

WGUMC July 27, 2014 "and is seated at the right hand of the Father" John 10:22-39

I started this sermon series on the Apostles' Creed because I'm interested in what the Church has to say about Jesus. But what you may have already discovered is that, while I'm happy to tell you what the Church says about Jesus, I can't tell you what Jesus says about Jesus. And that's because, when you ask Jesus a simple question, you almost never get a straight answer.

That is especially true in this passage we read in John 10. John's Gospel was the last of the four gospels to be written, around 100 A.D., and it is by far the most contentious. In John, Jesus is always arguing with someone. But that tells me less about Jesus' personality than it does about the early Christian community. It seems that the farther away his followers got from first-hand knowledge of Jesus, the more they argued about him.

I'm afraid that Christians in the first century acted a lot like Christians in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. We are still arguing about who Jesus was and is. Was he just a guru or is he God? Was he just a man or is he the Messiah? Is he dead or is he divine?

When the people asked Jesus these kinds of questions, they usually didn't get very clear answers. Listen to what Jesus says to the Sanhedrin:

They said, "If you are the Messiah, tell us." He replied, "If I tell you, you will not believe; and if I question you, you will not answer. But from now on the Son of Man will be seated at the right hand of the power of God." All of them asked, "Are you, then, the Son of God?" He said to them, "You say that I am." [Luke 22:67-70]

Jesus may be seated at the right hand of the Father, but he's still evading questions from people who aren't ready to hear the answers. The question is: are we ready?

The religious authorities in the Gospel of John are not ready, even though they have just heard about Jesus healing the man who was born blind. They interrogated that poor man

and his parents. But while the man can now see Jesus, the religious authorities cannot see him.

The scene changes, and a crowd surrounds Jesus as he walks through the temple. "How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly." [10:24] They obviously don't know Jesus! The one who speaks in parables and answers questions with more questions is not about to give them a simple yes or no. He says, in effect, I don't have to tell you who I am, because "the works I do in my Father's name testify to me." [10:25] Just look at what I do and you'll know who I am. Look at the healing, the feeding, the forgiving, and you'll know that "the Father and I are one." [10:30]

With those words, the crowd starts to pick up stones. The people don't want to kill him for the good works he's doing but for the blasphemous things he's saying, "because you, though only a human being, are making yourself God." [10:33]

And that's a problem for a lot of us, isn't it? We want to believe that God is God, but we aren't quite convinced that the man Jesus is God. Jesus knew that you can't just tell people who you are. You have to show them. So Jesus says, take a look at my resumé: brought good news to the poor, release to the captives, sight to the blind, fed the 5,000—even turned water into wine. "If I am not doing the works of my Father, then do not believe me. But if I do them, even though you do not believe me, believe the works, so that you may know and understand that the Father is in me and I am in the Father."

[10:37-38]

So here is one of the reasons we don't know who Jesus is: we don't pay enough attention to what he does. We think about Jesus in the abstract instead of looking for Jesus in close contact. But most of us need a good reason to go looking. And if there's never a crisis, never a burning question or unbearable burden, then we likely won't need Jesus enough to go looking

for him and discover who he is and what he can do. The upshot is that if we are too comfortable living our lives, we will be incapable of believing in Christ.

It's a real temptation here in Silicon Valley, but I don't want any of you to be too comfortable. Now if you don't happen to have a crisis brewing in your life right now, I don't want you to go manufacture one! But let's see if you can imagine one. Let me tell you a story about a woman who needed Jesus to be more than just a good man. She needed him to be the Son of God, the Son of God, seated at the right hand of the Father. Let me tell you about Mariam Yahia Ibrahim.

Mariam is a Sudanese woman who was raised by her mother to be an Orthodox Christian. However, in Sudan, you legally belong to the faith of your father, and Mariam's absentee father was a Muslim. So when she married a Christian, she was marrying outside of her father's faith, and that was outside the law.

Her half-brother filed a complaint, and Mariam was arrested by the Sudanese authorities. She was given three days to convert to Islam. When she refused, she was charged with apostasy. And because she illegally married a Christian, she was also charged with adultery. Her sentence: 100 lashes and death by hanging. That was back in May.

Mariam went to prison when she was eight months pregnant and worried about how she was going to deliver her baby. When labor started, her legs were chained together. And you can bet she was praying. This is when, if you are a Christian, you have to believe that Jesus is sitting at the right hand of the Father and can do mighty deeds of power. What else can you do? Thanks be to God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ because she somehow managed to deliver that baby.

By this time the international pressure on the Sudanese government was so intense that Mariam's sentence was

overturned on appeal. In late June, she walked out of that prison with her new daughter in her arms. She was immediately arrested again on trumped up charges, but this time, she and her family were able to take refuge in the American embassy. With the help of Italian authorities, she and her husband and their two children got on a plane and arrived in Rome last Thursday. They met with Pope Francis who thanked her for her "courageous and constant witness of faith." Now that they have American passports, the family will soon be on their way to the United States.

If Mariam hadn't kept up her faith, hadn't believed in her heart that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, who on the third day rose from the dead, ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of the Father, if she didn't believe that the living Christ was even now able to do works of amazing power in her, she would have given up her faith, and we'd have less reason

to keep ours. Thanks to her courageous witness, our faith is a little bit stronger today than it was yesterday.

I hope that as you heard that story, you were imagining yourself in it. What would you do? What would you hang onto? But don't worry. I'm not going to pray that things get that uncomfortable for you. Escaping the death penalty is not the only way to get to know who Jesus is for you. But if it takes a little crisis to get to know Christ, I'm pretty sure that most of us have already been there once or twice, and the rest of us are on the way.

I'm also not going to tell you that who Jesus is for me has to be who Jesus is for you. The Church has done that for 2,000 years now, and I think we've done more harm than good. I like the Apostles' Creed because it's short and simple and leaves room to wiggle. The Nicene Creed came later and is much longer. And it wasn't written because everyone agreed.



In fact, the Nicene Creed was written so that the powers that be could use it to exclude those with whom they disagreed.

I believe we can do a lot better if we spend less time telling people and more time showing them who Jesus is and what he can do. Being seated at the right hand of the Father is just another way of saying that Jesus is as God is and Jesus does as God does. And if we don't use up all our energy arguing about exactly what that means, we can do a much better job of showing the rest of the world that Jesus loves as God loves. And that's the answer the world is ready for.

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