

Maundy Thursday

April 8, 2020

Christ the Rock Evangelical Lutheran Church
Farmington, New Mexico

John 18:1-8 When he had finished praying, Jesus left with his disciples and crossed the Kidron Valley. On the other side there was a garden, and he and his disciples went into it.

2 Now Judas, who betrayed him, knew the place, because Jesus had often met there with his disciples. **3** So Judas came to the garden, guiding a detachment of soldiers and some officials from the chief priests and the Pharisees. They were carrying torches, lanterns and weapons.

4 Jesus, knowing all that was going to happen to him, went out and asked them, "Who is it you want?"

5 "Jesus of Nazareth," they replied.

"I am he," Jesus said. (And Judas the traitor was standing there with them.) **6** When Jesus said, "I am he," they drew back and fell to the ground.

7 Again he asked them, "Who is it you want?"

"Jesus of Nazareth," they said.

8 Jesus answered, "I told you that I am he. If you are looking for me, then let these men go."

"Who are you looking for?"

When you first visit a financial advisor or an athletic trainer, you might be surprised to hear them asking you questions first instead of doling out advice right away. You come in expecting them to fix you. Help me consolidate my debt. Help me get out from under a mountain of credit cards. Help me recover from this injury that led to surgery. Tell me what I need to do to get better. But instead they ask you what your goals are. What do you want to do? What do you want to accomplish with your money? With your exercise program? Maybe you never really thought of it like that. You just figured you wanted to get a better handle on your health or your finances.

But what is it you're really after? When you aren't sitting in a comfy chair across a desk or chatting in a noisy gym filled with sweating people.

You could widen that and zoom out a little bit. Do that exercise where it's fun to let your imagination run wild. If you received a check in the mail from a distant relative who wrote you into her will. If you had a large chunk of your taxes returned back directly into your bank account. If the casino made an error in your favor. If the Diamondbacks drafted you and gave you a nice signing bonus. How would you use it?

Ok, first you'd pay off your debts, you'd take care of those credit cards, you'd finally fix the transmission on your truck. But after that. If you could do anything that you didn't have to do, you weren't obligated to be responsible with, what would you do? Maybe get a new video game console. A new bike. That doll your grandma tells you is out of her price range for your birthday. More expensive toys like a new vehicle or finally indulge in an updated wardrobe or a home your family could be comfortable in.

Maybe it's not something that even has a price tag. What is it that absorbs your heart and your imagination? Where do your thoughts go effortlessly when you have no distractions? Like a drop of rain falling onto a leaf, which direction do your desires lead without any conscious input from your brain about what you are supposed to think or say or do?

Maybe it's not so much about stuff. Maybe it's more about friendships at school. Respect at work. The freedom to be able to quit your job you hate and have been counting down the days until you can retire with benefits. Getting noticed by your crush. Being loved back by the person you love. Being able to have a family. Keeping your family safe. Having children who still value you even if they don't need you any more. Not having to go back to the doctor for any more check ups. Being able to tell your therapist you don't need her any more.

So what would happen if you got it? What would it mean to reach your goal? Not with your trainer or financial advisor. But with life. Would it mean you could be content? Satisfied? Fulfilled?

So much of our world is built on this idea that we are just naive in searching for someone to give us more to life. Atheistic psychology is built on this foundation where we are discouraged from seeking someone behind those desires. Maybe the explanation is we are just adapting to our environment as part of this cosmic life force. But we shouldn't expect someone to be our divine Easter Bunny. We just need to transform our consciousness, to have a more pure awareness of our oneness with all reality that can come from spiritual contemplation. (Keller, "Prayer," p. 38)

Author and defender of Christianity C.S. Lewis has an alternate explanation. Maybe we desire more to life because there is something more. Maybe the things we want out of life that don't really satisfy show us that these things won't bring us ultimate satisfaction. Lewis says it concisely: "If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world." (C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, p. 137) So you can be honest about the things in life that don't truly satisfy.

And that brings us to a confrontation with what we really want. Jesus can ask you: "**Who are you looking for?**" (John 18:4) And the more uncomfortable question: Is it really Jesus you are looking for? Or are you actually looking for yourself? And Jesus is just your vending machine to give you what you are after? If it is really Jesus, then we can be honest. If it is Jesus, then Jesus can point out real needs. If Jesus, then he can show the disordered desires of your heart. If Jesus, then he can show the warped nature of your thoughts. If Jesus, then he shows the foolishness of what you're looking for. Jesus shows false Messiahs and phony Christs. My idols.

Give me Jesus. Give me the real thing.

And what exactly do we get when we have Jesus? In John chapter 18 we have a Jesus who knew everything that was about to happen to him and refused to flee the scene. We have the Jesus who affirmed his identity like confirming you are who your driver's license says

you. And yet when that positive identification resulted in the temporary paralysis of the arresting officers, Jesus stood pat. The Jesus who could have simply raised an eyebrow like the Rock in his wrestling prime. Except while Jesus could have disarmed that armed cohort with a muscle twitch he instructed the Apostle Peter to sheath his sword. The Jesus who could have instantaneously annihilated his captors just by flaring his nostrils, but instead went willingly into their clutches. This is the Jesus you have. This is the Jesus who puts his power back into the holster for bigger purposes. This is the Jesus who put aside his own desires and any thought of a personal agenda for you.

And if we don't see ourselves in light of the suffering and cross of Jesus, we miss the point of our existence. If everything about Jesus is about propping ourselves up, then we miss what Jesus was really looking for. One theologian explains that affirmation, comfort, support, building self-esteem all have their place. (Forde, p. xi) But if that's all we are looking for from Jesus, then our sense of worth will actually deteriorate instead of improve. Our churches will turn into lousy support groups instead of soul hospitals for the spiritually sick.

What was the one thing Jesus actually wanted in his life? Jesus wants you. What was his singular definition of success? It was securing your release from all the things you think will bring fulfillment to your life. What was his heart's greatest desire? What his mind gravitated toward when freed from distractions? You. Jesus wants you to have so much more than what you are so often seeking and searching and yearning for.

We put Jesus right on the racks with all the nicknacks in the gift shock. Crosses next to crystals. Banners next to blankets. Jewelry next to gems. You're searching and you're looking and you're hoping to find that one special, precious gift. And all the while Jesus is looking for you. Jesus has found you. Jesus knows hat you need. It's him. Jesus is your I Am.

But what about today? How are we supposed to handle things when the Jesus we are searching for isn't available? Like those precious paper supplies that are gone from shelves by the time we get to the store. Of course, Jesus is always here. Jesus never runs out. Jesus is always on call. Always on duty. But what about when Jesus can't come to us in the special way we would prefer? When Jesus can't interact with us on our terms? When Jesus can't be delivered to us when we want him? Today, I would love to be here with you. I would love to be in the front part of the church with you to deliver the very body and blood of Jesus to you for the forgiveness of your sins. But I can't. And that hurts. I want to be gathered together sharing God's Word with you face to face. But that's not possible. Is Jesus still here for you today?

I find it interesting that the Rolling Stones once sang "(I Can't Get No) Satisfaction" and then followed that up a few years later with "You Can't Always Get What You Want." Jesus has catchier hooks than even Keith Richards and sings more sweetly than Mick Jagger. Jesus gives you his promises. It might not be the format and the timing you want. But you have Jesus. You have Jesus who gave himself for you. You have Jesus who put you first.

Jesus is coming to you today. Right now to let you go. Jesus was captured and tried and ultimately executed to give you freedom. Not just freedom from your stuff and from your desires. Jesus died so you can die to your fears of not being good enough. Jesus gave his life so you can have a new life. A life free from chasing after your satisfactions. And when you and I realize we can't always get what we want, we can start to be honest enough to name and condemn our sinful desires. And when Jesus finds you, he gives the forgiveness you need. Jesus doesn't count your wrongs against you. Instead, he gives you a guarantee of your ultimate goal for life. You will be with Jesus forever in heaven. You already share in his blessings communicated to you through his promises. You have life right now. Amen.