

"Who Is Jesus?"
Sermon for the Eighteenth Sunday in Kingdomtide
Lectionary Year B
October 4, 2009
Text: Hebrews 1:1-4; 2:5-12
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Last weekend was Parent's Weekend at the University of North Texas, so Stephanie and I went to Denton on Saturday to visit with her youngest son, Tyler, and go to the UNT football game. It was a fun day, even though I've seen better games played by high school teams. During our late lunch with Tyler, he mentioned that he is taking a course on art appreciation. I responded by telling him I was rather envious, because I always wanted but never found time to take courses on art and music appreciation as well as history.

He looked at me like he thought I was demented, which he has a way of doing from time to time, as all our children do. Stephanie has threatened to have put on her tombstone as an epitaph, "I'm not stupid." My choice for the epitaph on my own tombstone is "This ATM is no longer in service." I personally feel like colleges and universities should make a course on parent appreciation a requirement for graduation in any academic field. But I digress. Back to art appreciation. As it turns out, Tyler hates the class and pretty much sleeps through it. So I proceeded to give him a few pointers on how to

sleep in class in such a way as to appear to be awake and paying attention. It's how I earned my five degrees.

I bring this up because the writer of Hebrews seems to have written this letter as a kind of syllabus for a course on Jesus appreciation. This book was written by an author who is unknown to us but who appears to be addressing the problem of complacency. In response to this attitude the author asks, "Have you realized who Christ is? You need to. Think long and hard about him until you are gripped by the reality of what God is trying to say to us in and through Jesus' life and work [*Broadman Bible Commentary* , Vol. 12, p. 9].

I suspect that for some of us, especially for those of us who have grown up in the church and for whom Jesus is almost an overly familiar name, complacency may be a real tendency. It is easy to take things for granted and to get less and less excited about them as time goes on. Jesus? Sure, I know who Jesus is. And then we mouth all those well-worn stock phrases by rote and without having to think about it.

Well, today I want us to think about it. I want us really to think about it. I want for the truth of who Jesus is to make its way into the most remote attic of your mind and the innermost region of your heart, because I want the truth of who Jesus is to make a difference in your life—a difference in how you feel about God, how you feel about yourself, how you feel about the world, and how you feel about

everyone and everything in the world. It may not have happened to you yet. It may not happen to you today. But I hope that at some point it does happen—that your heart is “strangely warmed” by your coming to know who *Jesus is for you*. And so may we make our way through this passage of scripture from Hebrews to see what it has to say to us about who *Jesus is* and learn to appreciate him even more.

Jesus is the one way in which God has revealed himself to us in these last days, as compared to the many and various ways God revealed himself to us in the past. As Christians, it is our contention that Jesus is the “full and final” revelation of who *God is*. As Schubert Ogden puts it, Jesus is the decisive re-presentation of the gift and demand of *God’s love*. Revelation is progressive throughout the biblical witness, but in Jesus we see the endpoint, *God’s final self-revealing act*.

This statement also alludes to the first of what sometimes is referred to as the “three offices” of Christ—prophet, priest, and king. Jesus is a prophet, from a long line of prophets. He fills the role of the prophet, that is, to speak the word of *God* to us, to reveal to us *God’s mind and heart*.

Jesus is God’s Son. The idea of Jesus’ being *God’s Son* points us in two directions, I think. First, it makes us realize that there is an extremely close personal relationship between *Jesus and God*. They

are intimately related, intentionally related, and substantially related. Second, since God allowed Jesus, his own Son, to die for us, Jesus' being God's Son shows us the compassionate nature of God. God suffers in and through the death of his Son, making it clear that our salvation cost God a great deal.

Jesus is God's appointed heir of all things. The third of the so-called "three offices" of Christ is that of king, and it is encountered here in this passage as well. In the language of today's culture, "Jesus rules."

Jesus is the One through whom God created the universe. In several places in the New Testament we have evidence of what is referred to as the "pre-existent nature" of Christ, that is to say, that Jesus has been with God since the beginning of time and that all things that have been made were made through him. The prologue to John's Gospel is another place where this kind of language can be found. All things are related in some way to Christ, through whom all things have been created by God.

Jesus is the reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's very being, therefore we can say that Jesus is God incarnate, Emmanuel, "God with us." The great Protestant reformer, Martin Luther, supposedly once said something like, "Jesus is all of God I need to or care to see." If this statement from Hebrews

is correct about Jesus, Luther had good reason to say what he did. If Jesus is, as I believe he is, *the reflection of God and the exact imprint of God's very being*, he shows us all we need to see about who God is. If you know who Jesus is, you know who God is. It's just that simple. And that's exactly why there was such a person as Jesus, so that God could reveal to us that he is all compassion, pure unbounded love.

Jesus is the One who sustains all things by his powerful word.

Not only was the entire universe created through Jesus, but he is who holds things together. Jesus maintains the connection between God and creation. God's creation, God's salvation, and God's providence are accomplished in and through Christ.

Jesus is the One who has provided purification for sins.

There is something which stands in the way of our relationship with God. It is this thing called sin, and it must be dealt with. Through Jesus, God has taken care of our sin problem. As we have faith in Christ and put our trust in him, God "forgets" about our sin. In this way, we are purified of our sins.

Jesus is seated at the right hand of God in heaven. This statement points to the second of the "three offices" of Christ, that of priest. Seated at the right hand of God the Father Almighty, as the Apostles' Creed puts it, Jesus is in a position to mediate between us and God. Jesus acts as our High Priest before God.

Jesus is the One whose name, the Christ, is above every name, even the names of angels. By virtue of his being seated at God's right hand, the position of ultimate power and authority under God, there is no one closer to God than Christ himself. Angels represent a lower level of spiritual beings compared to Christ.

Jesus is the One who for a little while (his earthly life) was made lower than the angels (became human). This language, reminiscent of Psalm 8, shows us that Jesus was human. Philippians 2:5-11 gives us a more complete picture of Jesus' descent from being above the angels to being below them and then above them again. As the early church councils insisted, though Jesus was fully God, he also was fully human.

Jesus is crowned with glory and honor because he suffered death. Jesus is Lord because of his suffering and dying. Check it out in the New Testament. He is raised to be Lord only after he has suffered and died for us. Lordship and suffering death go together. No pain, no gain—a lesson for all of us.

Jesus is the One who, by God's grace, died for everyone. Everyone has the opportunity to be put in a right relationship with God and experience a new and authentic life with God through Jesus Christ. No one gets left out because of God's choice. If there are those who

get left out, it will be only because God chooses to honor their choice. As the old hymn says, "Jesus paid it all."

Jesus is the pioneer (author) of our salvation, the One who brings us to glory, a right relationship with God. I especially like this language. I think it appeals to the pioneer spirit in all of us. As a "pioneer," Jesus blazes the trail to God so that we can find our way there. Were it not for such trailblazing, we would be hopelessly lost. We simply can't get there on our own. He's our GPS to God's kingdom.

Jesus is the One who, appropriately by God, was made perfect through sufferings he experienced in his bringing about our salvation. In other words, Jesus is rewarded for the work he did for us. God's "perfects" him for making possible our salvation. In him we can be made perfect as well.

Jesus is our brother (we have the same Father), and he is not ashamed to be related to us as such. Here is where I get sort of choked up. I am ashamed of myself a lot of time. Shame has been a part of my life since I was a little boy. But Jesus is not ashamed of me, not ashamed in the least to have me for a little brother, even when I am overwhelmed with shame. That's grace.

There is more, much more that could be and should be said about who Jesus is. Bishop Stephen Neill closes his book *The Supremacy of Jesus* with these words:

Not one of us can ever know him completely; but we do find that, as we touch the hem of his garment, however blindly and uncertainly, we are touching life. And we have the promise and the assurance that we shall be able to comprehend, *with all the saints*, the breadth and length and depth and height, and to know the love of Christ that passes all knowledge (Ephesians 3:18-19) [p. 165].

What we have touched on this morning is what Bishop Neill suggests—merely the hem of Jesus' garment. But it is a place to start. I challenge all of us to do just that, to start here to comprehend and then appreciate even further who Jesus is for us and to realize even further what a difference that makes for our lives.