

Sermon for April 7, 2019

“Jesus Thought He Was God”

John 14:1-14

Staunton Church of the Brethren

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I’m going to mention three names that you never thought you’d hear in a sermon. Charles Manson, David Koresh, and Jim Jones. They all had a Messiah complex. Charles Manson was a cult leader in the 60’s, born “No Name Maddox” to a sixteen year old prostitute. He said “I’m God to my friends, I’m the devil to my enemies. When I look to the future, I’m the prophet. When I must lay down the law for the earth, I am the son of man.” He’s serving a life sentence today for murder and conspiracy. David Koresh became leader of the Branch Davidians and self-proclaimed Messiah; he and 76 followers died in a fire during a stand-off with the FBI. Jim Jones claimed he was the reincarnation of Jesus, Buddha and Gandhi. He moved his followers from Indiana to Guyana and eventually influenced 918 of them to commit suicide, while he died from a single gunshot to the head.

The Messiah, or God, or Jesus complex. It’s a real psychiatric disorder where a person believes he or she is a savior. And, in fact, most of our society is infatuated with characters in books and movies, and comic books, where people have extraordinary abilities to save the world; like the Avengers comic and movie series, and X-men movies. I don’t know that any of those characters claim to be God, but their evil counterparts just might.

I confess, I had a bit of a complex at one point in my pastoral career. I had a wonderful experience as pastor in my first church. I was there for 10 years. We grew in every way and I gained a lot of confidence in how God was using me. So when I went to my second church, I could see no barriers, no difficulties, no potential pitfalls. It didn’t help that some on the search committee were kind of looking for a savior; so as new pastor, that was me. Unfortunately, it was more a lesson in humility. I wasn’t there very long, just a couple of years, in which I grew in

my understanding of myself, and I drug them along with me, so that the next pastor could just be pastor and not Messiah.

I'll stop short of saying that we all have our moments, but we do have it in us to look for one who can save us, who can help us out of our predicaments, get us through our crises, guide us past our bad decisions, and still love us regardless. As Christians, we believe that person was and is Christ Jesus. He fits the bill. He has the bad habit of thinking he is God.

Leonard Sweet enumerates the data for us.

"Jesus said he existed before Abraham.

Jesus said he was present at the beginning of Creation, and that 'without Him was not anything made that was made.'

Jesus said God was his Father, 120 times in John's gospel alone.

Jesus said he had been sent 'from above' into this world 'below' by his Father.

Jesus said to see him was to see God.

Jesus said he could forgive sins.

Jesus said he could grant eternal life.

Jesus said he was the same as God: to know him was to know God, to hear him was to hear God, to see him was to see God, to experience him was to experience God, to hate him was to hate God, and to honor him was to honor God."

To examine his life, there was no other like him. After his birth, under wild circumstances, with a star, and angels, and wise men, we first really meet Jesus at the age of 12, attending Passover with his family in Jerusalem. Instead of joining the caravan walking home, Jesus hung back, and after realizing that he was missing, his parents returned to find him hanging out in the temple. He was in trouble with his parents, but he sassed back with "Why were you searching for me?... Didn't you know I would be in my Father's house?" Now, if

Joseph and Mary had not been in on Jesus' birth narrative, they might have thought him crazy at the age of 12. Instead, this habit of claiming a special relationship with God as Father did not seem to faze them, though it did stress the religious authorities all through his life, especially when he forgave sins, and healed the sick, and exorcised demons, and touched the unclean, and raised the dead.

In the end, though, this Messiah was not about power and control, the kind of Messiah that was predicted. The way of this Messiah was the way of the cross. I love this passage that is our text for today. We often read it at Funerals and Memorial Services because it's so comforting, along with the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm. But there's so much more here than comfort.

"Do not let your hearts be troubled, believe in God, believe also in me." Why believe in Jesus unless he is God? The Jews had long established that there was but one God, counter to the Greeks and the Romans. "So to believe in me, in Jesus, is to believe in God. And you have nothing to worry about, because when I go, I will prepare a place for you, and then I will come again and take you with me." How do we know the way?, said Thomas. "I am the way," said Jesus. Thomas, of course, did what any one of us would; he was looking for directions – as in, which way are you going? But Jesus spoke in terms of his person as the way to God. Follow me. Do as I have done. I have shown you the way to live your life, in good days, on the mountaintop, and in the valleys, on the bad days, from transfiguration to crucifixion, which had not happened quite yet. "I am the way," and the next words, "truth and the life," are explanatory.

But Philip didn't have enough yet? "Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied." "I am in the Father and the Father is in me." Jesus confirmed that he and the Father were unified, and later in the chapter he reintroduced the Holy Spirit, the Advocate, who would be God with them when he was gone. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, of one essence, one substance, saturated and infused with the other, and yet distinct enough for us to know them. "Whoever has seen me has seen the Father." "The Father dwells in me." "And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate.....this is the Spirit of truth."

Even though the cross stood in his path, Jesus prepared the disciples and his followers to know that God was always with them, in the joy and in the pain of life. We all want the joy, but the pain is part of the deal as humans, and Jesus showed us how to deal with it. He humbled himself and took everything this world and his life had to throw at him, even death, and came out victorious, never abandoned by God.

I, for one, am glad Jesus knew who he was. He didn't just think he was God, he is God! And his self-knowledge is knowledge he wants us to have too. "Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father." Just as Jesus is in the Father, he wants to be in us, to live and to work and to love in us and through us. That's what the gospel stories are all about, not just a man with a Messiah complex, but the Son of God come to save the world. It's a love story that needs to be written on our hearts.

Sweet offers this interpretation: "Jesus' favorite way of describing himself was as "Son of Man," but also translated "the Human One." Jesus is not some ideal human being but the first true human being, the human being we were all created to be, whose resurrection makes the future our present. Baptism is not membership in the Christian church, then, but membership in a whole new and pure line of being human and participation in the sacrament of humanity."

You see, if we believe Jesus is who he says he is, and we say we believe in him, then our whole life changes. If Jesus is truly living in you, then why are you saying and thinking and doing some of the things you are doing? And yet, we're all hypocrites to some degree, because we have not yet been perfected. No excuses, though. "When Jesus becomes the plot that pilots our story, when Jesus becomes the thread that seams together the nature and nurture of our lives, we become a masterpiece, and a light for the world." We need to let all of Jesus' bad habits take root within us as his followers and his church. We are not the people who remember Jesus, but the people who experience, embody, and evidence Jesus' resurrection life. He has come back for us already, and he is living in us as the way. Let us do more than mimic him, but let us manifest him and be the living presence of Christ in the world.