

A Familiar Promise with a New Perspective

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Luke 4:14-21

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Back in the day when I used to think I was clever I came up with a catchy and somewhat unique message that I recorded onto our home phone answering machine. When it was first heard, people used to tell their friends to call our number just to hear the message. I finally took it off the machine because my sister politely asked me to change it because she was tired of listening to it every time we weren't home to answer the phone. As a family, we also became tired of getting calls from people we didn't know who simply wanted to hear the message. The message went like this:

Hi, you have reached the Reynolds residence and the first thing you need to know is that this is not an answering machine, it's a question machine! "Who are you and what do you want?" You know, Psychologists tell us that most people will go through their entire lives without ever answering those two questions, so... at the sound of the beep, tell us who you are and what you want and we will get back to you as soon as we can.

In the text taken from Luke's gospel it seems reasonable to me to take a look at those two questions (Who are you? and What do you want?) and learn from them as Jesus seems to be pretty clear about His answers to both of them, either stated or implied in the texts for this morning! The assumption that I am making here is that Jesus's answers might be instructive for us as we seek to come up with our own answers to these two questions, "Who are you? And What is it that you want?"

WHO ARE YOU?

The question "Who are you?", raises the issue of one's identity doesn't it. Throughout the scripture, Jesus seems relatively clear about His own identity. Here in chapter 4 of Luke's gospel Jesus quotes from the book of the prophet Isaiah a promise that was very familiar to the Jews of His day. Although the promise that was known was reiterated by Isaiah, it is also mentioned in one way or another by Ezekiel, Ezra, Nehemiah and it most probably goes all the way back to Moses. It was the same promise of liberty that God had promised to the people during the time of Moses:

Lev 25:8 "Count off seven sabbaths of years—seven times seven years—so that the seven sabbaths of years amount to a period of forty-nine years. Lev 25:9 Then have the trumpet sounded everywhere on the tenth day of the seventh month; on the Day of Atonement

sound the trumpet throughout your land. ^{Lev 25:10} Consecrate the fiftieth year and proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a jubilee for you; each one of you is to return to his family property and each to his own clan.

The problem was as you have already surmised, it became nearly impossible for God's people to follow through on their part of the bargain... as a matter of fact there is no evidence that they ever followed through and no evidence that the year of jubilee (and consequently it's promises) were ever kept. The Bible teaches that because this promise of liberty was real but that it was also necessary for the people to obey which apparently they never did. That is why, when Jesus quotes these words from Isaiah, this is a familiar promise and the people enjoy being reminded that this was their intended destiny.

Jesus had come to fulfill the promise as only God could accomplish it. Who are You, Jesus? I Am God in the flesh! Now, "Who am I", Jesus? "Where am I to find my own identity?" Jesus reinterprets the Jewish understanding of this promise and all that it encompassed and says to the people their identity is now to be taken, not from the law, not from their calling as Jews, and not from anything that they may try to accomplish on their own, but now their true identity is to be taken directly in and through Him.

This is the witness of the New Testament. Now we are children of God. We have been adopted into the family of God through Jesus Christ. Apart from Jesus we can do nothing, be nothing, and accomplish nothing. "I am the vine, you are now my branches and apart from Me you can do nothing.

The problem today is that people, and yes even we as Christ followers, from the earliest years of our lives and been taught that who we are comes from all sorts of other places rather than from our relationship, our connection to Jesus. When seeking to answer the question of our own identities, when seeking to answer the question, "Who am I?" Who sitting here has as their first response... "I am a child of God! I am a branch attached to the Vine called Jesus? I am a co-heir for all eternity with the One who loves me and came to liberate me?"

Instead our identities, our self-images, have come from all kinds of different places and eventually none of them are helpful, none of them satisfy! I am good looking, or not! I am competent at my job. I am productive. I am successful. I am wealthy. I am

husband... I am wife. I am son or daughter, brother or sister of... Until we can answer the question, "Who am I?" with Jesus understanding we will never find peace or contentment in this lifetime.

WHAT DO YOU WANT?

Does anyone happen to know what the Federal Reserve Bank has said in their own minutes is the real reason for the Great Depression that occurred back in the 1930's? This question may seem to be coming out of nowhere, but stay with me here because there is something very important here that I believe God has given me to share with all of us. Here is another question? Does anyone know what a cauliflower currently costs in Canada today?



According to the Federal Reserve Bank the reason for the Great Depression was actually too much stuff. It was the over production of things that originally had put many people to work with the ability to make them as efficiently as possible and then surpassing the need, and even surpassing the want level that cause the beginnings of all the problems. Production couldn't stop until it was too late and problems began to appear.

All week long I have been thinking about the difference of how I would answer this second question, "What do I want?" versus how Jesus answered it. If we are to answer this question as Jesus answered it then we have to begin making a critical distinction between answering the question "What do I want?" and answering the question, "What is it that I need?"

Here is something I realized this week as I studied and began to think out this morning's message. There is a huge difference between what we all want versus what we all need. When asked what Jesus wanted, He said something like this:

Jn 4:31 Meanwhile his disciples urged him, "Rabbi, eat something." Jn 4:32 But he said to them, "I have food to eat that you know nothing about." Jn 4:33 Then his disciples said to each other, "Could someone have brought him food?" Jn 4:34 "My food," said Jesus, "is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work.

Jesus also said in a different way that what we really should do is seek first God's kingdom and expect that everything we need will be added to us by a loving Father who knows our need before we ever ask.

Do you see the rub friends? What we really need is Jesus and when we have Him we have everything. Do you know right now there is such an over-abundance of stuff throughout the entire world that the problem that occurred bringing about the Great Depression in America is getting ready to affect every country throughout the world?

What is it that we want? Well, I believe many people in our congregation have found that answer. Do you know that at the Session meeting just a few nights ago, it was shown that though we have less people attending church, and though we have less people giving to the church than we did last year, more has been pledged, more has been promised for 2016 than in 2015?

Oh, yes, how much does a cauliflower cost in Canada? \$7.99 Canadian, \$6.50 US dollars. And yes, just in case you might be wondering, this is also the year of Jubilee, the 50th year when all debt is to be wiped clean and everyone enjoys the prosperity of celebrating together.

Celebrating? In the book of Ezra when it was pointed out that the people had not kept the years of Jubilee for more years than they could count and that their punishment (captivity) had been a year of captivity for every year they had not done so, they began to weep. Ezra says, stop crying and start the party. The punishment is over, now do it right! It's a message that says, the celebration still begins with Jesus. That's a great message friends that people today are still longing to hear.

"Who are you... and What do you want?" May it be so... amen.