Community "Following the Right God" 12/18/22

Luke 2:11 Romans 1:1-6

Illust. 19 men set out on a daring and dangerous mission that demanded a high level of commitment and a tremendous sacrifice on their part. They did it because of their religious beliefs and to bring glory to god. Friends called them heroes. We call them…..*terrorists.*

 We now know that these 19 Muslim fundamentalists who hijacked 4 planes on

 September 11, 2001, and killed so many people, were doing this in the name of

 Allah as a holy war waged on infidels. It was their belief in god that, at least in

 part, motivated them to do what they did.

A lot of people believe that all religions are equal. It doesn't matter *what God* you believe in as long as you believe in God. But doesn't it make a difference whether you believe in the god of the Shehite Muslims or the God of Mother Theresa?

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Illust. One evening a while back I was watching TV and flipping channels. One of the channels was airing a "roast" of Hugh Hefner, celebrating his 50 years as founder and head of the Playboy empire. It was a gala event with numerous celebrities, surrounded by Playmates. There was a lot of cursing and coarse jokes. One speaker got up and thanked God for making that event possible!

 Do you think the god cheering on the coarse sensuality of the Hugh Hefner roast

 is the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Jesus?

It really does make a difference *what God* we believe in!

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**Christianity is** different **from other religions because Christians believe Jesus revealed the *true* God and Jesus is *the way* to God!**

Now in today's politically correct society this is viewed by many as being narrow-minded and intolerant, because "all roads lead to the same god". But this is not what our New Testament claims.

*If you want to know and experience the real God you have to know and experience Jesus.*

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***The problem is, more and more Americans no longer know about Jesus.***

Illust. A number of years ago Ginghamburg United Methodist Church sent someone

out on the streets to ask people, "Who is Jesus?" The responses were in some cases

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hard to believe! Some just had a blank look on their faces. Others weren't quite sure what to say. That was some years ago, but I doubt it's any better now, since more and more young people grow up without any experience of church.

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**Who is Jesus? And what difference will it make if we worship and follow Him?**

In the Christmas story the angels announce the birth of Jesus to shepherds in the fields, telling them who this child Jesus really is: "To you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ, the Lord" Matthew 2:11.

 He is *Savior……*He is *Christ*……He is *Lord.*

Turn to Romans, chapter 1. The Apostle Paul, the great missionary-evangelist of the first century, tells how God called him to spread the message of Jesus.

 Read Romans 1:3-4. Here again is a summary of who Jesus is: He is *Son of*

 *God…..*He is *Christ* …..He is *Lord.*

We use these words all the time in the church, but we may not know what they mean.

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Illust. In the early church the image of a fish was used as a sign that identified Christians. There were times of intense persecution, and followers of Jesus might make the sign of a fish in the dirt, or in some other way, to identify themselves as Christians to the other person. Today we can put this symbol on our cars or trucks. I've seen businesses advertise and put that sign somewhere on the ad.

What does this mean? The Greek word for fish is "ichthus" - **s.** Each letter of the word fish stands for a title of Jesus:.

**(iota) **s (Jesus)

**chi) **s (Christ)

**(theta) **

**(upsilon) **s (Son of God)

** (sigma)  **(Savior)

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***Some today have mocked this sacred symbol, trivialized and even vulgarized it.***

There is the *Darwin fish* – a fish symbol with legs.

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 Illust. I saw a fish symbol on the back of a car and thought, "Oh, that's a

 Christian." Then when I got closer I saw the legs attached.

Illust. I found a website where you can order all kinds of "fish".

 A ***Jewish fish*** – that has the star of David instead of an eye.

 A ***Buddha*** fish.

 A ***Hindu*** fish.

 A ***Satan*** fish.

 A ***pagan*** fish.

 Also a ***Fish 'n Chips. Hooked on Fishin.***

 And there is a really raunchy ***procreation fish.***

So you see what we have done with this sacred symbol of who Jesus is.

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BRIDGE…for those first Christians, the fish was a sacred symbol of who Jesus is.

**He is *Jesus.***

The Greek word translated Jesus is s. It is the same as the Hebrew word "Joshua", which means "God saves" or "God is salvation". Jesus is "Savior".

The last letter in the word "fish" (sigma) stands for the word - Savior.

Before Jesus' birth the angel told Joseph that Mary would give birth, and he was to name the child Jesus, "for he shall *save* his people from their sins" Matthew 1:21.

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***To believe in the Christian God is to believe that we need a Savior, and Jesus is the One to save us!***

Ask: Any of you think you don't need a Savior?

 Any of us here never done something wrong or evil?

 Any of us here free from impure thought or motives or habits?

 Any of us here who has never felt far from God?

 Any of us here who believe we can conquer death on our own?

Ask: do you think the world needs a Savior?

 Are people getting better and better?

 Is man's inhumanity to man just a thing of the past?

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 Are people any closer to God today than they were a 100 or a 1,000 years ago?

The Bible says when we believe in Jesus and the God He reveals we can be saved from the things that destroy life, and have a new relationship with God that will last forever.

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**The symbol of the fish also spoke of Jesus as the *Christ.***

s s.

"Christ" is not Jesus' last name – like "Hello Mr. Christ!" It's a title that means "messiah" or "anointed one".

This term "messiah" has a long and detailed history, but by the time of Jesus the Jews were looking for a messiah who would be an anointed king or leader who would conquer Israel's enemies and once again restore Israel to a place of prominence among the nations. This messiah would come from the line of David and bring about glory days for Israel, just like when David was king.

Jesus was a descendant of David. Romans 1:3 says, "Regarding his Son, who as to his earthly life was a descendant of David."

But Jesus was not the Christ or Messiah people expected. He wasn't a warrior king.

He was humble. He wasn't out to kill people; in fact, He gave up His life for all humankind. His kingdom isn't a kingdom of worldly power and influence, but a kingdom of humble service and love.

When we say we believe in Jesus as the Christ (the Messiah) we are committing ourselves to a kingdom of unselfish service, peace and good will. How different is that from the kingdom of Muslim terrorists, or the self-centered kingdom of the Hugh Hefner types.

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**The symbol of the fish also signifies that Jesus is the *Son of God.***

s 

The title "Son of God" doesn't mean to us what it meant to ancient Hebrews. We think of a biological father, mother, and son (or daughter). Looking at it this way,

was God the dad? That gets a little dicey, doesn't it!

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In Hebrew thinking, to say Jesus was the Son of God meant that Jesus had a unique and special relationship with God, especially in terms of His obedience to the Father.

Illust. There are some very spiritual Christians who have a very close relationship with God. But that can't begin to match the intimacy that Jesus had and has with His heavenly Father!

 Jesus did what none of us can ever do: He obeyed the Father completely! 100%.

And Jesus' perfect obedience to the Father benefits us tremendously!

 Romans 5:19 says, "For just as by the one man's disobedience (that's Adam) the

 many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience (Jesus) the many will

 be made righteous."

 Imagine that! When we trust Jesus to be our Savior, His righteousness covers for

 our sin and disobedience to God. We are made right with God through Him!

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BRIDGE…so there we have it, the sign of the fish. Jesus, Christ, Son of God,

 Savior. Jesus connects us to the true and living God!

 But there's one more important title used over and over for Jesus that fills out

 our picture of who Jesus is:

**He is *Lord.***

Read Romans 1:1-4

 Also verse 7: "Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the *Lord*

Jesus Christ."

The word "Lord" in the Greek, kurios (s) meant master, owner – someone with absolute authority. In the Old Testament it was a word used for "God"!

Illust. To call Jesus "Lord" means this attitude: *bowing down.*

I worship you…I allow you to have absolute authority over my thoughts, plans,

decisions, actions. I surrender my life to your control – do with me what you want.

*Obviously, if we really mean that it will radically affect the way we live -* how we spend our money…how we spend our time…what we do on a date…what we read, what we watch on TV, what websites we go on…how we treat our family members

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…how we respond to people who hurt us or people we don't like!

Illust. Now I realize that for most of us it's difficult to put our life in someone else's

hands (especially if I've had a problem with controlling people in my life). But I assure you, we can trust the Lord and feel safe in His hands.

 In fact, surrendering to His lordship will bring an excitement to life, a deep joy

 and satisfaction that we could never have if we want to stay in the driver's seat!

Philippians 2:10-11 tells us that someday "every knee shall bow…and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

 Someday everyone will acknowledge Jesus for who He is – king of kings, and

 Lord of lords.

 It's so much wiser to acknowledge the lordship of Jesus now, than to be among

 those who perhaps reluctantly bow before Him – when it's a little too late.

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**So does it matter which God we follow and which God we believe in and serve?**

You bet it does! Because the God we honor and serve will shape the way we live.

I want to worship and serve the God connected to the sign of the fish!

 Think of the fish. *Ichthus!* Jesus Christ, Son of God, Savior. He is the One

 who brings us into the presence of the true and living God!

Illust. How many of us read the daily horoscope? What's your sign? Some believe this will determine what happens to each day, what our personality is, etc.

But I'd suggest there's a better sign to be under! It's this one: *(sign of the fish).*