

Sermon Notes: Why Be Christian?

Week #4

Introduction

As we continue our post-Christmas sermon series called “Why Be Christian?” we might remember what we’ve explored so far. We began in the baptismal waters alongside Jesus, who entered the waters to show us the way to God’s abundant life. We listened for the voice of God alongside Samuel, Philip, and Nathanael. With Jonah, Simon, Andrew, James, and John, we received the persistent and grace-filled invitation to participate with God in living out the fullness of God’s kingdom here and now. As we continue, we learn that God draws leaders from the nurturing experience of community, and that community is essential for our life of faith.

Illustration Video

https://youtu.be/e1t774obMsQ?si=Sqj_Cr6EF-rQva9&start=00&end=123

A clip from the 2019 film *Star Wars: The Rise of Skywalker* where a dark moment becomes one of determined hope.

Video Discussion Questions

1. This is the ninth movie in what has become known as the Skywalker Saga within the larger framework of the Star Wars universe. This is certainly the climax of this film, and it could be argued that this is the climax of the entire nine-film arc. In a moment when all hope seems lost, suddenly new arrivals bring new perspective. Have you ever been in a situation where all hope seemed lost? How did that feel? How did you respond to these emotions?
2. At one point in this clip, one Imperial (the “bad guys”) officer seems surprised because he doesn’t think the protagonists have a navy. His companion notes that it’s not a navy but “just... people.” What do you think he means by this? What do you think the difference might be between an official organized navy and “just... people?”
3. What do you think motivated the large group of people to show up to this place at this time? If you’ve seen this full film (and even the larger saga), consider the full context. If not, use your best guess. Are there times in your life where you feel like people “showed up” in a meaningful way? Are there times in the history of La Jolla UMC or the broader United Methodist Church where people “showed up” in a meaningful way? Can you think more generally of times in history where the people “showed up?” For each of these, why do you think this happened, why do you think it was important, and what was the result?
4. Who is leading this group? Even if you don’t know the background of this character, consider what it must have taken to step into this leadership role. Why do you think this leader did this? What challenges do you think this leader faced? Where do you feel yourself called to lead, and what challenges give you pause?

Deuteronomy 18:15-20 (CEB)

¹⁵The Lord your God will raise up a prophet like me from your community, from your fellow Israelites. He's the one you must listen to. ¹⁶That's exactly what you requested from the Lord your God at Horeb, on the day of the assembly, when you said, "I can't listen to the Lord my God's voice anymore or look at this great fire any longer. I don't want to die!"

¹⁷The Lord said to me: What they've said is right. ¹⁸I'll raise up a prophet for them from among their fellow Israelites—one just like you. I'll put my words in his mouth, and he will tell them everything I command him. ¹⁹I myself will hold accountable anyone who doesn't listen to my words, which that prophet will speak in my name. ²⁰However, any prophet who arrogantly speaks a word in my name that I haven't commanded him to speak, or who speaks in the name of other gods—that prophet must die.

Mark 1:21-28 (CEB)

²¹Jesus and his followers went into Capernaum. Immediately on the Sabbath Jesus entered the synagogue and started teaching. ²²The people were amazed by his teaching, for he was teaching them with authority, not like the legal experts. ²³Suddenly, there in the synagogue, a person with an evil spirit screamed, ²⁴"What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are. You are the holy one from God."

²⁵"Silence!" Jesus said, speaking harshly to the demon. "Come out of him!" ²⁶The unclean spirit shook him and screamed, then it came out.

²⁷Everyone was shaken and questioned among themselves, "What's this? A new teaching with authority! He even commands unclean spirits and they obey him!" ²⁸Right away the news about him spread throughout the entire region of Galilee.

Scripture Discussion Questions

1. Why did the Israelites need a prophet? Do we need prophets or prophetesses now?
2. Mark 1:22 says, "They were astounded at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes." What does it mean for Jesus to teach as one who has authority?
3. Why did the impure spirit recognize the Holy One of God (Mark 1:24)?
4. A note on this Lectionary text from Discipleship Ministries (UMC) says, "*Like the prophet who comes from within the people of God, sometimes the demonic does as well. We ought to be as quick to call out what is wrong within us and among us as we are to point out how bad things are 'out there.'*" How can a community of faith discern and unmask the evil that might exist within?
5. Ephesians 4:11 (NIV) says, "So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers." Have you or has someone in your community been given any of these gifts?

6. The note from Discipleship Ministries also says, “*The community of faith can be a supportive incubator for those who discern a call to leadership or ministry of various kinds.*” How can your faith community be supportive so its members can fulfill their God-given call?

Add'l (Optional) Questions for Consideration

1. What are some characteristics of a good leader? Who do you know in your life who is a good leader? Have you told them? Why or why not?
2. What does it mean for someone to “teach with authority”?
3. What kind of characteristics do you think Jesus was looking for in a prophet? What kinds of characteristics do you think we look for in leaders here at church and in our various groups/committees/teams?
4. How can you apply this scripture to a situation that happens over and over again in your life/job/school/family?

Weekly Action

Take time this week to think about what your church community means to you. Perhaps you're very satisfied with your experience of church community. Perhaps you think there are ways your experience of church community could be better. Pray about this, and listen for God's response. Do you hear God speaking to you about your sense of church community? Do you think God might be calling you in some way related to this church community? Make a plan on how you might respond.

Prayer

As we continue on our journeys of faith, may God bless us with open hearts to recognize the gifts and graces in one another and in our neighbors, open minds ready to dream with the Spirit, and open doors ready to welcome the reign of God's love right here and right now. Amen.