

## 1-1-23 Sermon #1 Who is this Jesus?

Let's pray.

Last year, my very first message was titled, "Who is this Jesus?" I also asked, "What made you become a believer?" If a stranger asked you "Who is this Jesus?", how would you answer them? As a Pastor, I've been challenged with how to better serve you from the pulpit and from the Gospels. Leading our church through the truth of the bible has brought tremendous blessings to me, and I need to ask all of you to help me with trying to grow our Faith together. No two people are the same, and we're all at different spots in our walk with Christ. We all need to continually challenge ourselves with moving forward in our walks, and this requires taking some Godly risks. It's amazing how fast one year has gone by. Reflecting on the year, we've been able to see how God is working in our lives. When I think about our prayer list and the Congregational Care Group, it shows how much our church desires to become closer to God. In the very beginning of our journey together, we talked about church growth, and we agreed to ask ourselves, "Who are we doing it for?"

I would like to revisit this commitment. I'm hoping that we can dig deeper into our hearts and grow even more. My hope is, can we get even closer to God? We explored feeling Jesus' love and hopefully that has helped with growing our FAITH. My prayer is that our love for Christ will help us become a little bolder with talking to others about Christ.

In 1 Corinthians 3:6-9 it says,

<sup>5</sup>What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to believe—as the Lord has assigned to each his task. <sup>6</sup>I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow. <sup>7</sup>So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow. <sup>8</sup>The one who plants and the one who waters have one purpose, and they will each be rewarded according to their own labor. <sup>9</sup>For we are co-workers in God's service; you are God's field, God's building.

What reward is this talking about?

These verses are talking about moving into action. Can we become stronger at being servants of God?

I think you would agree with me that prayer is powerful, and prayer is the only weapon we have to fight against what this world would want us to believe. Weapons are just a category and there are many different kinds of them.

Prayer is just like this. I think it's important that we identify all the different forms of prayer and practice using them. These are the weapons of Faith. Through the prayer chain and the Congregational Care Group, we've seen just how powerful of a God we serve is. We've been able to witness first-hand the importance and power that prayer has.

In Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 it says,

Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labor: <sup>10</sup> If either of them falls down, one can help the other up. But pity anyone who falls and has no one to help them up. <sup>11</sup> Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm. But how can one keep warm alone? <sup>12</sup> Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.

As a church, it's really important to hold onto this. By holding on to this promise, we will become even stronger ambassadors of Christ. I'm very thankful that we accepted the challenge of moving closer to God through prayer, and I believe that God was preparing us to do even greater things. I've shared with some of you that our denomination is working very hard at trying to get churches to return to the mission and purpose of the EC Church. They're trying very hard to help pastors and churches with finding ways to bring the good news of Christ to the lost in today's times. They're challenging churches to take Christ outside the four walls of the church.

Having the confidence in our heart for taking Christ to the lost isn't something the denomination can provide. This is the most difficult part. Currently, the Sunday morning bible study down stairs has been reading through the book of Luke. I would like to ask all of you to read through Luke and try to feel Jesus' passion for how He loved people.

Luke chapters 9, 10 and 12 can only happen through our Love for Christ. Let's start in 9:1, where Jesus talks to the Apostles:

When Jesus had called the Twelve together, he gave them power and authority to drive out all demons and to cure diseases,<sup>2</sup> and he sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal the sick. <sup>3</sup> He told them: **“Take nothing for the journey—no staff, no bag, no bread, no money, no extra shirt. <sup>4</sup> Whatever house you enter, stay there until you leave that town. <sup>5</sup> If people do not welcome you, leave their town and shake the dust off your feet as a testimony against them.”** <sup>6</sup> So they set out and went from village to village, proclaiming the good news and healing people everywhere.

Then In Luke 10:1-3 Jesus Sends Out the Seventy-Two:

10 After this the Lord appointed seventy-two<sup>[a]</sup> others and sent them two by two ahead of him to every town and place where he was about to go. <sup>2</sup> He told them, **“The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field. <sup>3</sup> Go! I am sending you out like lambs among wolves.”**

Then in Luke 12:12 Jesus makes another promise for all people. Jesus gives us the way to do it!!!!

**<sup>12</sup> for the Holy Spirit will teach you at that time what you should say.”**

Outreach isn't a new concept to the church. The kind of outreach we use needs to be examined.

Over the last year, some of you have told me that you've tried many different things for outreach, but nothing worked. We had the parking lot jam, Harvest Home dinner and served a meal for Alma's family. These kinds of outreach are very expensive, and it's impossible to do them on a regular basis.

The early church never had money, but the church grew. In the verses we just read from Luke, Jesus sent them out with nothing but a promise.

We've all heard of churches who are growing in today's times. It's the body of the church that's making this happen. Outreach from within people's hearts is what's making the difference.

Sure, it may be a hard thing to get started, but unless we keep planting and watering, God can't make it grow. Taking a lamp and putting it under a bed doesn't help light a room.

Developing a deeper more intimate relationship with Christ will never hurt any of us.

We believe that the bible is the true word of God. The bible is full of promises, and the second sentence of Ecclesiastes 3:11 is important to understand. We need to let this take over our hearts:

<sup>11</sup> He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the human heart; yet no one can fathom what God has done from beginning to end.

This isn't just a promise, it's a Faith issue. It can only be proven if we risk searching for the evidence. Outreach in the early church wasn't about putting on events and hosting things in the church, it was about finding people of PEACE. When we identify people of peace first, then natural conversations about God happen. This leads to the question, "How can we introduce Christ to people in today's times?" There is tons of evidence today that shows people don't want to be approached by people who walk up to them with a bible or start a conversation by using "Church", "Jesus", "God", or anything biblical. Huge walls go up and people will go silent as they look for a way to get away.

People don't understand the language of the bible, and we need to understand it's foreign to them.

We must first find peace. We need to watch for body language, and until we know someone feels safe around us, they won't care about what we have to say about God. We must be willing to listen and then listen some more. Learning how people feel takes time.

God is in everyone's heart, and we need to help people feel safe with us. It takes time and patience for learning about what may have hurt someone in the realm of God. We've all been hurt, we've been scared, we've lost loved ones.

When these things happen, we all need to be comforted.

I'm not sure how we've gotten to the point of so many walls being built up about Faith, but Hell fire and brimstone isn't by God's design. I think about Galatians and how the leaders of the law created a divide. Somehow the focus of Christianity shifted from Mercy and Grace to rules, laws, and guilt trips. This way of presenting God to others took the meaning of the name Christian and changed it to Hypocrite and has caused people to say please go away.

Churches that are growing today are presenting God in a way that shows MERCY, GRACE & FORGIVENESS. God will always provide a way to overcome anything.

So what's my point? What does all this mean?

As a church, I would like to ask you to help me with starting our own church survey. Find one person a week that you can ask for an honest opinion. Ask people their opinion about how they view churches today. Start with letting them know that you have NO ULTIOR MOTIVE, and promise them that you're not going to try and take over the conversation. Let them completely explain why they feel the way they do. After the conversation, jot down a couple of notes and let's start collecting them and see what happens. One example for how to start a conversation is by saying; "I wonder if you could help me?"

Let them know that our church is doing a survey and were trying to gather information that's truthful. Try very hard not to get ahead of yourself. Once they share, only respond by asking them for a deeper meaning to their response.

Last year, I tried to challenge us with asking people how we can pray for them? That probably wasn't a good idea. When I started asking strangers, I got bad results. The way I approached it was wrong. I've learned to give a logical reason why I'm asking them, and once I figured that out, when I ask them if they have a prayer need, they don't put a wall up.

Let me explain. In restaurants, we usually always say grace before our meals, and most servers experience this from time to time with their patrons. I've learned to tell them that because we say grace before our meal, if they have anything we could pray for them we would be glad to include it in our own prayer. I've even had servers stay and bow their heads with us.

Last Tuesday, a young lady named Grace was our waitress. I explained to her that as a group we say grace before we eat, and we would like to know if there's anything in her life that we could include in our prayer. Without hesitation, she asked that we pray for her new move. She and her boyfriend just moved in together and she said "please" pray for us to get settled in.

All we need to do is plant the seed.

Creating a natural conversation is what we need to do. In other settings, I can use being a Pastor as a way for genuinely meaning why I'm asking others how can I pray for them.

Everyone has something they can say to start a conversation with others.

I'm not asking them a question so I can "witness" to them. I'm asking because I genuinely would like to know. I do believe that all people have God in their heart. Learning why people are against the church and learning how they've been hurt by Godly people is a genuine concern to all of us. It's also refreshing to know how many people are genuine believers.

1 Peter 3:15 says,

<sup>15</sup> But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect.

The part about this verse that we need to understand is the "ASK" part.

We need build a relationship with people before they're going to want to "ask" us about our faith. One of my favorite scriptures that helps with knowing how to get into a "Natural" conversation about Faith is:

Luke 10:5:

<sup>5</sup> "When you enter a house, first say, 'Peace to this house.' <sup>6</sup> If someone who promotes peace is there, your peace will rest on them; if not, it will return to you. <sup>7</sup> Stay there, eating and drinking whatever they give you, for the worker deserves his wages. Do not move around from house to house.

Finding people of peace is all Christ is asking us to do. Please try to talk to somebody and to make a new friend.

As we close today's message, if you have a need in your life, or if you need to find salvation for the first time, please ask Christ to help you.

Let's pray.