

Psalm 147:12-20
John 1:1-18

Second Sunday After Christmas
Midway Presbyterian Church
January 3, 2021

Who Is Jesus?

Introduction to the Psalm

Our Psalm for this Sunday was written for the Jerusalem congregation in the period following the Exile. The rebuilding of Jerusalem would not take place by the people alone. An invitation to praise God is followed by reasons to offer praise. Listen to these words from Psalm 147:12-20...

Introduction to the Gospel Lesson

Our Gospel Lesson this morning is taken from the prologue of the Gospel of John. Unlike Matthew, Mark, and Luke, John begins his gospel by going all the way back to the very beginning of time, wanting to say that Jesus was not an element of creation, but the Creator—the same as God. Listen to these words from John 1:1-18...

Sermon

It was not until Kate Corbett had reached the age of fifteen or sixteen that her faith became central to her life, and she began to think of being a missionary. The old photographs reveal a beautiful young woman. Undoubtedly, there would have been numerous suitors in her small Pennsylvania farm community. But she turned her back on that life, feeling called by God to the mission field. When the Presbyterian Church sent her to India, in an area that is now Pakistan, the journey, by clipper ship, took six months. For a person with no sailing experience, the trip must have been particularly hard. But the voyage may have seemed like a vacation next to the task that awaited her. The term “culture shock” could not begin to describe the difference between nineteenth century India and her hometown in the U. S.

But Kate Corbett stuck it out. Her faith led her to better the lives of others, and she believed Christ called her to that place, in that time. She founded schools for girls, untouchable girls, those at the very bottom of India's social structure. Kate sought to give opportunity and hope to individuals that society considered "throwaways." So she spent her life in India, building, administering, and teaching at these schools.

However, in 1911, at the age of 49, while in the mountains of Kashmir, she was bitten by an insect. Carried by stretcher for three days attempting to reach a mission hospital, she died before she could receive treatment, and she was buried in the missionary graveyard near Lahore, Pakistan.

Supported by the Presbyterian Church, the schools Kate Corbett founded have educated Christian and Muslim girls, throwing a lifeline in a culture where to be untouchable and female is a difficult combination.

As mentioned in the Introduction to the Gospel Lesson, the first 18 verses of John are known as "The Prologue." Right at the beginning of his book, John sets forth his theme and purpose. Every story he tells and every incident he describes in the full 21 chapters are simply validations of what he states in these verses, that when we see Jesus, we see God.

The Nicene Creed in our *Book of Confessions* declares that:

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ,
the only Son of God,
eternally begotten of the Father,
God from God, Light from Light,
true God from true God,
begotten, not made,
of one Being with the Father;
through him all things were made.

Later, after Jesus' promise to prepare a place for his followers in heaven, John records Philip's request:

Philip said to him, “Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied.” Jesus said to him, “Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. (Jn. 14:8-9a)

So John seeks to convey that Jesus and God are the same entity. Jesus is of the same mind and character of God. In Jesus, we are confronted by God Himself.

Some of you may remember Arthur Burns, who served two consecutive terms as chairman of the Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System. He was a man of considerable gravity. Medium in height, distinguished, with wavy silver hair and his signature pipe, he was economic counselor to a number of presidents from Dwight Eisenhower to Ronald Reagan. When Arthur Burns spoke, his opinions carried weight and Washington listened.

Burns was also Jewish, so when he began attending an informal White House group for prayer and fellowship in the 1970s, he was accorded special respect. In fact, no one knew quite how to involve him in the group. And week after week when different people took turns to lead the meeting in prayer, Burns was passed by—out of a mixture of respect and reticence.

One week, however, the group was led by a newcomer who did not know of Burns’ status. As the meeting ended, the newcomer turned to Arthur Burns and asked him to close with a prayer. Some of the old-timers glanced at each other in surprise and wondered what would happen. But without missing a beat, Burns reached out, held hands with others in the circle, and prayed this prayer: “Lord, I pray that you would bring Jews to know Jesus Christ. I pray that you would bring Muslims to know Jesus Christ. Finally, Lord, I pray that you would bring Christians to know Jesus Christ. Amen.”

John wants Christians to know who Jesus Christ is. If we do not accept that God and Jesus are one and the same, then he is simply a great philosopher, a person of deep spirituality, a profound moral teacher, but not someone in whom we believe and to whom we dedicate our lives.

But if he is God, if he is the very creative mind of the universe, then everything he says is true and must be followed if we are to live the lives for which we were created. If we believe that Jesus is God, then faith in him will produce a moral and ethical transformation in which our lives begin to reflect his life. The truth he communicated becomes the very voice of God, calling us to live out the concepts of love, generosity, goodwill, and justice. The love and forgiveness that Christ that brings to our hearts and minds, enable us to wipe away our sin and become in a very real sense, a new creation.

Kate Corbett did not go to India because Jesus was a profound moral teacher with some wonderful ideas. She got on that boat, lived and died in that strange land, seeking to help people who were total strangers, because she believed the Creator of the universe, the Word made flesh, called her to serve him there.

It is said that during the Revolutionary War, a group of Continental Army soldiers was struggling to lift a heavy log. It was plainly too much for them, but their corporal just stood by, barking out orders and getting red in the face. At that moment, a man rode up on horseback. The stranger looked the situation over, then dismounted and walked over to help. With a great heave-ho, they all picked up the log and moved it to where it belonged.

The stranger turned to the corporal and asked why he hadn't been helping. "Sir," the soldier replied, "do you not see that I am the corporal?"

At that point, George Washington opened his coat, revealing his general's insignia.

“Yes, sir, I see that you are the corporal,” he said, “but I want you to see that I am the general.”

We deliver Meals on Wheels, pray for the sick, help the poor and oppressed, give sacrificially of our resources, because that is what Jesus did and wants us to do.

Who is Jesus? John says Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah, the very essence and being of God. Theology is what we believe about God. To be sure, we are often more drawn to Jesus' parables—stories like the Good Samaritan, or the Prodigal Son, or the story of the Healing of the Blind Man. But theology determines what we *believe*, which determines how we *act*. Kate Corbett went to India because she believed Jesus was God.

And that is why we celebrate the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper. Thereby do we remember what he did for us and our salvation. Thereby do we pledge our allegiance to him first and foremost. Thereby do we commune with him and with all his people in heaven and on earth. To the nurture of our souls in this sacred journey we call life on earth. Until we enter that heavenly home that he has gone to prepare for us.

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.