

9/19/21 WORSHIP SERVICE

MORNING PRAYER – PASTOR LOIS

(Carol Friesen, Jenny Fast's mother, passed away at Schowalter Villa in the very early hours of yesterday – Saturday – morning. Jenny and her father, Walt, were at her bedside when she died. Jenny's siblings arrived last evening, so service plans will be made as they're able given covid restrictions.)

God, we cannot imagine the love you have for us and for all your creation. You sent Jesus to us, to reflect your very self, to show us the depth of your love and to remind us of our mission, our purpose here on this earth as your beloved children. We thank you and praise you, God, for your love, for the many ways you show us your love and care – through the love and care of family and friends, through the beauty of creation, through the provisions you offer, through the efforts of people to care for one another. Thank you, God, for all of your good gifts. As we proclaim with our words that you are the lord of our lives, the focus of our efforts, may our behavior, our actions, be consistent with our words. We confess that we often don't align our words and our intentions with our actions. It's too easy for us to draw lines between what we claim to believe and the ways we actually make decisions and live and speak. You have created us, God, with wills and minds – the ability to choose what we believe and how we behave. We proclaim with our mouths, here, in this worship service, that we want to be your people, it is our intention to live in ways that honor you and so we humbly ask for your wisdom, God, for your guidance and your Spirit to move in us and through us. We offer our prayers.

We thank you God for the life of Carol Friesen, Jenny Fast's mother. Thank you for welcoming her to yourself, for releasing her from her tired body. We ask that you would be especially close to Walt and to Jenny and John and Jenny's siblings and families. Be with them as they grieve and remember and celebrate Carol's life and as they consider how to make plans for a service. Be their wisdom, their comfort and their peace as they adjust now to this new reality.

O God, we thank you that you created our bodies and our souls with amazing powers to heal. And from you has also come incredible knowledge and wisdom through science and medical study. We pray for those in our midst who are experiencing pain or brokenness – in body, mind or spirit. We pray for Connie as she recovers from procedures and continues to work with doctors to address pain. We pray for those whose journey with illness is on-going and who continue to receive treatments. Give them perseverance, hope and trust in your steadfast love. We pray for those whose pain is not physical, but is every bit as real and impacts their life and those close to them in ways that can create anguish, worry and fear for their well-being. Oh, God, be with those who need your healing touch in specific ways to ease pain that is not so easily identified or treated. Grant your mercy and your Spirit of grace and love to those who care for and support those who are struggling.

We pray for your blessing on the community service day next week as we worship with our hands and feet in this community. May our actions and our words glorify you God, and send clear messages of humility, love and care.

We pray for the work of the Mennonite Central Committee – locally and internationally. Bless the efforts of your people everywhere towards bringing peace with justice. That work looks different in different contexts and cultures, but we ask that your Spirit would be present, guiding, opening possibilities, opening minds and hearts to your work of bringing your kingdom here on earth, as it is in heaven, as we pray the prayer together that Jesus taught... Our Father, who art in heaven...

PRAYER OF DEDICATION – PASTOR LOIS

O God, you are the source of all that we have and all that we are. Bless these gifts of money that have been given here this morning. Bless the gifts of time and energy, the gifts of care and compassion. Bless each giver and each gift – we acknowledge that it all originates in you. So make us generous and free to give, glorifying you in the process. Amen.

SERMON - JESUS IS LORD – PASTOR CALEB

Philippians 2:5-11

I believe that this is a very important passage of Scripture – one of those “foundational passages.” It wasn’t on purpose, but it’s also not random that this is actually the third time this has been the scripture reading or part of the scripture reading since I’ve been here.

Before we delve in, I want to recap a little on the series we are in. We’ve begun talking about “Anabaptist Essentials,” core teachings or emphases of Anabaptist Christians. These essentials certainly overlap with the beliefs of most Christians in the world, but we are maybe unique in the way that we emphasize and hold together the ten essentials that we will look at in this series.

This is our third week around the theme “Jesus is the center of our faith.” We’ve talked about following Jesus as the basic goal of our faith, interpreting Scripture through Jesus, and now Jesus as Lord.

As I’ve been reflecting on all of this, I keep coming back to how important it is to establish who Jesus really is. Lot’s of people can say the two-syllable word “Gee-zuss.” But how do we really know who this person is?

David Gushee names some of the inadequate versions of Jesus that are out there. There’s the “Hallmark-Christian-movie Jesus” a sentimentalized white Jesus.

There’s the “Jesus who wants you to succeed” – whatever your middle-class pursuits, you can always quote “I can do all things through Christ...” and have more confidence of winning.

Even worse is the “Vacant Jesus Fillable with Any Content We Want.” This, Gushee says, often ends up being the “Jesus of my tribe, my class, my race, my party, [or] my all-important self.”¹

JESUS – SCRIPTURE – LOVE

I have a suggestion that may help us. Think of a triangle with these three points: Jesus, Scripture, and Love. I have two-way arrows, because each of the three aids in understanding the others, and they reinforce each other.

We know who Jesus is through Scripture. Through the stories in the Gospels, teaching about Jesus in the rest of the New Testament, and through the story of Israel in the Old Testament that Jesus fulfilled.

We’d know a little about Jesus of Nazareth without the Bible, but not much. True, the different biblical writers speak of Jesus from different angles. They may even seem to contradict. That makes the biblical portrayal of Jesus all the more complex and richer.

We need Scripture to know Jesus, and yet last week pastor Lois preached about reading all of Scripture through the lens of Jesus.

LOVE

The third part of the triangle is love. Jesus taught that love of God and neighbor is the fulfillment of the law. We can test our interpretation of the Bible – and our understanding of Jesus – if they lead us to practice love.

Because we are created in the image of God, we all have some basic moral intuitions about what love looks – what we sometimes call our conscience. This basic love-idea remains an important test to sniff out questionable readings of Scripture and questionable “versions” of Jesus.

This test still goes both ways. In our culture, we so easily trivialize love. We reduce love to a romantic movie with a young and attractive woman and man having the hots for each other.

We know what love is only from story and real experiences of love. I can think of my own life story of how I have felt loved (albeit imperfectly) by my parents or mentors, closest friends. We also learn what love is by coming to love another deeply, a child, a spouse, a dear friend.

Love has no meaning apart from our stories. As Christians, the ultimate and central story we tell to know what “love” is really is the story of Jesus.

See what I mean about these three being mutually reinforcing?

There’s obviously a life-time journey we can take to study Scripture and understand Jesus better – doesn’t that sound like fun?

¹ Gushee, David P. *After Evangelicalism: The Path to a New Christianity*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2020., p. 85-86

PHILIPPIANS DRAMA

PHILIPPIANS 2:5-8

Philippians 2 has this kind of hymn or poem about what Jesus did. We don't know for sure if Paul composed this or if Paul was quoting something composed earlier. Paul is telling the community that they should cement a sense of friendship and equality between each other by each one pursuing an attitude or mindset of humility.

This is when he gives this poetic tribute to Jesus as our example. Before we get to Jesus as Lord, it's critical to understand *what Jesus did* to become "Lord."

Paul seems to be reaching back to the time before Jesus the human was born, when the Spirit of Christ was "in the form of God" – basically was God – but chooses to take on flesh in this person of Jesus. Paul says he took on the "form of a slave" – a direct parallel with the earlier "form of God." "He emptied himself" and "he humbled" or lowered himself.

I guess you could say it's a huge demotion to go from divine status to human status. If that's not enough, Jesus practiced a life of obedience and love that actually led him to the point of the most humiliating death on a Roman cross.

The whole drama can be drawn with a "V" shape. Christ began the journey at a high status, takes the lowest status imaginable, and then God brings him back to the highest place.

Jesus doesn't undertake this journey simply as a way to get to glory. Though the hymn doesn't directly say so, Christ is motivated by love. The journey of descent is the only way to save humanity.

When I preached earlier on this, I said *"Jesus entered the hole that each of us are in so that we can come out of that hole."*

PHIL 2:9-11

The final movement is that God highly exalted Jesus, lifting him up as much as Jesus had lowered himself. This part of the hymn is talking about the resurrection, but more than that, Christ's return to the highest possible status after suffering the lowest possible status.

At this point the Christ hymn probably depicts a kind of triumphal procession like the kind Roman emperors and military generals had.

All of creation, all creatures in heaven, earth, and the underworld bow and confess that Jesus is Lord. These words come from Isaiah 45:23, where God says *"to me every knee will bend and every tongue swear."*

Everyone makes this pledge of allegiance together. It's possible that rather than the statement "Jesus Christ is Lord," what we actually have is a salute that everyone says together: "Lord Jesus Christ."

Kind of like the kind of salute that Caesar expected when doing a victory lap. But this Jesus didn't go on military conquest. He taught, healed, loved, exposed hypocrisy, prayed desperately in the garden, and was nailed to the cross.

Why does this matter? Because our theme today is “Jesus is Lord,” and I want us to see that whatever that means, Jesus did the exact opposite of what powerful men in ancient and modern times have done – grasping for more, more money, more political power, more cities subdued.

SLIDE: MATT 20:28

Even the disciples of Jesus had trouble getting this. Jesus explained to them,

“You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. ²⁶ It will not be so among you; but whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant, ²⁷ and whoever wishes to be first among you must be your slave; ²⁸ just as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.” (Matt 20:25-28)

Some Christians today find the word "Lord" difficult to connect with in their spirituality, because the secular meaning of the word Lord has to do with male dominance and hierarchical power.

When early Christians called Jesus “Lord,” they were really turning the concept of “lord” on its head. They were subverting the very idea of domination systems, of certain people lording it over others the way that most cultures have always functioned in history.

ANABAPTIST ESSENTIALS

In chapter 3 of *Anabaptist Essentials*, Palmer Becker contrasts the way that Jesus is Lord with the authorities in our lives.

He says that obedience to self (in the sense of our less mature, selfish desires) leads to chaos. Obedience to governmental or institutional authority leads to law and order. Christians are to obey the law of the land where we live whenever it doesn’t conflict with our discipleship.

The unique position of most Anabaptists has been a refusal to participate in military action, because we believe that serving the state does not exempt us from following Jesus’ command to love our enemies.

At one time, Becker was pastoring a Mennonite congregation where some were military veterans, and others had done alternative service in order to never being in the position of having to take another life.

Becker could find common ground by asking everyone to pledge “supreme allegiance” to Jesus. Jesus is always our primary authority as our “upside-down” lord.

SLIDE: AUTHORITIES AND LOYALTIES.

I believe that the idea of “authorities” could be expanded to include authorities, loyalties, or allegiances that are every day, and may even be invisible to us. Not all of these are inherently bad. It is not wrong to feel a sense of loyalty to your family, your community, your workplace, or your country.

I believe an important item to add to the list is *ideology*. An ideology is a set of ideas that a group of people has developed to be a coherent, consistent way of thinking about the world and hopefully what human flourishing should look like.

To pretend that we are not at all influenced by ideologies is to simply leave those influences unexamined. Very often ideology, whether conservative or liberal, is something we give allegiance to without being aware.

Because we live in this world, followers of Jesus will engage in some way or another with ideologies, but we have to do this carefully and fruitfully from our faith and the vision of God's will, justice, and peace we find in the biblical story. It's too tempting to go at it the other way around: being convinced by an ideology, and just finding a smattering of Bible verses that seem to support what we already think.

The Jesus of the Bible will challenge and likely disturb both conservatives and liberals. Some ideologies are better than others, but none should take first place for us.

We don't just say "Jesus is first" or "Jesus is Lord" without this transforming us deeply. That transformation will have the same "V-shape" that the journey of Christ did. I'm convinced that there is something of the logic of Phil 2 that is the essential revelation of God's love which has always been true. The way of Jesus is the way of love and we know what love looks like by holding it up to the pattern of Jesus.

It means nothing to call Jesus "Lord" if we are unwilling to at least begin to embrace the same "V-shaped" pattern for our own lives.

What does it mean for us to live out the same pattern? That's a hard question, because I sure don't intend to get myself crucified. In essence, the V-shaped pattern is about living out self-giving love.

Some Christians miss the point by teaching a prosperity gospel where prayer and faith give you a "get out of jail free" card. It's also missing the point to think we have to make ourselves miserable, if we think this means we should have poor self-esteem, or to tell anyone they have to stay in an abusive relationship or situation.

But to live this pattern does mean a decision to not play the same game of life that the culture tells us to.

I think of the ways that as a parent we try to be willing to enter the imaginary world of our four-year-old. Austin is either a "worker" involved in a major construction project – sometimes we have arguments, because he thinks the project needs to take place on the street or requires digging up the lawn. Sometimes he's a football player, with the same stinky shirt he pulls out of the laundry and a baseball helmet with old socks tied across the front to look like the helmet's face mask.

As little as we know about parenting, sometimes it seems the best we can do is to be willing to enter his imaginary world, and share his joy and frustrations. This is after all, what Jesus did.

In certain ways, I also experienced a kind of “humility” when I lived in a poor neighborhood in Honduras. I could have chosen to have my own apartment, but preferred to live with a family in the neighborhood where I worked.

This meant bathing by pouring somewhat cold water over my head (it usually felt good), and sleeping in a hot and humid room with a fan. I was young, so none of this was a big deal. I also had some uncomfortable privilege. Since the rental agreement said I had to have my own room, all five of the family members slept in one room for awhile until they could add a room to their house.

CONCLUSIONS

Where have we ended up at? In sum, we have said that first,

- *Jesus is our highest authority. We follow Jesus before following anything else*

We have to be willing to examine the invisible allegiances that may be what really hold primacy for us.

Second,

- *Jesus is the upside-down “Lord.” Instead of grasping at more, Jesus’ way is the way of service, humility, self-emptying, self-giving love*

When we call Jesus “lord,” he is like a powerful person by the world’s logic. It’s actually quite the opposite, and calling Jesus “lord” is to let go of the hold of the logic of the domination systems of the world and stand with those on the underside.

- *To claim Jesus as our “Lord” we have to reflect the same spirit of humility and self-giving love as Jesus*

What an incredible ride we are in for! We may feel like this is too challenging or that we are not good enough for this. That’s true. It’s freeing to admit our inadequacy, accept the grace we need for each day, and keep our sights and imaginations on the goal.

SLIDE: QUESTIONS

1. What other loyalties test your primary allegiance to Jesus?
2. How do we know if we are giving something else primacy over Jesus?
3. What is the difference between imagining Jesus to be a domineering “lord” versus an upside-down “lord” who came to serve and give his life?

BENEDICTION

May all of our knees bow at the name of Jesus and everyone’s tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father