

The Trouble with Jesus

HOMILY – AUGUST 23, 2009

A mother was preparing pancakes for her sons, Kevin, 5, and Ryan, 3. The boys began to argue over who would get the first pancake. Their mother saw the opportunity for a moral lesson. "If Jesus were sitting here, He would say, "Let my brother have the first pancake. I can wait." Kevin turned to his younger brother and said, "Ryan, you be Jesus."

I wonder, could that be the trouble today, that nobody wants to BE Jesus. Never mind, BE Jesus, fewer and fewer seem to want to acknowledge Jesus? Think I'm wrong? Bring up just the name Jesus in a conversation and see how quickly the conversation stops. Even mention Jesus outside the church walls, and watch people squirm and get all uncomfortable. Why even I doubt the sincerity of some people when I hear the name Jesus slip off their tongue.

Not so different than what Jesus found himself up against 2,000 years ago. He feeds 5,000 people or more with just fish and bread. Then he intrigues people by talking about the bread of life. At first folks are fascinated by him but

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then he starts claiming to BE the bread of life, and he insists that people eat his body and drink his blood, and then he demands that they put their trust in him. Now that's going a bit too far! Now people are getting offended!

That's the trouble with Jesus! When he claimed to be God in the flesh, that was going just too far, some people thought!

If he had just been content with being the son of Joseph, and stuck to feeding the hungry and curing the blind, and not insisted he was REALLY the Son of God, he would have been much easier to accept. But claiming to be DIVINE? Insisting that people believe in him as the Way to Life with the heavenly Father? No way! *That was just too much!*

And that's not even all. He even had the audacity to say he would return to the Father by being lifted up. The Son of God was going to die! The Son of God was going to suffer and bleed and be humiliated by being lifted up on a cross. Now that was really hard to take!

That's just not how God should act!

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It is really troubling that Jesus died. He acted way TOO human! The Son of God hung on a cross and died!

And *this* is the One who challenges us to follow him, who demands our trust in him. It can all be pretty hard to

swallow! It's not so easy to be a follower of this Jesus.

And that's precisely the trouble with Jesus, isn't it? He doesn't make it easy. He makes it hard – for himself, and for those who MIGHT want to follow him.

No, it's not so easy to get up on Sunday after Sunday and come to church, make our kids go to Sunday school, especially when we see others working in their yards, taking a walk through town with their dogs, hanging out at Starbucks talking, heading off to play golf. And it's not so easy to be asked to sacrifice a little bit like Jesus has sacrificed himself for us. To give generously of our hard-earned money, to serve our church and family and community, using our time and our God-given gifts for the sake of others, to live differently in the world: to refuse to take God's name in vain, to treat others with respect

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instead of ridicule, to live as Jesus would live with integrity when it seems as if the rule is “everyone for yourself!”

We live in a world today of cheap grace and shallow faith. We'll come to church until it gets hard. We'll be a part of the church while it *feels* good, but if our true self starts to *feel* something, if we are challenged, if we are asked to take a look into ourselves, to walk in the dark and the pain, well, we might take a walk and find a church that allows us to hide. When our spiritual buckets develop a leak our commitment seeps out. When someone hurts our feelings, instead of sitting down in faith and trust and talking about our feelings together, we run. When we are challenged to work things out, go deeper, down past our comfort zones, out of our boxes, to listen to one another, we tense up and bolt. We say we welcome diversity, but we really don't, we want to be around other hidiers, we want to remain numb.

We want a relationship, sure, we even want a faith experience, sure, but one that doesn't require too much of

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us, one that doesn't ask us to scratch below the surface, one that doesn't expect us to REALLY grow in grace.

We need to understand that there are certain periods in our lives when we are more susceptible to doing what most followers of Jesus did, turning back and no longer following him. The college years., out of earshot and eye range of mom and dad, the college student is often tempted to drop church.

When a couple first marries, so often love is blind concerning and a spiritual relationship of marriage and faith is ignored. The promotion years, when we are climbing the corporate ladder, God often gets crowded out of the picture.

Basically you can call it all anything you want, we turn our back on our faith and our faith journey because our priorities get flipped. People resort to excuses why they can not come to church. It's all in indicative of a dwindling spiritual life, hobbies, jobs, sometimes even family activities crowding out God, and It has crippled the Christian life.

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All living things can die through neglect. A plant in a garden, a friendship, a marriage, all can wither if not nourished. I have never met a person who just crashed out of the Christian life, who just woke up one morning and announced, from now on I will not be a Christian, I will turn my back on God, on the church. But I have known more than a few who oozed out of a once vital faith, and it was all done simply by neglect and inattention, the flame of faith was extinguished through neglect.

Whatever happened to Commitment, to discipleship, to faithfulness? Want to really clear a room? Ask how many prayed as a family today, or who wants to spend some time apart and in silence with your God by going on retreat. I know, we're all busy, everybody needs us, but what if you could be a better mother/father, husband/wife, friend by giving God your precious time for just three days?

The communication revolution means that the outside world reaches into each and every home via the internet. This

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inspires and enables an increased realization of the various doctrines and opinions that have been around forever. We are now able to be exposed to more and more diversity.

We find there is diversity in Christianity, as well as diversity in every other faith and religion. The “one true faith” actually never was “one.” It was those who wanted our adherence to “their” version who pretended it was so.

And it is in the recognition of that diversity that is life giving, for it validates our own perceptions, and aren't we all entitled to our own perceptions? Peter's words today – “to whom can we go?” In Jesus we reach out to others to appreciate their perceptions in hope. This is where new life will be found, this is where we broaden our own outlooks, when we open ourselves up to each other, and expect change. To whom can we go?

We just returned from a five day camping trip with our neighbors. For almost twenty years we have shared a driveway with these folk. It's when you go away with people for a period of time that you see their differences, their

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diversities, and it is also an opportunity to see how alike they are to you. It is when you are sharing a fire pit, outside under the stars, a beautiful moon, a beer and s'mores, maybe too many mosquitoes, that you discover each other on a deeper level. Next time we might do it at a Marriott, but it was a gift to be together, to get to know each other on a deeper level.

And so it is with God, with Jesus. We should strive to know him on a deeper and deeper level.

At the same time we as a church might want to look to those things that bring us freedom and life, and we might look away from those things that demand our compliance. We might look to those things that bring freedom to all people, and we might turn away from those things that demand compliance of anyone else. Our mere presence should mean that we are aware of the multitude of perceptions around us. Fundamental to our faith should be the fact that human beings are important, not the details of our beliefs.

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Jesus says in John, “Does this offend you? It is the spirit that gives life. “

It's not so easy to follow the One who offended so many people with his plain and sometimes blunt talk, with his claim to be God's Son, and with his bold, prophetic actions. It's not so easy to acknowledge that Jesus is God in human flesh, and trust in One who was lifted up on a cross.

No, it *isn't* so easy to be a follower of Jesus, and it's no wonder that so many drifted away in Jesus' day, and it's no surprise that so many drift away or reject the claims of Jesus today. *Jesus is just TOO troubling!*

And yet, some catch on. We're here this morning because we have caught on – or at least we're curious enough to hang out with those who have caught on. There are those like Peter, and ten others, who have discovered the truth about Jesus. The truth that in the humiliation of his death, *Jesus is God in the flesh!*

This One, so troubling, and so determined to turn the world upside-down, so insistent that we live differently in the world, this troubling Jesus is the one who gives us life!

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Life is a marathon, there are hills and valleys, there are times of dryness and pain, there are times when we collapse not able to go on another step. But along the road people cheer us on, people let us know, “Hey, we’re here!” We suffer with depression. Stuff happens, we lose our job, we get sick, we get divorced, we drink, we overeat, our kids disown us, our parents die, or even worse, they don’t die, they suffer. Stuff just happens.

We can trust Jesus, we can believe in Jesus, that’s why Peter makes the confession we hear, “Lord, to whom can we go? “Jesus sometimes gives us some hard choices, some hard teachings. But in the Gospel of John today he gives us all hope, “the words I have spoken to you are spirit and life”. And who wouldn’t want that? Yep, that’s the trouble with Jesus! Amen.