

The Power of Jesus

Luke 3:15-17, 21, 22
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First Presbyterian Church
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Has anyone here ever read the entire Bible? Some have; for sure. The Bible ends with these words, from Revelation 22, verses 11, 12 and 17. It says, "Let the evildoer still do evil, and the filthy still be filthy, and the righteous still do right, and the holy still be holy. See, I am coming soon Let everyone who is thirsty come. Let anyone who wishes take the water of life as a gift."

Doesn't this get you wondering about the second coming of Jesus? Just when will he come? What events will bring him? Who will he embrace? And who will be tossed aside? That's what people were wondering when they saw John baptizing in the wilderness. As Luke tells us, "... The people were filled with expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Messiah...."

This was at a time of great political and social unrest. John preached about it, calling for repentance and warning people to turn away from evil deeds. He confronted religious and social leaders as hypocrites, who set up corrupt systems that served their own interests, with little regard for those they were supposed to serve. Kind of like a lot of our political and social leaders today.

John also denounced immoral behavior, no matter where it was found. He famously criticized King Herod for marrying his own brother's wife. Herod would later have John thrown in prison and executed for speaking out against him. That's kind of like the "cancel culture" we see today, where people won't listen to anyone who opposes their ideas or actions. They just do away with them.

At the time of John, too many people were only looking out for themselves, rather than taking care of others. That's why he says earlier in Luke, "Anyone who has two shirts should share with the one who has none, and anyone who has food should do the same" (Luke 3:11).

That doesn't seem to be happening today, at least not on a large enough scale. There's just too much need out there to imagine that we as a society are willing to share what we have with others. And yet, that's just what John and Jesus called for, taking care of one another, and showing people how to live by faith, which is another thing that's a struggle to do these days; share the faith with others. So you can see, when it comes to Jesus returning to set all things right again, now would be as good a time as any.

The story goes that one day the Pope himself was trying to imagine the day of Jesus return. Just then, a flash of light appeared in St. Peter's Square and there stood – not Jesus – but an alien form another planet.

The Pope rushed out and said, "I know this question may sound odd to you, but I was wondering if you and your kind know about Jesus Christ?" "Jesus Christ?!" exclaimed the alien. "Of course we do! He visits our planet every two years or so." "Every two years?" shouted the Pope. "We're still waiting for his second coming!" "Maybe he didn't like your chocolate?" said the alien. "Chocolate?" replied the Pope. "What in heaven's name does chocolate have to do with it?" "Well," said the alien. "When he first came to our planet, we gave him chocolate. Why, what did you do?"

Which is to say if Jesus were to return today, what would that look like? What would you be found doing? When Jesus first appeared to his followers, John the Baptizer described him as someone with special power, someone who would baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire, someone who would gather the wheat into his granary, and burn the useless chaff with unquenchable fire.

Is that the Jesus you know? Is that the Jesus you expect to come and set things right? Truth be told, nobody knows when and how Jesus will return. But I think we all hope and believe he will, since Jesus said he would.

If Jesus were to show up at your house today, what things would he tell you to gather into your granary; what things about you would he value? And what things would he toss out, as unwanted, useless, undesirable, of no value? That's a great question for all of us. Picture your home right now. How much of the stuff that you have would Jesus find valuable? Probably just what you could use, and not much more.

Jesus wasn't much for possessions. For Jesus, having too much stuff just gets in the way of what's truly important. That's a warning to us all. Don't let your possessions or desire get in the way of doing what's right, what Jesus would have you do. Same with our busy schedules. Think about your schedule and how you spend most days. If Jesus were looking through your schedule, your to-do list, what would he scratch off? And what would he write there in its place? Think about it.

You know, Jesus wasn't much for planning ahead and keeping busy. He left great amounts of time open to be with God and to help and guide those in need. If more people these days dedicated just a portion of their time to be with God and help those in need, this world would be so much better off, wouldn't it? But of course, that's Jesus. We're not Jesus. And he's not back yet.

So what do we do in the meantime? I mean, John clearly says that someone more powerful than he – more powerful than we are – is coming. And in John's day, Jesus did come. Jesus came to John and was baptized, and from that moment on, Jesus went throughout all the towns and cities and regions wielding that special power of his. Too bad we as children of God can't do the same! Or can we?

Jesus may not be here in his fullness to set things right, but he did send that same Holy Spirit upon us, that we might have the power and wisdom to do the things he did. As Jesus says in John 14, verse 12, "Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these...." You know, things like feeding people body and soul, forgiving others, healing the sick and restoring the lame, revealing the truth and guiding the lost, comforting those who grieve and equipping those who serve, bringing the Spirit of new life to people who are dead inside, and yes, even laying down this life for the sake of others. It is good and right to wait for the Lord's return. And we should do that actively, as those worthy to be called followers of Christ, selflessly doing the things he did.

About 100 years after Jesus' death and resurrection, during the reign of Emperor Hadrian, a Greek philosopher named Aristides said this about what it is to be a Christian: "Christians love one another. They never fail to help widows. They save orphans from those who would hurt them. If a Christian person has something, he gives to a person who has nothing. "If they see a stranger, Christians invite them to come into their home and consider them a brother or a sister. If they see someone who is ill or someone who is in prison, they go visit them. If they hear that one of them is in great tribulation, they will give that person all that he or she needs. These Christians are a new kind of people." A new kind of people, with a new kind of power. The power of Jesus, not to elevate ourselves, but to help one another, and to show all the world what true power is. You have been given this power by the Holy Spirit. How you choose to use it is up to you. But let us and all the world make no mistake about it, when Jesus does return, that's the type of person he will be looking for, embracing, and bringing into his kingdom. Amen.

PASTORAL PRAYER

Come, O Holy Spirit, come! Come like Holy Fire and burn with us. Come like Holy Wind and cleanse us. Come like Holy Light and lead us. Come as Holy Truth and teach us. Come as Holy Love and enfold us. Come as Holy Power and enable us. Come as Abundant Life and Fill us, Convert us, Consecrate us, until we are wholly thine.

Come, Holy Spirit, Come!

We do pray the Holy Spirit and all his wisdom and comfort and healing power upon those who grieve, those who struggle with illness and disease and those in need of direction in their lives.

As we join our hearts in prayer, we ask that you would unite our hearts with those everywhere who rejoice in your presence and your promise of coming. We pray all this in the power and promise of your name, as you taught us to pray together, saying:

**Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.
Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our debts,
as we forgive our debtors; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.**