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“Just. Jesus.” Sermon
Community of Christ Temple Service
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Matt has provided us theological understanding of Jesus as our revelation of God’s justice in and for the world and what it means to “invite people to Christ.” Matt makes several crucial points. Unpacking the words in our theme as Matt started in our Call to Worship, “Just Jesus,” highlights three of Matt’s points:

1. The first meaning comes from reading the word “just” as an adverb. If we start with the first question that Matt asked of “Are you saved?” And consider the follow-on question of “What does it take to be saved?” We might answer: “Just Jesus!” or “Only Jesus...nothing more.” Our answer is not exclusive, only that Jesus is enough.
2. However, we know from what Matt has shared this understanding is incomplete so that leads us to the second meaning. This meaning comes from reading the word “just” as an adjective. This reading emphasizes the justice that Jesus pursued. The prince of peace sought justice for those without voice or place in society. So the answer to the question of why do we invite people to Christ, is “Just Jesus!” Because “Just Jesus” becomes the bumper sticker capturing the Good News of Jesus which calls us to engage in the reconciliation of all the earth and the creation of God’s reign of justice and peace on and for the earth.
3. This leads me to the third meaning which again comes from reading the word “just” as an adverb. This one may be a bit more of a stretch but it upholds the importance of “now” that Matt discussed. “Just,” as an adverb, can also mean a short moment

ago, a second before now. “Just Jesus” implies immediacy. It implies bringing one into direct and personal involvement with Jesus now. This means that our theological understanding of Jesus Christ creates a sense of urgency for how we fulfill our mission to proclaim Jesus Christ and promote communities of joy, hope, peace and love and a compelling desire to invite others to be a part of this.

As Matt so eloquently shared, God challenges us, for the sake of the world, to embrace a more complete theological understanding of who Jesus was **and is** and why God sent Jesus as we consider our invitation to others to join us in living Christ’s mission **now**.

God’s reign on earth happens every time we embody and share the peace of Jesus Christ. And God’s reign spreads on the earth as we invite others to be a part of it.

So how does this shape our invitation to others? When you think about what Matt and I have described, who in their right mind would commit to the life disrupting, all consuming journey of following Christ?

I’m reminded of various responses I’ve heard when we share the invitation to Christ especially with people who had no religious background or had been hurt by their exposure to Christianity.

Here’s one humorous example. The person who had almost no religious background said something like this: Let me get this straight. You have committed to pattern your life after a guy who was a life philosophy teacher over 2000 years ago. And who ultimately was put to death having been convicted by the government for capital crimes. And if that’s not bad enough, he

rose from the dead, like a Zombie? And then he was taken up into heaven. What exactly does that mean? Is that like an Alien abduction? You do realize none of this makes any sense, right?

Here's another example that came from someone who was hurt by their experience with other Christians. I hear what you're saying but it's not what I've experienced. Every time I bump into people who say they are Christians, I end up feeling really bad about myself and about the world. I feel hopeless and afraid. The justice I experience is judgmental and condemning. It is not life-giving or love-centered and certainly doesn't bring any form of peace into the world around it. Christians may quote John 3:16 from the Bible but I'm just not feeling it.

These examples and hundreds more cause each of us to be tentative about inviting people to Christ. Inside we feel personally convicted to follow "Just Jesus" in all its fullness but we fall short in knowing how to extend the invitation to others in a way that expresses why.

So let's take a look at John 3:16 that gets quoted routinely but also read verse 17 which provides important clarification about our invitation: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him."

This scripture leads me to the Community of Christ enduring principle of Grace and Generosity. I see our enduring principles woven through Matt's theological reflections about Jesus. Our enduring principles provide a framework for my invitation to others that I think encompasses the fullness of "Just Jesus."

Let me share my invitation story with you in hopes that it might help you frame or adjust your invitation in a way that moves beyond the barriers we face in our culture and that also upholds all the meanings of “Just Jesus” that Matt and I have explored.

This is not my “elevator invitation” which is for those short 30 second responses. This is my airplane ride invitation when I have time for longer sharing and after I’ve had the chance to develop a bit of a relationship with the person. It goes something like this:

For me, every day begins with the choice to see God’s Grace and Generosity throughout the world. I know there are a lot of bad things going on. Sin is real. We must acknowledge that separation from God and others occurs individually and collectively as well as unintentionally and intentionally. And that is part of my compelling desire to invite people to Christ...not so they can avoid eternal condemnation but so we can collectively move beyond separation and create God’s kingdom on earth like it is in heaven. Matt said there’s freedom in Christ and when I choose to see God’s love and grace in the world, I am exercising this freedom.

So every day I wake up and try to find the good that is present and I also try to be part of creating good for others. This means living repentantly and extending forgiveness. I try to spend more time involved in constructive, reconciling situations. I also try to be generous with everything I have and that includes my time and money which are limited and precious to me.

My first encounter each morning is with creation. I’m mindful that I’m breathing. I’m aware of whether it is dark or the sun has risen. If it’s dark, I don’t panic because I never doubt that the sun will rise. That is an expression in my ultimate faith in God.

Almost every day, I read the news which reminds me of the importance of how we treat the earth and those who live on the earth. I choose to experience creation as sacred, a gift from something bigger than humanity which I know as God. Creation displays God's generosity and reminds me of human's responsibility to take care of creation including one another.

As I consider creation, I realize how much humans have grown in our understanding of creation. Looking at our own restoration story, I also see how we have continued to grow in our understanding of God's vision for creation and our role in helping fulfill this vision. We express this growing understanding as Continued Revelation where people discern and learn together about God's purposes for the world.

For example, Continued Revelation has continued to challenge and expand our understanding of people who are different from those in our immediate circle. In Community of Christ, we have always understood the Worth of All Persons but we have struggled to fully embrace and live that understanding. As we recognize the worth of each one, we also start to see how each one has something to share. In other words, all are called to be part of God's restoring purposes to save the world and equally important, all are needed.

We do not have to earn our worth and calling from God. God's love and grace flow freely. God does not make us respond. God gives us the freedom or agency to act as we choose. We either choose to move away or towards God. But once we get a glimpse of God's vision for the world, we want to make responsible choices that move us closer to God. We start to understand how our choices impact ourselves, others, and the earth and likely the universe and beyond.

Responsible choices happen when we choose to pursue peace or Shalom for the entire world.

Responsible choices keep us from remaining silent or detached when we are faced with injustices that do not align with our growing understanding of God's reign on earth.

This Pursuit of Peace causes us to grow in our understanding and application of our Unity in Diversity. We discover that we cannot share the peace of Jesus Christ by making everyone the same. We have to find common ground with one another for the sake of the world while upholding the unique beauty of all the ways that humans were created different.

As we find our unity while celebrating our diversity, we discover the Blessings of Community. We realize that God's reign on earth is possible in those moments when we all come together for good. And through those blessings we experience Grace and Generosity and the cycle begins again. Throughout this cycle, we recognize how the life, ministry, and message of Jesus shape how we experience this cycle.

Being a follower of Christ as part of Community of Christ has changed my life. It changes how I see the world, how I experience other people, and how I use my time, talents, treasures, and testimony to make the world a better place. And my understanding of what "a better place" is for the world is shaped by my growing understanding of God's vision of Shalom.

Following Christ and being God's kingdom builders is not always easy. It doesn't come with a guarantee for a carefree, burden-free life. (As a side note, I know many of you would understand some of the burdens and concerns that I carry.) However, living Christ's mission provides purpose for my life and meaning. It also comes with the support of a wonderful

community. Despite the difficulties, I wouldn't be on any other path. I love being part of creating God's reign on earth, the peaceable kingdom, or as we often call it, Zion.

Living Christ's mission and helping create God's reign on earth now can sometimes feel overwhelming and all consuming. It can sometimes lead to doubt about whether anything I'm doing is really making a difference. But when I'm in those dark moments, the Holy Spirit always helps the light break in.

Whether it is in experiencing something good that is happening

Or whether it is a friend who texts me when they don't even know I'm down or holds my hand and cries with me

Or whether it is the blessing of the Holy Spirit I sense moving in and through the world that can break into my psyche and provide a glimmer of light and hope.

We live in a world that has plenty of darkness. There are certainly events and circumstances that I do not understand and that are disturbing down to my very bones. If we listen to some people, we should be afraid of what is unfolding around the world. But I'm inviting you to see the light and potential for good that is in the world and to help that potential grow one just act, one responsible choice, and one invitation at a time.

Individually we are limited but collectively, we are strong and able. Together, we are the salt and leaven for God's kingdom. And the world needs you! I'm inviting you to use your whole-life as part of the growing community who focuses all of their time, talents, treasures, and testimony to bring healing and wholeness to the world by following Jesus Christ's example. In

other words, I'm inviting you into whole-life stewardship on behalf of God's purposes in the world.

So that's my unfolding invitation story as I consider "Just Jesus." What comes next is out of my control. Maybe I get to hear the person's story. Often I get to give them a business card.

Sometimes I get an email when they say a Community of Christ congregation. And sometimes, I hear that they ventured through the doors.

Inviting people to Christ is inviting them on a journey of discipleship, a journey that will change their life as they engage in helping change the world.

Inviting people to Christ isn't an attempt to sell them eternal fire insurance or in other words, make some guarantee about their individual salvation.

Inviting people to Christ is about bringing them into sacred community where we struggle together to live Christ's mission for the sake of the world.

So like Matt said, "The reign of God on earth, as it is in heaven, has been unleashed into the world. And, you're invited to come. Invite others."