

Sermon Notes: Why Be Christian?

Week #5

Introduction

This is the final week of our sermon series on why our Christian faith is essential. We have not addressed all the reasons and all the ways that Christianity is as important as ever, and I suggest that's not possible. With that said, I suggest that this week we approach an essential element of the Christian faith: that this is a faith that requires action. The epistle of James strongly advocates this point in the 2nd chapter (set aside potential arguments from Paul; this will be addressed on Sunday) by saying "So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead." (James 2:17). Why be christian? Because it inspires us and requires us to live our lives outwardly to build God's kin-dom on earth as it is in heaven.

Illustration Video

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=76txalAC5yg>

A clip from the 2013 film *The Croods* where a fictional prehistoric family works together to get breakfast.

Video Discussion Questions

1. This is the opening scene of the film, and clearly the beginning of this family's day. What do you observe from this family? As they start their day, what are they doing?
2. Who do you see as the leader throughout this clip? How does this leader express leadership? Is this leader effective? Why or why not?
3. Does this family accomplish their goal? Is it easy to accomplish or difficult? Why is it easy or difficult?
4. At the end of the clip, one character gets the least of the breakfast. How does he respond? What does this say about this character? Do you think it says anything about leadership?

Isaiah 40:21-31 (CEB)

- ²¹ Don't you know? Haven't you heard?
Wasn't it announced to you from the beginning?
Haven't you understood since the earth was founded?
- ²² God inhabits the earth's horizon—
its inhabitants are like locusts—
stretches out the skies like a curtain
and spreads it out like a tent for dwelling.
- ²³ God makes dignitaries useless
and the earth's judges into nothing.
- ²⁴ Scarcely are they planted, scarcely sown,
scarcely is their shoot rooted in the earth

when God breathes on them, and they dry up;
the windstorm carries them off like straw.

²⁵ So to whom will you compare me,
and who is my equal? says the holy one.

²⁶ Look up at the sky and consider:
Who created these?
The one who brings out their attendants one by one,
summoning each of them by name.

Because of God's great strength
and mighty power, not one is missing.

²⁷ Why do you say, Jacob,
and declare, Israel,
"My way is hidden from the Lord,
my God ignores my predicament"?

²⁸ Don't you know? Haven't you heard?
The Lord is the everlasting God,
the creator of the ends of the earth.
He doesn't grow tired or weary.

His understanding is beyond human reach,

²⁹ giving power to the tired
and reviving the exhausted.

³⁰ Youths will become tired and weary,
young men will certainly stumble;

³¹ but those who hope in the Lord
will renew their strength;
they will fly up on wings like eagles;
they will run and not be tired;
they will walk and not be weary.

Mark 1:29-39 (CEB)

²⁹After leaving the synagogue, Jesus, James, and John went home with Simon and Andrew. ³⁰Simon's mother-in-law was in bed, sick with a fever, and they told Jesus about her at once. ³¹He went to her, took her by the hand, and raised her up. The fever left her, and she served them.

³²That evening, at sunset, people brought to Jesus those who were sick or demon-possessed. ³³The whole town gathered near the door. ³⁴He healed many who were sick with all kinds of diseases, and he threw out many demons. But he didn't let the demons speak, because they recognized him.

³⁵Early in the morning, well before sunrise, Jesus rose and went to a deserted place where he could be alone in prayer. ³⁶Simon and those with him tracked him down. ³⁷When they found him, they told him, “Everyone’s looking for you!”

³⁸He replied, “Let’s head in the other direction, to the nearby villages, so that I can preach there too. That’s why I’ve come.” ³⁹He traveled throughout Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and throwing out demons.

Scripture Discussion Questions

1. In the text from Isaiah, the prophet is asking us to pay attention to what is already present, already taking place. Today in our faith, we are asked to know that God is in our midst, within us... already! Do you see God at work around you and/or within you?
2. Isaiah 40:31 reads “but those who wait for the Lord...” in the NRSV and “but those who hope in the Lord...” in CEB. What does this translational difference mean to you? How does God’s Spirit speak to you and guide you to read this text? Whether you prefer to “wait for” or “hope in” God, how will/do you do this?
3. After Jesus healed Peter’s mother-in-law, she began to serve Jesus and his disciples. She did not take time to rest. What does this say about her response to Jesus and his ministry? What does it say about how we should respond to Christ today? What does it say about the traditional role of women in society and within the communities of faith?
4. Why did Jesus not want the demons to say who he was? (Mark 1:34b). Why might this have been important to Jesus?
5. According to Mark 1:35-39, how were Jesus’ priorities set? Does this match what you have thought about Jesus’ priorities? If not, what’s different?

Add'l (Optional) Questions for Consideration

1. When you think of God, what words come to mind? What names come to mind?
2. What are words you hear other people use about God? Do you agree with most of those words?
3. What are words that someone who isn’t active in their faith or has never been a person with a faith/religion would use to describe God? How are those similar or different than the ways that a person with an active faith/religion would describe God?
4. Is it important that the Bible distinguishes people who are sick from people who are demon-possessed? Could it be the same thing? Why or why not?
5. Why might it be important that Jesus is known not just as a healer but also a preacher?
6. How could you be a healer in your world? How could you be a teacher in your world?

Weekly Action

Prayerfully explore where and how you experience God in the world today, keeping the words of Isaiah in mind. If you feel like you don't experience God, your task this week is to consider how you might work on how to listen, to open your ears or mind, or some other way to open your heart to experience God in your life. If you do experience God, even if it's not all the time, consider where you feel as though God might be guiding you or calling you. Make a list of what it will take for you to actively and outwardly respond to this guidance or calling. Consider Jesus' priorities in the Mark reading and how these might influence your plan. Then... Just Do It!

Prayer

Dear God, life can be hectic and tiring. We wear many different hats and have many responsibilities. Whenever we are exhausted and about to give up, please help us to have hope in you. Please give us the wisdom and determination to go to a quiet place to be in your presence and renew our strength to continue fulfilling your call upon our lives. Amen.