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John 7:25-52
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Is Jesus the Christ?

Aloha. I have just returned from the sunny beaches of Waikiki where I had the pleasure of joining Karen on a business trip. It was a much needed rest, but all too short of a break. I understand why people sometimes escape to warmer climates mid winter. It was lovely.

But truth be told, my trip got off to some what of a rocky start. Shortly into my relaxing flight to Honolulu, I got bombarded by phone calls, text messages, and emails asking if I had just sent out a request for gift cards for a particular ministry need. No I had not!

Sure enough, a hacker had taken information from our website, created a fraudulent email with my name, and then emailed all of you. On one hand, it might have seemed legitimate. But on the other, there were several clues that it most definitely was not “from” me.

Firstly, the email address was not mine. The first question we should ask is does the originating email address match up with other emails I have received from Chris or what is posted in the church directory? If it does not, it is a scam.

Secondly, I will never ask you to provide gift cards or cash in this way. If I have a particular ministry need, I most certainly would have channeled it through either our Benevolence Board, our deacons, or Janet VanFleet as our elder of Mission and Peace.

And finally, very rarely do I sign emails with my formal title.

We cannot be overly cautious about fraudulent emails, fake news, and potential scammers. The question becomes, how do we authenticate that what we are receiving is indeed real?

Well the same thing was of concern with the people in Jesus’ day.

People were receiving mix signals as to who Jesus was. On the one hand, he made claims about himself that put him on equal footing with God the Father and he did the signs and wonders expected of the Messiah or the Christ. But on the other hand, trusted religious leaders claimed that he was a fraud who needed to be needed to be killed.

So which was he? A fraud? Or the Christ? How can we be sure?

Join me as we read from John 7:25-52 as we hear for ourselves.

25 Then some of the people of Jerusalem began asking questions. They said, “Isn’t this the man some people are trying to kill? **26** Here he is! He is speaking

openly. They aren't saying a word to him. Have the authorities really decided that he is the Messiah? **27** But we know where this man is from. When the Messiah comes, no one will know where he is from."

28 Jesus was still teaching in the temple courtyard. He cried out, "Yes, you know me. And you know where I am from. I am not here on my own authority. The one who sent me is true. You do not know him. **29** But I know him. I am from him, and he sent me."

30 When he said this, they tried to arrest him. But no one laid a hand on him. The time for him to show who he really was had not yet come. **31** Still, many people in the crowd believed in him. They said, "How will it be when the Messiah comes? Will he do more signs than this man?"

32 The Pharisees heard the crowd whispering things like this about him. Then the chief priests and the Pharisees sent temple guards to arrest him.

33 Jesus said, "I am with you for only a short time. Then I will go to the one who sent me. **34** You will look for me, but you won't find me. You can't come where I am going."

35 The Jews said to one another, "Where does this man plan to go? Does he think we can't find him? Will he go where our people live scattered among the Greeks? Will he go there to teach the Greeks? **36** What did he mean when he said, 'You will look for me, but you won't find me'? And what did he mean when he said, 'You can't come where I am going'?"

37 It was the last and most important day of the feast. Jesus stood up and spoke in a loud voice. He said, "Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink. **38** Does anyone believe in me? Then, just as Scripture says, rivers of living water will flow from inside them." **39** When he said this, he meant the Holy Spirit. Those who believed in Jesus would receive the Spirit later. Up to that time, the Spirit had not been given. This was because Jesus had not yet received glory.

40 The people heard his words. Some of them said, "This man must be the Prophet we've been expecting."

41 Others said, "He is the Messiah."

Still others asked, "How can the Messiah come from Galilee? **42** Doesn't Scripture say that the Messiah will come from the family line of David? Doesn't it say that he will come from Bethlehem, the town where David lived?" **43** So the people did not agree about who Jesus was. **44** Some wanted to arrest him. But no one laid a hand on him.

45 Finally the temple guards went back to the chief priests and the Pharisees. They asked the guards, "Why didn't you bring him in?"

46 "No one ever spoke the way this man does," the guards replied.

47 “You mean he has fooled you also?” the Pharisees asked. **48** “Have any of the rulers or Pharisees believed in him? **49** No! But this mob knows nothing about the law. There is a curse on them.”

50 Then Nicodemus, a Pharisee, spoke. He was the one who had gone to Jesus earlier. He asked, **51** “Does our law find a man guilty without hearing him first? Doesn’t it want to find out what he is doing?”

52 They replied, “Are you from Galilee too? Look into it. You will find that a prophet does not come out of Galilee.”

Let’s us pray. Prayer of Illumination.

There are a couple of questions that I would like to explore today. What were some of the Old Testament prophecies about the Messiah or the Christ? What was Jesus doing and saying that alarmed the religious leaders so? How do we discern what we are hearing is from God? And finally what is God saying to us today?

The Jewish people were and still are waiting for the Messiah. In fact there were certain signs and wonders that Old Testament prophets foretold. Scholars estimate that there are somewhere between 200 and 570 prophecies in the Old Testament that pointed to the Messiah’s coming. Similar scholars estimated that all of them were fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

For example, the Messiah would be born of a virgin, from the lineage of David, come from Bethlehem, and be called a Nazarene.¹ The Messiah would be called out of Egypt.² The Messiah would be a prophet like Moses.³ The Messiah would perform signs of healing and life affirming redemptive deeds.⁴ The Messiah would be known as be the Son of Man.⁵ The Messiah would be called God’s Son.⁶ And this just scratches the surface.

At this point in John’s Gospel it is still early in Jesus’ ministry. But we can see how Jesus certainly would have seemed to fulfill some of these prophecies from the start. Like when he changed water into wine at a wedding in Cana. When he miraculously healed a royal official’s son in Capernaum and a lame man by a pool in Bethseda who had been sick for thirty eight years. Thirty eight years! When he fed five thousand people from just five barley loaves and two small fish.

¹ Isaiah 7:14; Micah 5:2; 2 Samuel 7:12-14; Isaiah 11:1

² Hosea 11:1

³ Deuteronomy 18:15-19

⁴ Isaiah 35:5-6; Isaiah 61:1-2

⁵ Daniel 7:13-14

⁶ Psalm 2:1-12

And when he defied the laws of nature by walking upon water when his disciples were in a boat in the middle of a lake.

This is just some of the signs and wonders he did.. that no one could explain.

What set him on the wrong footing with the Jewish religious leaders was that he violently cleared the Jerusalem temple of money changers and animal sellers, saying that his Father's house should be a house of prayer, not a market place. That he claimed God as his Father, it made him equal with God. That he told Nicodemus that he had to be born again spiritually in order to understand things from God. That he told the Samaritan woman that he was the Messiah. That he broke religious law by healing sick people on the Sabbath. That he announced that he was sent from God in heaven. That he told people to eat his flesh and drink his blood. And that he stated his teaching was from God and not from himself.

Each of these claims created issue with the Jewish religious leaders.

But clearly there were mix opinions among the crowds. Some said he was "the Prophet." Some said he was just a man. Some thought he was "the Christ." Others thought he was mad. Even the temple guards knew that there was something different about him. When asked by the chief priests and Pharisees why they didn't seize Jesus and bring him into them, the guards declared, "No one ever spoke the way this man does."

So whether one knew all of the prophecies or none, didn't matter. What mattered was knowing in one's heart that Jesus was who he said he was. The Christ.

Notice how Jesus said, "I am only with you a short while, and then I go to the one who sent me. You will look for me, but you will not find me; and where I am, you cannot come." Now whenever one hears echoes of other scriptures when Jesus speaks, it is important to follow those trails.

Back in the Old Testament, God spoke, through the Prophet Jeremiah, to the exiles in Babylonian captivity, "I will come to you and fulfill my gracious promise to bring you back [from captivity]. For I know the plans I have for you declares the Lord, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you a hope and future. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you." Now listen to this and see if it doesn't resonate with Jesus' words today...

"You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all of your heart. I will be found by you," declares the Lord.⁷

So in one place God says, "You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all of your heart. I will be found by you."

⁷ Jeremiah 29:10b-14

But in another, Jesus says, “You will look for me, but you will not find me; and where I am, you cannot come.” So what is the difference?

The exiles had to trust in God, to stop trying to figure things out for themselves, and to humbly accept that God’s plans for them were good even when none of it made sense.

They had to trust.

They had to have faith.

They had to believe in what they could not see at the time was true.

That is the posture of a heart that finds God.

That is the posture of a person who accepts that Jesus as the Messiah. The Christ.

Sadly those were not the hearts of the Pharisees and chief priests in our scripture today.

Why?

Perhaps they were prideful and just couldn’t believe that God would use someone without formal religious training or expertise like theirs.

Perhaps they were prejudiced and dismissed the possibility of a prophet coming from Galilee, let alone Nazareth.

Perhaps they feared losing power.

Perhaps they felt threatened by Jesus’ popularity and how he taught with such authority, like no one else.

As I mentioned previously, the longest and hardest spiritual journey one can ever take is the distance between the head and the heart.

But notice that there is one glimmer of hope amidst the group skeptics. Nicodemus. Remember him from a couple weeks back? He was the one Pharisee who came to Jesus by night to learn from him. Back then Nicodemus said, “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him.”⁸

You see his head and the heart were starting to connect.

This same Nicodemus stood up for Jesus when his fellow leaders called to condemn Jesus asked, “Does our law condemn anyone without first hearing him to find out what he is doing?” So they belittled and racially slurred Nicodemus by calling him a stupid Galilean.

Even today bullies love to call people names when they feel small and insecure because it makes them better about themselves.

But probably the most profound thing that Jesus did and said in this story came on the last and greatest day of the Feast of Tabernacles. This was a feast that lasted seven days. But on the eighth day, there was a closing ceremony that

⁸ John 3:2

included a procession from the temple to the Pool of Siloam. The priest would draw water from the pool, bring it back to the temple, and pour it out on the altar as an offering to God while reciting the words of Isaiah 12:3, “With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation.”

Which is why Jesus, fulfilling the words of Isaiah 12:6, “Shout aloud and sing for joy, people of Zion, for great is the Holy One of Israel among you,” stood up among them and shouted, “If anyone is thirsty, let them come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow up within them.”

The Pool of Siloam was a fresh water reservoir where Jews could go for ritual purification, and it was where Jesus healed a blindman.

Jesus is the well of salvation. He alone purifies people from sin. And he puts his Spirit in whoever believes in him that they become fountains of his living water.

So what does this tell us about God?

That God is faithful and has carried out this plan of salvation through sending his Son Jesus Christ. That God can be trusted to carry out what he said he will do.

That God looks at the heart of a person, not the outward appearance or human credentials.

That God invites us to approach Jesus with open hearts ready to receive him as the true Messiah.

What is God telling us today?

We need to question everything that our culture tells us about Jesus. There are many false gospels out there telling us what our itching ears want to hear. Instead we need to authenticate our beliefs and what we hear in scripture. God’s Word will not contradict God’s self. So let us listen to what God says.

We need to trust the Holy Spirit within us who will help us discern what is true and what is false.

We need to not come before Jesus like the Pharisees and chief priests. They were arrogant and prideful. Instead we need to come before Jesus in true humble repentance. Psalm 51 says, “The sacrifice of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.”⁹

We need to seek Jesus with all of our hearts, while there is still time, believing that we will find him.

And finally we need to drink in the words of Jesus and allow His Holy Spirit to well up within us so that we can provide Jesus’ living water to others.

So may we take these words to heart. May we believe that Jesus is the Messiah. And may we share these life-giving words with others. Amen.

⁹ Psalm 51:17