

What's the big deal about Jesus?

Sermon for Sunday, August 19, 2007
by Bruce Fraser

Scripture: Ephesians 2:19-21, and others

1) Jesus is the centre of the church

Many people base their lives on trying to please other people. I once knew a woman who wanted to be popular. So she did thing which she thought others wanted her to do. Most of her clothes were yellow; she didn't like yellow, but she thought others did. She found that once she started acting a certain way, it was hard to stop it. People really believed she liked yellow, so for her birthday her friends gave her even more yellow clothes! I was with her one day when she cried out, "I don't care what other people want. I want to be me!" Her whole life had been a guessing game, trying to figure out what people wanted.

That's why the church is based on something permanent, a solid foundation that will never be shaken. In Paul's letter to the Ephesians, he pictures the church as a building — of course, we all know the church is *not* the building, even though many people sometimes act like the building is the focus of the church! He is just making an analogy, to illustrate how Jesus is the key to the whole church.

Ephesians 2:19-21, Today's English Version:

So then, you Gentiles are not foreigners or strangers any longer; you are now citizens together with God's people and members of the family of God. You, too, are built upon the foundation laid by the apostles and prophets, the cornerstone being Christ Jesus himself. He is the one who holds the whole building together and makes it grow into a sacred temple dedicated to the Lord.

This is expressed in our mission statement, where we see that Jesus Christ is the core of the church.

Friendship United Church is a group of followers of Jesus Christ

Wesley Church: ... we are a caring community, worshipping Jesus Christ as Lord

2) What did Jesus say about himself?

Some people may wonder: "Why all this fuss about Jesus Christ? Why not just talk about God? Just about everyone believes in God of some kind. That would bring us closer to other religions, and it would make us seem less arrogant and dogmatic, insisting that our way is the only way. Emphasizing Jesus just alienates people."

The reason is that Jesus *is* different from other religious leaders. He doesn't simply say, "Follow my teaching." He says, "Follow me" [Matthew 16:24]. He doesn't just say, "Trust in God." He says, "Trust in me" [John 14:1]. Here are some more of his claims.

a) He claimed to be the Son of God

After Jesus was arrested, the religious leaders put him on trial:

Matthew 26:63-64, New International Version:

The high priest said to him, "I charge you under oath by the living God: Tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God."

"Yes, it is as you say," Jesus replied. "But I say to all of you: In the future you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven."

b) He claimed to give eternal life

John 5:21, New International Version:

"For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son gives life to whom he is pleased to give it."

c) He claimed to have authority to forgive sins

Jesus heals a man who was paralyzed:

Mark 2:5-11, New International Version:

When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven."

Now some teachers of the law were sitting there, thinking to themselves, "Why does this fellow talk like that? He's blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?"

Immediately Jesus knew in his spirit that this was what they were thinking in their hearts, and he said to them, "Why are you thinking these things? Which is easier: to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up, take your mat and walk'? But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins..." He said to the paralytic, "I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home."

I could go on with more, but I think you get the point. This kind of talk is an indication of someone who is so puffed up with pride that his head might burst. But what if it's true, if he really is who he says he is...

C. S. Lewis put it very well in his book *Mere Christianity*.

I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about him: "I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral

teacher, but I don't accept his claim to be God." That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic — on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg — or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse. You can shut him for a fool, you can spit at him and kill him as a demon; or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about his being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.

Jesus is Lord and God. He is the heart of our church. All that we do is grounded in him: his death on the cross for our salvation, his commandment of love for others, his commission to go and tell the world about him, his example of accepting and caring for *all* people, his promise to be with us always, even to prepare a place for us in heaven.

I closed this sermon by playing a recording of S. M. Lockridge's talk, "That's My Jesus." [Available many places on the internet; just search for his name and that title.]