

Who is Jesus?

Philippians 2:5-11

March 24, 2024 – Palm Sunday

Donna Claycomb Sokol

Mount Vernon Place UMC, Washington

*Who is Jesus?*

If we were sitting around tables sipping a cup of coffee or waiting for our tea to steep, I might invite you to turn to a neighbor and respond to the question.

If I then invited someone from your table to report highlights from your conversation, I suspect we might hear things like teacher, savior, Messiah, Son of God, friend, redeemer, mystery, and even a “I am not sure” from some of the braver folks in the room.

*Who is Jesus?*

While we might not be rehearsed in answering the question aloud, I suspect many of us have answered the question with other words or actions spoken during the week.

“Jesus!” we may have said aloud on January 6, 2021 when our attention was captivated by scenes of a once unimaginable insurrection splashed across our television screens, and for one or two in the congregation, taking place just beyond our locked office door. Did our saying his name on this day hold some belief that his presence is one that can save us from harm and destruction?

“In the name of Jesus,” is how I wrap up most of my prayers, invoking faith in one I believe can heal and make all things new.

“Jesus, you’ve got to come and help me,” we may have pleaded when a part of our body felt a penetrating pain that made it impossible to sleep or when walking into an exam room woefully unprepared.

We call on Jesus’ name when we need his peace, his presence, and his power.

*Who, then, is Jesus?*

The question is answered this week with a depth few of us can comprehend—starting with the crowds who lined the streets on this day hoping to catch a glimpse of the one they had watch heal people of their diseases, proclaim truth in parables, still a storm, cast out demons, and feed a multitude with fives loaves and two fish.

“Hosanna,” they shouted as he entered Jerusalem for the Passover. “Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.”

The word, “Hosanna,” is better translated, “Save, please!”

“Hosanna” is prayer of supplication for God to come and save a struggling people.

“Save us, Jesus!” they cried.

Save us now from the impact of Roman occupation.

Save us from backbreaking labor.

Save us from the bleeding that will not stop or the harsh stares that judge us without a word being spoken.

Save us from the pain that comes from a life that is oh so beautiful and oh so hard.

Come quickly, Jesus, and save me.

How often do we pray a similar prayer or cry a similar cry?

While it might seem that some of our prayers for Jesus so save us fall on deaf ears, the story we tell this week is of how God heard the cries of a suffering people, saw the needs of the world, showed up, and took on the form of a human in Jesus who took on the form of a slave and emptied himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross.

God will be God this week—by placing Godself in spaces where no one else would want to be.

God will be God this week by entering the rugged landscape of our world whose powerful cannot tolerate anyone who might reveal and insist on an alternative leadership—one in which peace is more powerful than war, humility is more potent than control, the myth of scarcity is replaced by a table where there all are fed and no one is turned away, and the cruelest form of capital punishment leads to abundant, unending life for all.

In Jesus, God becomes the last slave as his life, death, and resurrection destroy all that enslaves us whether it is guilt, shame, sin, or regret; and all systems that enslave communities—racial injustice, homophobia, conspiracy theories, economies that elevate a few by standing on top of a multitude, and so much more.

Will you walk with Jesus—not only on days when it is easy to stand in crowds of support but also when it is time to wash feet, when it is time to put the needs of others before our own needs, when it is time to give up our seat so someone else can sit down, when it is time to do something that might make us an enemy of the empire by refusing to prop up systems that enslave people instead of setting the captives free?

Come with me to Jerusalem and see who Jesus really is and the power he has to make all things new.