

Sermon Text or July 14, 2024

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Ezekiel 34:23-24, Matthew 12:22-32

“Jesus Messiah”

There is a sense that I kinda need to reintroduce myself to you after all this time away. So much has happened around here with both senior and junior high having gone and their mission trips and we give thanks to God for that. Look at this place, I get back and we are ready for VBS this evening, full steam ahead. I know that every time that I get back I don't have to worry about the church swerving away from the path that has been set before us by Scripture which leads us directly to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ who commands us to love him and to love our neighbor and that we will continue to do that which he commands us to do whether I am here or not. How awesome it is to jump in right where we left off.

Let me tell you about my time away and what I was up to, because Jesus showed up in powerful ways that I want to share with you. I spent the last week of June in my house in committee meetings basically from 10 in the morning until about 6 at night. I was assigned to the Ecumenical and Interreligious committee, which I loved because I have spent my life working with other churches for the kingdom of God both in the United States and outside of the United States. We passed a closer union with the Episcopal Church where now Presbyterian pastors can serve Episcopalian churches and vice versa. That was the kind of things that we did in committee.

Then it was off to Salt Lake City where all of those people who served on committee gathered together, about 450 of us equally divided into pastors and elders plus another 100 advisors from youth to people from other churches, and then another 300 or so who were the observing. All of us focused on Jesus the Messiah and trying to discern and understand God's will for the church. One of the highlights for me was when the General Secretary of the World Council of Churches addressed us. You see, I have a soft spot for the World Council of Churches, my dad used to be on their evangelism committee and he knew all the players there and we would have them over to our house often. So I listened closely to the General Secretary Jerry Pillay. He shared a story of a kite, he is originally from South Africa, but of Indian descent. The Indians came to South Africa as basically slaves, so there was a long historical connection to oppression and persecution in his family.

But this kite was attached to another kite and they were flying along and dipping up and down but one day the kite said that he wished he was free from the other kite and able to go along without being attached in any way. How nice it would be to be free, unattached to anyone or anything. With a tug he forced himself loose and finally he was free to fly on his own, and he flew for not very long before he realized that he was losing altitude and didn't really know and wasn't capable to pull himself up and he came into contact with a telephone pole and there he was stuck on the telephone pole.

He described how necessary it is in Gaza for the world to rally around this humanitarian crisis because we have left them all alone, without anyone to walk alongside of them as people are starving, and that is not the way that Christians do things. All that he said he brought back to the presence of Jesus the Messiah who has to be by our side in all things and the more we look to distance ourselves the worse things become in our world.

It was nice to hear the fundamentals by a world leader and the importance of not detaching ourselves from the Messiah. I worshipped in Park City on Sunday with friends who were in our church in Moscow 15 years ago. They still love Jesus which is awesome. I worshipped this past Sunday at Chapel Hill Presbyterian Church where Stacy and I were married and Naomi was baptized, and also with another couple that were probably our closest friends while we were in Russia, and they still love Jesus, which is also awesome.

Today we rediscover what it means when we say that Jesus is the Messiah and the impact it should have on our life when we say that and when we live that. Both of our Scriptures speak to the Messiah and so we will define what we mean when we use that term. But ultimately it comes down to allowing ourselves to see ourselves as the sheep, and Jesus as the shepherd and to allow him to shepherd our lives, to lead and guide us even and especially in those times when we would want to be detached from him and try it on our own. It doesn't go well for us when we try that. Let's read.

READ

One of the highlights of our trip after I was in Salt Lake was in Seattle with Rachel, and on Tuesday of this past week we went on a 20 mile hike with her and Stacy's sister, brother in law and a nephew. We expected to be out for about 20 miles. It is called the Enchantments and for the first five miles it pretty much straight up, but then for one mile after that it is a 2,200 foot elevation gain which is brutal. Then you finish it off with another 14 miles. We happen to choose the hottest day of the year, it got up over 100 degrees. It was stunning, it was beautiful, I

have never seen some of the scenery that we saw, and I never will again. We finished it, but never again. It was one of those life experiences that brought me closer to God.

Our first reading today, just two simple verses, but they provide us with a background to what we understand when we say that Jesus is the Messiah. What does this term Messiah mean? He describes King David who had lived about 250 or 300 years before Ezekiel as the prototype of who the Messiah is. Remember what happened when David was anointed and chosen as king? If you look at I Samuel 16:7 you have the verse where Samuel is trying to figure out who should be the next king because God has told him to check out the boys of Jesse because from his family would come the next king. He keeps thinking the ones that look like kings are going to be chosen by God but then God says: The Lord does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart. Then David is chosen and anointed.

Ezekiel gives us a promise that one day someone like David will come and will be the Messiah that we expect. The term Messiah means deliverer or Savior. It comes from the Hebrew word for anointed, which is why we went back to the Samuel Scripture. Someone will come along who will be anointed like David because of his heart for the Lord and will lead his sheep and save them. We know that Jesus was that Messiah that Scripture predicted and our Matthew Scripture shows us that the people who were living in Jesus' age wanted an answer as to whether Jesus was truly the Messiah or not. Let's look at our Matthew Scripture.

We know that Jesus came as the Messiah, but the people of his day had a hard time seeing him for who he really was. We read that the people brought to him someone who was deaf and blind and Jesus heals him. The next verse I love because in the literal Greek it says: and the crowds went crazy over him. They were amazed. I went to a Yankees game last evening in Baltimore and watched as the crowds went crazy and imagined what it would have been like if all of us were gathered to see Jesus perform a miracle.

In vs. 23 we see that the people have one question on their mind after this healing. They ask: are you the son of David. Which basically means are you the one that Ezekiel told us about, are you the Messiah that is to come? The people wanted to know. Before Jesus could give them an answer we read that also there were the Pharisees who were in power in those days and so because they had the power they also had the ability to define by whose power Jesus was acting. They were the ones equipped by the culture to interpret exactly what was going on and the people were pretty much forced to believe their interpretation of it. That's the way it is, the people in power get to call the shots and so the Pharisees did.

They tell anyone who would listen that no, he is not the Messiah, in fact, the power that he has only comes from the devil. He would have no power except that which the devil gives him. Did you know that during Covid I had someone tell me that I was operating under the influence of the devil and the church was as well because of the decisions that we were making? Yeah, that was a problem, but fortunately people know us and people know me and they have always seen that our desires and our focus has been on Jesus and not hurting people or causing harm.

But church, we are in good company, the Pharisees accused Jesus of working with and under the influence of the devil. So the real question was not just are you the Messiah Jesus, but under whose power are you operating? He answers and says that he is operating under the power of the Holy Spirit. Because in healing this man it is an act of God and the devil cannot do that which is pleasing to God or else it would be a house divided against itself. The devil cannot do good, and that is all that Jesus does, which is good. Jesus' opponents agree that he has power, but they point to a different source which Jesus says no, it is by the Holy Spirit that he works.

This year's General Assembly was an example of the presence of the Holy Spirit moving through a body that was visible and palpable. We disagreed on a lot. But we agreed that Jesus is Lord and the Messiah and that the gates of hell cannot vanquish His church. You see if we allow any singular issue to divide us, then Satan wins. There is still room in the church for dissent because it is founded upon the rock that Jesus is the Messiah. We still believe this, we still believe that Jesus is coming back again, we still believe that the most important thing we can do is to love God and to love our neighbor. It is the Holy Spirit, which Jesus says here, which provides us with the power to do anything at all as a church.

At the end of the day maybe it is more about showing that human resistance to God is ultimately futile. God's patience with those who insist on calling good evil and evil good will come to an end. The kite as he was hanging on that pole bemoaned the fact that he rebelled against the attachment that he had which he now realized kept him alive. Like the kite we rebel against Jesus in the name of freedom or prosperity or getting back to some elusive greatness which never existed at all. But we are the ones who choose to disengage from the other kite. We find ourselves then alone, enslaved to our own whims. Enslaved to our schedules with some little time for our Messiah, enslaved to the approval of those around us.

In a gust of wind, the kite noticed that the other kite had come back and with a little tug reattached himself and took that kite off of the telephone pole and soaring with him once again.

He again realized that true freedom could only be found in the truth of being attached. Jesus said you shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free. Jesus the Messiah is that truth, stay attached to him. Amen.