



Messiah and Lord

Vienna Presbyterian Church
The Rev. Dr. Peter G. James
Acts 2:29-39

November 20, 2016



Charles Spurgeon was a famous preacher in 19th century London. He served what some people would call today megachurch. Upwards of 10,000 people gathered each Sunday to hear Spurgeon preach in the Metropolitan Tabernacle Church. Spurgeon preached there 38 years. Today, his sermons fill 63 volumes.

Spurgeon was also afflicted with melancholy; what we would call depression these days. One Sunday, he was so disabled by melancholy that he couldn't muster the strength to preach. He asked an associate to take his place and escaped to the country. He wandered into a small church and slipped into a back pew. He sat low in the seat so the preacher wouldn't recognize him.

The young minister happened to be preaching one of Spurgeon's sermons. I mean he was reading it word for word. Well into the sermon, he recognized Spurgeon seated in the congregation. He froze but managed to keep going, fearing the worst after the sermon. He apologized profusely to his surprise guest. Spurgeon wasn't buying it. "There is no need to apologize," he said. "This sermon was exactly what I needed to hear." God used one of Spurgeon's sermons to speak into his life!

I'm relying on another man's sermon for this morning's message. The genesis for today's message originates from a sermon Peter preached on the Day of Pentecost. I'm so glad the Bible isn't copyrighted!

Our theme this fall is Souls on Fire for God. We have talked about souls on fire for mission, generosity and now

sharing our faith. Last Sunday, we read how Philip invited his friend Nathanael to come and see Jesus. I observed how *come and see* Jesus eventuates into *go and tell* other people about him. I challenged you to learn to tell your faith story in less than 100 words.

I was drawn yesterday to a headline in the editorial section of the Washington Post: “In the Age of Trump What is a Christian?” The article was responding to earlier stories about why so many evangelicals voted for Trump. Colbert King asks four times in the article, “What is a Christian?” I’m so glad you asked. Peter’s Pentecost sermon is an ideal place to go to answer this “what is a Christian” question.

Peter determines the way into talking about Jesus with his Jewish audience is to reference their patriarch David, the greatest king Israel has ever known. “My fellow Israelites, I can tell you confidently that the patriarch David died and was buried, and his tomb is here to this day” (Acts 2:29). As great as David was, he is still dead. His tomb is still occupied.

Peter heralds another king to come who will sit on David’s throne forever (2:30). The prophet Nathan said to David, “When your days are over and you

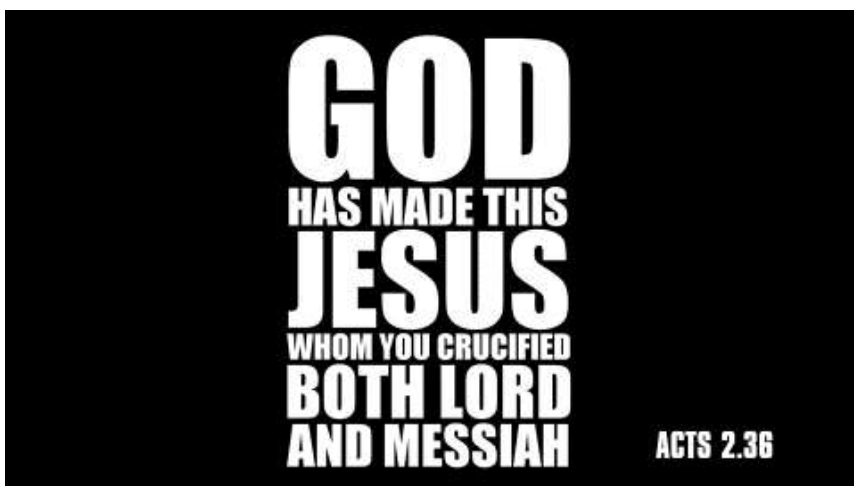


rest with your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, your own flesh and blood, and I will establish his kingdom. He is the one who will build a house for my Name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever” (2 Samuel 7:12-13).

This is where Jesus comes into play. Peter interprets David's words in Psalm 16 as prefiguring Christ's resurrection: "He was not abandoned to the realm of the dead, nor did his body see decay" (2:31). He states emphatically, in verse 32, "God has raised this Jesus to life and we are all witnesses of it."

Peter declares that Jesus has been exalted to God's right hand (2:33). That's why he's uniquely positioned to bestow the Holy Spirit on Pentecost. I can still recall a little girl who told me that God must be left-handed since Jesus is sitting on His right hand. While, as a southpaw, I am sympathetic to her concerns, I don't think so. God's right hand is a figure of speech. It means Jesus has been raised to the highest honor.

Peter again makes reference to the Psalms. What better way to identify Jesus' messianic status than to appeal to Hebrew Scripture? Psalm 110 begins, "The Lord said to my Lord, sit at my right hand."



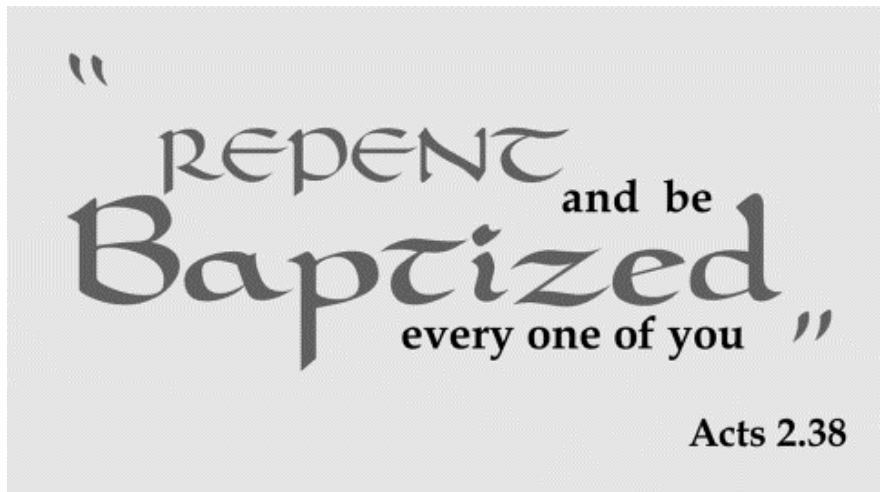
Peter summarizes his sermon this way: "Therefore, let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah" (2:36).

Some people argue that Peter's words are anti-Semitic. While Peter holds his listeners complicit in Jesus' death, don't forget that Peter, himself, is Jewish and there is blood on his hands also. He denied Jesus' three times in quick succession. The New Testament holds both Jew and Gentile culpable for Jesus' death.

If you are having trouble tracking with Peter's dense sermon, consider Peter's concluding sentence, "God has made this Jesus both Lord and Messiah." Messiah in the Greek, *Christos*, translates as Christ, meaning *anointed one*. Jesus is God's anointed one. Lord in the Greek, *kurios*, was a title customarily given to Roman rulers. Caesar may be an earthly king and worldly lord but Jesus, in the language of Revelation, is and will be, "King of Kings and Lord of Lords" (19:16).

Peter's sermon finds its mark. His listeners are "cut to the heart" or pierced, conscience-stricken with remorse. "What must we do?" they ask (2:37).

Peter answers, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness for your sins and you will receive the gift of the



Holy Spirit" (2:38). This is Peter's so-what moment in his sermon. *Repent* means to change direction. Peter invites his listeners who have been leaning away from Jesus to turn toward him. He's asking them to do a 180. Three thousand do just that!

Maybe it's time for you to turn toward Jesus. Perhaps, it's a *come and see* this Jesus for yourself moment. You have been running away from him and keeping your distance. Maybe it's time to take a step in his direction and open yourself to him as Messiah and Lord. Hold that thought. We'll come back to it at the end of this sermon.

For those of you who have come to Jesus and seen what he can do in your life, it might be time for you to pick up the pace regarding telling other people about him. I have four reflections to make about *go and tell* people about Jesus. So what difference does this sermon make in my life?

First observation: we need **Clarity about the message**. Peter states our core message plainly: “God has made Jesus both Lord and Messiah.”

Christians are adopting, with greater frequency these days, the attitude that all religions offer valid pathways to God. Really? The only way I know to come to this conclusion is to air-brush the differences among religions away.



Let me illustrate it this way. Take the popular bumper sticker COEXIST. This slogan urges greater tolerance among world religions. I’m all for more forbearance among

religions. It’s sorely needed in our day.

But there’s a new definition of tolerance gaining acceptance these days. Recognizing people’s right to hold various beliefs has now morphed into saying that all beliefs are equally valid. I can no longer say some beliefs are right and others are wrong. I must now say all beliefs are equally true. If I refuse to adhere to this revisionist understanding of tolerance, sanctions can be imposed against me.

Peter preaches that Jesus died for our sins, was raised from the dead and is seated at God’s right hand. Other world religions categorically reject this truth claim. According to the law of non-contradiction, two contradictory statements

cannot be true and untrue. Either Jesus died for our sins and rose again or he didn't.

Yes, we need more tolerance and forbearance toward competing truth claims. But no, I'm not going to be backed into saying that all world religions can be distilled into a coherent whole. Practicing tolerance doesn't preclude us from witnessing to the truth about God revealed in Jesus Christ.

Second observation: we need **Priority in living the message**. Clarity about the message comes first but making this message a priority for our lives flows from it. It's not going to amount to much if we are clear about the message, but unwilling to give it priority for our lives.

Is this message of Jesus as Lord and Messiah our first priority or last resort? It's not going to work to keep Jesus on retainer in some advisory capacity. I'll go to church when I get the urge and pray when I feel like it. Nominal adherence and casual association won't get the job done. We need to be all in.



13th century mosaic

3. Humility in practicing the message

Third observation: we need **Humility in practicing the message**. Arrogance and self-righteousness is such a turn-off. Humility remains one of Jesus' most

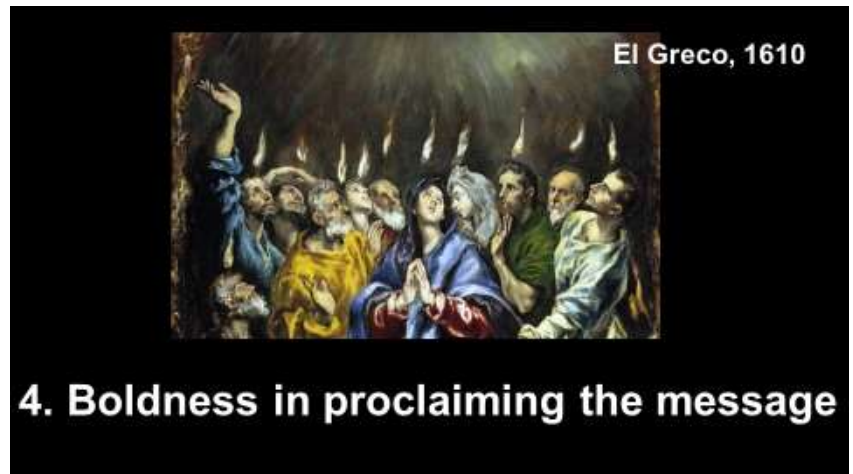
compelling qualities. We need more humility.

Don't argue with people. Don't become combative when people disagree with you. Show respect. We're not witnessing to people as some evangelistic project. We're not

targeting them. We're loving and serving them because they are people God loves and Christ came to save.

I need to be reminded that I am a sinner saved by grace. This is what D. T. Niles said about witnessing, "We're like one beggar telling another beggar where to find bread."

Fourth observation:
we need **Boldness in proclaiming the message**. Humility and boldness go together. Humility is showing honor and respect. Boldness is



the willingness to take risks for what we believe. Some of us are so afraid of offending anyone that we never say anything to anybody.

You might protest that you don't know enough. How much did Philip know when he invited his friend Nathanael to follow Jesus with him? You're not the Bible answer man or woman. Simply share what you have seen and heard. If you take the witness stand in a court of law, you will be asked to tell the court what you have seen and heard. That's all. Tell people what you have seen and heard about Jesus.

Come and see this Jesus for yourself. Maybe it's time to turn to Jesus as Lord and Messiah of your life. Or maybe this is *go and tell* others about him moment. Take a few risks. Say something. Invite someone to come to VPC with you. If they are not interested, they'll tell you.