

Magnetic Jesus

John 12:20-33
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First Presbyterian Church
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There was a time when all the Catholic bookstores sold a magnetic cross with Jesus on it. This little statue of the Savior, with his arms extended in blessing, was meant to be placed on the dashboard of your car. It was a reminder of the Lord's caring presence during your morning and evening commute.

You're not likely to find a magnetic Jesus in bookstores anymore, because there aren't any new cars with metal dashboards these days; everything's made out of plastic. And yet, a magnetic Jesus is still a powerful image. The way magnets work is a reflection of the way Jesus works.

Do you remember science class in grade school and the lesson on magnetism? The teacher would have two rectangular magnets and place one on the experiment table. She'd then take the other and slowly move it toward the first one... until, "Snap!" the magnets would click together. But that was only half the lesson. The teacher would then separate the magnets, place one on the table, and turn the second magnet around. As she slowly moved that magnet closer, the first one would be repelled, spinning away across the table, unable to resist the force of magnetic repulsion.

This classroom lesson on magnetic attraction and magnetic repulsion – it's useful in understanding what happens out in the world when it comes to Jesus.

In today's New Testament lesson, John tells us there were some Greeks who were attracted to Jesus. As they journeyed alongside the Jewish faithful headed to Jerusalem for the Passover, they came to the Apostle Philip and said, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus."

Why these Greeks wanted to see the Jewish rabbi named Jesus we do not know. All we know is that their desire to see Jesus marks a turning point in his earthly ministry.

As soon as Jesus hears that the Greeks want to see him, he says to his disciples, "The hour has come...." "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified."

Jesus then compares himself to a grain of wheat that can only produce a fruitful harvest if it falls into the earth and dies. Otherwise, it remains a single grain.

I wonder what the Greeks thought of that. Were they attracted to Jesus by what he said, or repulsed?

I mean, put yourself in their place. What attracts you to Jesus? Is it his death on a cross? All the fruitful growth of churches you see popping up in new and vibrant ways? What do you expect to get for yourself out of being a follower of Jesus?

Are there parts of being a Christian that you don't particularly like? Such things as selfless service, turning the other cheek, giving of yourself for the sake of others – even when they don't deserve it, even when you're sure it's not going to make a difference in the end?

It's hard to be a Christian. It's hard to be a Christian in a world where so many people suffer. It's hard to reconcile our faith in God with all the poverty we see; all the moral depravity, selfishness and self-centeredness; all the gluttony and accumulation of wealth and power, just for the sake of having more and more, just because it makes some people feel superior.

It's hard to be a Christian in such a world as this. And yet, for those of us who know the Lord, who have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, who trust in God and live solely by the grace and blessing of the Holy Spirit, it is the only way to be, the only way to live – as a Christian.

As Jesus says, "Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honor."

We have faith in those words of Jesus. We have faith that living for the sake of others gives us a part in the salvation of the world. We have faith that resisting the temptations of power, money and hedonistic pleasure allows us to be the person God created us to be, a people made in the image of God.

We have faith that what we do for the least of these, we do for Jesus. We have faith that following the Lord puts us on the right side of history. We have faith that, in the end, God will bring all people to himself, welcoming the faithful into the glory of his Kingdom, on earth as it is in heaven.

This is the journey we find ourselves on, as followers of Christ. This is the journey we seek to embody more faithfully during Lent; the journey we celebrate on Palm Sunday; the journey we contemplate on Maundy Thursday, Good Friday and Holy Saturday; the journey we look forward to as Easter draws near.

Jesus calls us to travel alongside him on this journey of joy, tragedy and triumph, knowing full well the sacrifice it means for us and for our lives.

"Now my soul is troubled," says Jesus. Jesus knows his way is not easy for us. But Jesus shows us it is possible, and fruitful. Looking toward the cross, he says to his disciples, "... What should I say – 'Father, save me from this hour?' No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour. Father," he prays, "glorify your name."

Jesus lived his life to the glory of God, just as we live our lives for the sake of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior, the Savior of the world!

As Jesus says, “Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.”

Jesus is drawing all people to himself. And it is our calling as brothers and sisters in Christ to, likewise, draw people closer to Jesus, through our ministry, through who we are as followers of the Lord, as children of God.

So ask yourself, what is “the ruler of this world” that needs to be driven out by Jesus. Clearly injustice, right? The root causes of poverty and homelessness, right? The warring of nations, acts of senseless violence – violence of any kind – any hatred of another soul, the abuse and misuse of our precious planet, the plants and animals that live on it. All this hatred and abuse driven out, by Jesus.

Now ask yourself what in you needs to be driven out by Jesus? Is there any prejudice in your heart, any anger in your soul, any doubt or fear that’s controlling you, any addiction or temptation that has you in its clutches?

Jesus is here for you, to drive all that out, to make room for his blessing. “Now is the judgment of this world,” says Jesus. Now is the time for of us to stand in the gracious judgment of the Lord. Now is the time to ask Jesus to drive out anything in you that is keeping him away, those things you know of that are keeping you from drawing nearer to the Lord and those things that are hidden from you. Pray to the Lord to take them out of your life.

There is a strong attraction that we feel for the Lord, a magnetic attraction. We just need to turn around those parts of our lives that are country to the Lord, turn them around so that the attraction pulls us closer.

The closer you are to the Lord, the closer you are to seeing the salvation of the world.. For it is in living for the sake of Jesus, devoting ourselves to the work and worship of God, and sharing with others the blessings of the Holy Spirit that Christ is working out the salvation of the world, drawing all people to himself, in the fullness of God’s glory. Amen.

PASTORAL PRAYER

Merciful God, we embrace this season of Lent as we prepare again to walk with Jesus to the cross. Speak to us, we pray, the solemn truth of Christ's passion. Remind us that there is no life without death, no communion without separation, no glory without suffering.

Give us courage and faith to receive these difficult truths, and to align our hearts and lives with them.

May we choose to lose our lives so that we may gain them; to endure the pain of separation that we might enjoy the fellowship of all your saints; to enter Christ's suffering by entering the suffering of your children on earth, that we may one day share in your eternal glory.

We pray for those who are suffering, and in doing so we draw closer to you and to them. O Lord, help us to be mindful of all your blessings, and to let our lives sing out as our grateful response for your extravagant gift of love, care, compassion, and provision. We pray all this in the name of Jesus Christ, who is and was and forever shall be, and who 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.