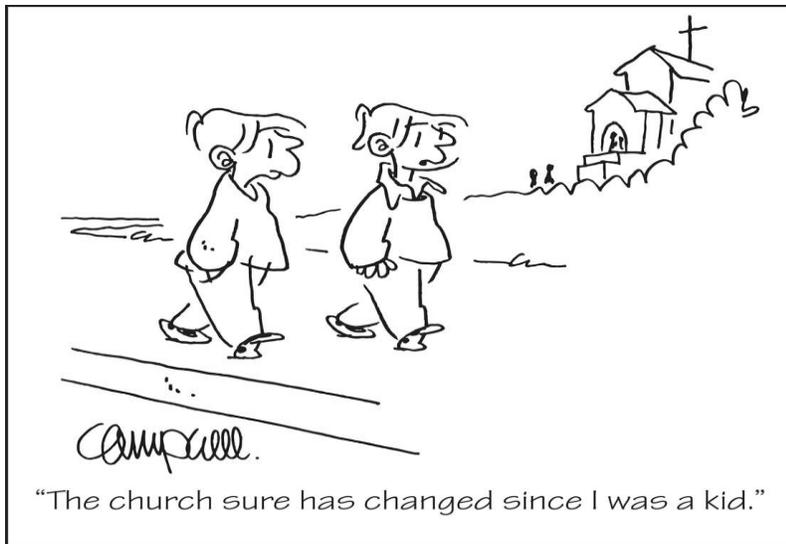
Sunday, March 21, 2021

Pastor Matthias (Matt) Krier

Message

I Have Decided to Follow Jesus

Two young boys were walking out of church one Sunday and one of the boys said to the other boy:



Not only has the church changed a great deal, my image of Jesus has changed! Not only has my image of Jesus changed, but my image of what it means to be a follower of Jesus has changed drastically!

When I was young, I would say I believed in Jesus, but I would also have to say I was not a follower of Jesus. **Why not?** Because, I never really saw Jesus.

In our scripture for today, we hear these words: *"Then they came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida of Galilee, and asked him, saying ... SIR, WE WISH TO SEE JESUS."* John 12:21

These words simply jumped out at me: *“SIR, WE WISH TO SEE JESUS.”*

I wonder if Christians throughout the ages, including myself, see Jesus for who he really was. **I wonder if folks who claim to be followers of Jesus have truly seen Yeshua?**

No one knows what Jesus looked like, so why is the image important? It is important to have an image that reflects the truth, not what is believed just because most of the caricatures of Jesus are as of a white man. Followers of Jesus seek the truth in all things, not just in some things. This includes the color of Jesus' skin. When I was growing up, I did not know that Yeshua would've most likely had brown skin. I did not know that Yeshua was a Jew. I did not know that the early followers of Jesus were called followers of the Way. They were not called Christians until decades after Yeshua walked the earth. Interesting, but sad, that I did not learn these things until I got away from the church and went to college. **Makes me wonder why the church in general lags so far behind modern Biblical scholarship? What is the church afraid of?** We shall come back to that another day.

What does it mean to actually see Jesus?

Okay, let's contemplate for just a moment. I mean really see something for what it is! Think about an aha moment you had. Maybe it was seeing the night sky for the very first time in all its glory and splendor?

I remember when I was around 5 years of age looking up into the night sky and was in awe and wonder, especially the constellation pleiades. Now, I did not know at the time it was pleiades but for some reason I was mesmerized with the night sky and especially this particular constellation which is also called “Seven Sisters.”

The Jesus I grew up with was a suffering savior who could save me from my sins with a crown of thorns and blood dripping down his face.

In fact, it was a portrait like this that hung in my bedroom for 18 years while growing up on a farm in eastern South Dakota. This image of Jesus is just one image but it shaped the way I thought about this Jesus of Nazareth as a youth and young adult.

Fast forwarding to seminary I was introduced to Yeshua who was a Jewish teacher, mystic, healer and sage. It was then, I learned of the many faces of this Jesus from Nazareth:



Lent as some of you already know is a wonderful time for self-examination and reflection. Personally, I grow more spiritually during this time than any other season of the year. Furthermore, the services on Palm / Passion Sunday, Good Friday Tenebrae Service bring me to a sacred time and place where it prepares me to experience the resurrection of Christ in new and profound ways. For centuries, Christians have skipped out on the Passion of Christ and went from Palm Sunday to Easter Sunday. Holy Week services are the bridge from Palm Sunday to the Resurrection Moment. There is no Easter unless one goes through Good Friday and the passion of Christ!

“SIR, WE WISH TO SEE JESUS!” Is this your prayer?

This week in Mid Week Reflections the group expanded what I was contemplating in seeing Jesus. I was focusing entirely on the person of Jesus Christ and not how we see Jesus in others as Jill shared during the

Young Theologians time. Before I could see Jesus in others, I had to understand and experience who Jesus was and who Yeshua is for me to be able to see Jesus in others. Understanding the historical Jesus was of huge importance to me back in seminary. Without seeing Jesus for who he really was would not have led me to experience Yeshua -- the Living Christ!

I believe when we truly see Jesus, it leads us to this question: **Am I really following Christ or not?**

A verse from our scripture today says: *If any man serves me, let him follow me; and where I am, there shall also my servant be: if anyone serves me, him will my Father honor.*" John 14:26

Fans of Jesus as we have talked about before will cheer Jesus on from the bleachers, but will not actually get up out of their seats to follow him.

Back 30 some years I found a verse that explained for me what it meant to follow Yeshua. It came in at least three parts. For it wasn't just about a relationship. The relationship leads to something more. One verse that explains this comes from Micah 6:8: *"What does God require of you, but to seek justice, to love kindness and to walk humbly with your God."*

The prophet Micah along with the other prophets spoke again and again that it is more than just walking humbly with God. It is about our faith in action.

Joan Chittister, author of *The Time is Now* asks this of us:

"The only question is, will we take up what we know is our moral and spiritual responsibility: to make the world a better place for all, to bring to life the fullness of creation for all? To help bring about equality, safety, security, and compassion for all?"

She goes on to say: "This is where the prophet comes in. The prophet is the person who says no to everything that is not of God.

No to the abuse of women.
No to the rejection of the stranger.
No to crimes against immigrants.
No to the rape of the trees.
No to the pollution of the skies.
No to the poisoning of the oceans.
No to the despicable destruction of humankind for the sake of more wealth,
more power, more control for a few.
No to death.”

Joan’s book, “*The Time is Now*,” is a call to uncommon courage in a world where courage is sorely needed to confront the social evils of our day from A to Z. Our hearts go out once again to the 8 victims and their families in yet another mass shooting. My heart aches again and again when I stop to pause and think about the anger, pain and grief with yet more senseless killings.

For the victims and their families, we light a candle of hope, peace, justice and healing ... and the courage to do what is necessary to help prevent these senseless murders in the future. (LIGHT a candle.)

This is a book calling the followers of Jesus to do as the prophet Micah says in seeking justice, loving kindness and walking humbly with God.

If any of these three are missing, it is not the whole gospel of Jesus Christ. The whole gospel of Jesus Christ is not about naval gazing and simply feeling good about our relationship to God. It is about seeking justice for those who have been abused or exploited in any way.

The time is now to continue the *comfort ministries* the church is known for. We need comfort ministries for those who are hurting. At the same time, we need challenge ministries where we not only comfort but confront the social evils of our day. For example, it is one thing to warmly embrace our LGBTQ

siblings into our midst. It is quite another to actually combat the inequality in which these folks face in their everyday lives.

Why is it so hard for us as a society to live by the Golden Rule? Why is it so hard for us and or our leaders to *“do unto others as you would have them do unto you?”*

On a lighter note, it is said that Jesus has revised the Golden Rule in this day of modern technology. Here it is:

“Tweet others and you would have them tweet you.”

I wish I had thought of this!

Now on a more serious note why is it so difficult for well-intentioned Christians to live by the Golden Rule. Well intentioned Christians once supported slavery. Well intentioned Christians once denied the right for women to vote. Well intentioned Christians stormed the capital believing the election was stolen and consequently people were injured and died.

Something so simple could guide us in all that we say and in all that we do and when we fail, we can ask for forgiveness.

What is it that is so simple to guide us in our words and in our actions?

WWJD - WHAT WOULD JESUS DO?

WWJS - WHAT WOULD JESUS SAY?

So very simple and yet so hard to do. We are called to uncommon courage as followers of Jesus to not only feed the poor, but fight the causes of poverty in our communities. There is no way we can experience harmony in our society when 1 in 5 children right here in the United States are hungry and in need of proper nutrition. In order for us to truly serve and follow Jesus, we need to see Jesus. We need to turn our eyes upon Jesus.



The image here is not recognizable unless you gaze upon the image for a while, at least 30 seconds or so. I invite those here and those streaming with us to gaze upon the four dots in the center of this image for 30 seconds after 30 seconds, gently close your eyes, an image will emerge. However, after a few moments that image disappears and is no longer visible as it was. If we are to serve faithfully and enthusiastically as well as prophetically, we need to turn our attention and focus our eyes upon Jesus.

In one of my previous churches we started an alternative service on Wednesday evenings with a meal in the fellowship hall. As a downtown church, we had about half of those in attendance were homeless and half were people from the community who were unchurched. Not only did they enjoy the good food, but they enjoyed a bible study and more contemporary music instead of a sermon. The service grew quickly and this was where we met Frank. Frank was homeless and wasn't bashful about asking questions during our bible study. It was during Lent when Frank could not hold back any longer and in anger, I might add, asked, "**How can you Christians wear a cross around your neck or on your jewelry?** Don't you know that the cross was a tool of torture and death? How could you possibly wear that around your necks? I affirmed Frank for his opinion in raising such an important question. Several of us got to respond why the cross became such a sacred and powerful symbol of new life and

resurrection. We shared with Frank who listened intently as we had listened to him. Once Frank heard how incredibly meaningful and powerful the cross was to us and how it brought us through pain and suffering, he was quiet. Many of us were in tears as we all felt peace and harmony and we were no longer strangers, but a more beloved community. How? Because we saw Jesus in each other.

Once we make a decision to truly follow Yeshua in *seeking justice, loving kindness and walking humbly with God,* then we will need to come before God again and again for strength and renewal. We will pray, Fill My Cup, Lord, fill my cup and make me whole. Let us pray and sing this prayer, Fill My Cup, Lord as we prepare for the Sacrament of Holy Communion.

Let us pray: Oh gracious and everlasting God, may we have the courage to truly see Jesus and then follow Jesus. May we as followers of Jesus, seek justice so that all people will be treated justly and fairly. Help us to walk with you in such a way that we are empowered to live and love as Jesus loved. Amen.