

**Seeing, Hearing, Feeling and Loving a God
who Sees, Hears, Feels and Loves All
based on 1 John 1:1-10
David Jahnke, 5/3/18**

Children's message from Luke 5:17-25-- Jesus Forgives and Heals a Paralyzed Man who was brought to Jesus by his friends. He was then criticized by the Pharisees for forgiving sins. Jesus said, "What is easier, to say to this man, "Your sins are forgiven? Or to have him pick up his mat and walk? But I will show you my authority to forgive sins..." And then he healed the man.

Just as Jesus healed people's bodies, we can heal as well by way of loving touches and making sure people can go to the doctor and get medicines. And just as he healed people's souls by loving them and telling them their sins are forgiven, we can do the same; and tell people to stop feeling bad about themselves. And when powerful people ask us why we should do that for people who are not the best people; people who have messed up their lives in some way or another, we can respond as Jesus did, "It is not people who are well who need a doctor but sick people." We tell them that Jesus was the best doctor ever and he wants us to nurse everyone who is sick.

Sermon

Pastor Ken gave me the classic Christian apologetic Basic Christianity by the English evangelist John Stott. I am not sure if he thinks I need a review or not! No...; we might start giving copies to visitors. The introduction starts off with concern about the loss of the younger generations in England for a couple of main reasons: 1. Because of the huge disconnect between the Jesus of the gospels and your average modern-day Christian. And 2. because of skepticism regarding Jesus' divinity.

The same is happening in modern-day America. And we need to figure out how to address it. Listen to what John has to say about this at the beginning of his first epistle.

1 We declare to you what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life— 2this life was revealed, and we have seen it and testify to it, and declare to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was revealed to us— 3we declare to you what we have seen and heard so that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. 4We are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.

So the first response I would make the questioning of our youth is that Jesus was a person. He was seen, heard, touched and loved by a great many people. And those people spoke and wrote about what he did and what he taught. Jesus is not a Greek myth concocted out of a wonderful imagination. He was considered an amazing teacher and a great healer and wonder-worker in his day. There is no serious scholarly debate about any of this.

My children's message pretty much sums up what people had to say about him. He reached out to the lowest, the sickest and the worst in society without any fear of being defiled physically, socially or spiritually and he made them well. There was good reason for righteous people to avoid these folks. Sick people might be contagious. Being around spiritually sick people is dangerous too since sin can move from one person to another by way of impacting them and the possibility of falling prey to their temptations. And to associate with quote-unquote sinners was also a detriment to your social standing. And yet Jesus was not concerned with any of these things. Because he knew he could not be defiled physically and spiritually.

When he taught and healed, he did this with an amazing combination of both humility and bravado. He lowered himself and looked broken people in the eyes. He welcomed them to dinner tables and went to their homes to eat.

But at the same time, he had the gall to tell them that their sins were forgiven which was something only God should do. And he did these things on the sabbath, which was a no-no as well. So he looks like the most humanistic of humans who ever lived. And yet he acted and taught with a boldness that led people to accuse him of blasphemy which means that he put himself in the place of God.

All of this ought to get young people thinking. Why would someone so humble and loving put himself in the place of God? And why would the church remember him in a way that actually fueled the accusations that he was a blasphemer? It would have been in many ways better for them to continue to remember and honor him as messiah without implying his divinity; without the scandals of him breaking the sabbath and hanging out with and forgiving the sins of sinners. And yet they did remember these things. Why?

Maybe because he actually said and did most of these things. And they knew they should tell the truth, even though it was scandalous. Even his opponents in the gospels acknowledge a lot of what he did and they suggested that he was doing them by way of demonic power or he was just a charlatan. But from my reading of Jesus' character, neither of those accusations holds water.

There is much I will say about this in the weeks ahead but I want to now move to will be more convincing to youth than historical evidence and theological argument; and that is Jesus' followers actually following him in their way of life.

I read Friday night about a disagreement between John Stott and Billy Graham who were probably the two most influential evangelists of the 20th century:

"They were in Lausanne, Switzerland for the International Congress on World Evangelization. Stott had come to the conclusion that God called his people to care about society and politics as well as evangelism. But [most of the Americans, including Graham,] believed that preaching the gospel was all that really mattered. Talk of social action brought to mind the dreaded social gospel, which many saw as a chief culprit in the theological drift of America's historic denominations."

<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/trevin-wax/when-john-stott-confronted-billy-graham/>

Friends, a lot of people are right to lament the quote-unquote theological drift of mainline denominations; (i.e. the divinity and resurrection of Jesus.) But the evangelical movement is finally coming around to the righteousness of the social gospel. I was just at a continuing education conference in Nashville and it was put on by young evangelicals who are part of a new reformation in the evangelical movement that he basically come around to Stott's position. It only took us 40 years in America to do so but better late than never. So at this conference, it was really a beautiful thing to behold evangelicals welcoming black and female pastors, poets and organizers of all kinds talking about social justice matters and how they are connected to the mission of Jesus.

Right before a female Anglican priest got up to deliver an excellent sermon, the m.c. spoke about a survey that they had the 1500 participants take which asked what they thought about having women preach. 53% of the people there were either opposed or uncomfortable with that or were not sure. And then this priest gets up and just hits a home run with her sermon.

Young people today simply will not put up with oppressive attitudes toward women or minorities, be they racial or sexual minorities. And they know that the meaning of life is directly connected to the kind of society we create. So when we adult Christians separate the thing that we suggest is the most important thing in life-- God and our faith in Him-- when we separate this from our family and social lives, it is a scandal to the gospel. When we do not pray much or read the Bible or talk about Jesus much in our homes; when we do not even get to church regularly, much less take these things to the streets, well then our youth see right through it and think, "If you believe that Jesus was the divine Son of God, why don't you pay more attention to Him and to building the kind of society he exemplifies?"

Dr. Dick Sharrett (from our church) has been pondering as of late the meaning of Jesus' being Lord of all creation. And how this means that his teachings are not interesting intellectual puzzles. They are commandments which must be obeyed if we want full life for us, our loved ones and the world. It's time to take seriously what John is telling us when he says the following: Continuing now at the fifth verse...

5 This is the message we have heard from [Jesus] and proclaim to you, that God is light and in him there is no darkness at all. 6 If we say that we have fellowship with him while we are walking in darkness, we lie and do not do what is true; 7 but if we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.

We are living in a time of both tremendous light and tremendous darkness. And yet the postmodern world that our youth have grown up in is telling them that it is all grey and/or that we are all just wandering aimlessly between the light and the dark without knowing which is which. In such a world, *we have to* walk in the light and we have to be the light to an ever-wandering and ever-uncertain generation. They are looking for something to hold onto. And we have to show them the anchor that holds the universe together and fills it with meaning.

The great news is that with Jesus as an anchor and lighthouse, then the great fog of our post-modern uncertainty clears; the darkness of their doubt and fear lifts. Brokenness in their relationships is repaired by grace and love. The emptiness and sorrow of the seeming victory of death is replaced by the joy of eternal life.

So please give serious thought to what you will do and say to draw youth to Jesus and everything he represents. We have a new mentoring program at the church and have about 15 officers signed up to disciple the middle and high school kids. We could use about 15 more. And I wonder if the Spirit is particularly inviting empty nesters and soon to be empty nesters to this. And we also need parents to get their kids involved.

And if this is not for you, is there someone else in your family or among friends that you might reach out to and help them become or stay conscious of God and the church's love for them? Or do you have any ideas about what might help? For just as the evangelical movement in America is 40 years behind Europe when it comes to social justice, so too are we about 40 years behind them in terms of losing our youth. May we do everything in our power to not let it happen through the one who can do more abundantly in us than all we can ask or imagine, to God be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus.

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Sermon Questions for Reflection and Application
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1. Why is it so hard for people to believe that Jesus is God? What are some responses to those doubts? What did John and Paul experience that led them deeper into Jesus' divinity?

2. Why is it important to believe that Jesus was divine? What happens to his authority if that goes away? What then happens to God's authority and the authority of Love, Goodness, Justice etc.? Is there sufficient reason to trust in God and all of these other things without the self-revelation of God in Jesus?
3. Who can be a second witness to the Johannine (i.e. from the gospel of John) Jesus' claim that he is "the light of all life"? What do you think of Jesus' argument?
4. Some good people focus on Jesus' humanity and teachings and like the idea of God. But does this align with what Jesus suggested about himself? Does it align with the very personal God of the Bible? What is lost in this?
5. Others focus almost entirely on Jesus' divinity and his saving death on the cross. How does John correct this pseudo-"docetism" which is a heresy that says Jesus was God but not human? What happens to human expectations and potentialities if Jesus was God but not really human? What happens to God's understanding our temptations and weaknesses?
6. Paul too says that "if there is no resurrection of the body, then Jesus was not resurrected and that means we are still in our sins." If Jesus was the Son of Man and took all human sins into his body and the grave, what happened to those sins? What kind of life then is possible for us always?
7. What will you do to go deeper into the mysteries of Christ's divinity, crucifixion and resurrection?