

## Jesus Christ:

### Who is he? What is he doing? And what does he want with me?

Session 1 – November 2, 2014

“Who do they say that I am?” (Mark 8:27-29)

What titles/descriptors have you used/heard used?

Kent Knutson, *His Only Son Our Lord*, 1966 – basis for our reflections

Talking about Jesus Christ: An adventure with risk

Challenge of information overload: so much already available

- Four Gospels, twenty-three other New Testament books – foundationally authoritative
- Centuries of Christian writing
- Too much there to do it justice: cf. John 21:25
- Yet Christians keep finding themselves compelled by the nature of their relationship with Jesus Christ to think/speak/argue/talk about him....and to proclaim/invite-into-following him. Silence could mean faith is fading...

Challenge of language: Jesus Christ must always be talked about in language meaningful to those in the discussion.

- Past efforts to summarize/distill: Apostles' Creed, Nicene Creed, ☐ Luther's Catechism, etc.
- Finding our own meaningful language benefits from understanding our forbears' witness

History and Faith: a complex relationship:

When doing history, it's not possible simply to have “just the facts.” All remembered “facts” are interpreted. The same is true when talking about Jesus Christ.

- New Testament books written from point of view of faith.
- NT a kind of “propaganda:” intention is to call forth faith in Jesus Christ, and to bring life of the faith community together with the remembered Jesus
  - Compare “Jesus was a carpenter's son from Nazareth.” with “Jesus is Lord.”
  - Peter's confession at Caesarea Phillipi; Thomas' confession after Resurrection
- New Testament witness to Jesus Christ deeply rooted in historical events (“what really happened”), but doesn't seem to have our concerns for historical detail
  - For example, date of Jesus' birth/death, chronology of Jesus' life
  - All NT authors write after Jesus' resurrection. They seem to believe they know how the story goes up to their time, and seem to believe they're not writing the last chapter of the story.

Risks in our talk of Jesus Christ:

- Confuse faith with acceptance of historical events: Worries about historical “fuzziness”

threaten to make this sort of faith no faith at all.

- Confuse faith with ideas about God/reality with no connection to history: threatens to make faith about something other than the “really real”
- Most of us who take faith seriously tend towards one or the other: how about you?

Our effort here: “from faith to faith”

Our talk of Jesus Christ here seeks to take both New Testament and our forebears in the faith seriously. And we seek to take seriously the challenge to speak of our faith in Jesus Christ, and to live it out, in the realities we experience today.

### Historical patterns in talking about Jesus Christ

First seven centuries: Particular concern about the “*Who*” – the *Person* of Jesus Christ... human/divine relationships.

- Apostles’ Creed: seems determined to establish Jesus’ humanity
- Nicene Creed (325, 381 AD/CE): expands on Jesus’ relation to God
- Chalcedon (451) Formula: sets boundaries on and gives directions for how to speak of the relationship between the human and the divine in Jesus Christ
- These claims are settled: Dogma (cf. distinction between dogma and doctrine)

Middle Ages/Reformation: (ca. 1000 to 1700): Concern about the “*What*” – the *Work* of Jesus Christ – what did he do?

- Anselm (1098): *Cur Deus Homo?*
- Reformation – Melancthon (1521): “To know Christ is to know his benefits.”
- Particular interest in the Cross – what was accomplished in Jesus’ death.

“Modern Era:” Special interest in “What is Jesus Christ *doing?*” Concern about the “*Whither*” – the *Goal* of God’s work in Christ – where are things headed because of him?

- Interest in *Eschatology* – Jesus’ role in God’s purposes with the whole of reality...the *Cosmic Christ*
- Renewed interest in the relation of faith in Jesus Christ to other religious faiths
  - Need for speaking of Jesus Christ and living out Christian faith in a pluralistic world where Christian faith is not dominant or even a given