

“Lent in the Upper Room (Part 9):
Do You Now Believe?”
Exodus 32:1-14 and John 16:16-33

Back when our church office staff still worked in the church office, Sue Schenler would often come by on Thursday afternoons to go through the IPC archives and scan documents from our 60-some year history. Every now and then she'll say “Andy, look at this.” One day she showed me a letter from a member who was a little concerned about how many people at IPC were obsessed with the psychiatrist Carl Jung—who lived and died right around here.

Jung is the reason that we are familiar with the concepts of introversion and extroversion. Do you think I'm an introvert or an extrovert?

Well, I was an extrovert until I became a pastor.

In South Carolina, USA, I started a church with another extrovert friend, Daniel. But after just 3 years of starting that church, both of us were introverts.

By the time we hosted small groups in our homes, met people at coffee shops, went to parties and football games, and held morning coffee hour, morning worship, evening dinner, and evening worship, and locked up the building, we were *introverts!*

In fact, when we were preaching through John's gospel, and we got to today's passage, Daniel declared that John 16:32 was our theme verse as pastors: “A time is coming and in fact has come when you will be scattered, each to your own home. You will leave me all alone.”

But now everything is the opposite! We're all scattered, each in our own homes. And I feel a little left-alone! Maybe Coronavirus 2020 will be what turns me into an extrovert again?

But of course Jesus isn't an introvert who wants a day off. He's the expression of God's love who is about to face isolation and death; and who is going to be raised and return to his Father. Jesus says this, the disciples say “we believe!”

Our question of the day comes from Jesus, John 16:31: “Do you now believe?”

They believe, but they don't really believe. And they need to believe.

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What do you and I “believe,” but don’t really believe, and really, really need to believe?

Three things:

That we can have the victory of Jesus,
the intimacy of Jesus,
and the jubilee of Jesus.

The victory, intimacy, and jubilee of Jesus.

The Victory of Jesus

If there’s victory, it means that there must have been competition, opposition, a struggle.

Jesus says (22) “now is the time of grief,” but soon we will rejoice.

What is the struggle he’s speaking of?

First, he’s talking about the next 2 or 3 days that the disciples are going to experience.

That very evening, that awful Thursday when he was betrayed and arrested, and that next day, Friday, when he was crucified, and that long Saturday, when he laid in the tomb — these will be times of great grief.

But Sunday when he’ll rise from the dead will be a day of victory and joy.

But the second thing Jesus means: I’m going and you’ll be sad; I’m returning victorious, and you’ll be happy—
includes the later experience of the disciples, and it includes all of us.

Jesus has gone away to the Father. *We don’t* see him.

And the world we’re left with is broken and full of sorrows and struggles.

Everything has changed, and yet so much doesn’t seem to have changed.

This is one of the great mysteries of life:

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We are living in the already/not-yet time.

Jesus has already risen in the same body he died in,
but we have not yet risen from the dead.

Jesus has raised us spiritually with him and seated us with him in the
heavenly places,
but we have not yet seen his throne with our very eyes.

Jesus has overcome the world and we ourselves are more than conquerors
with him (33),
but we still groan with all of creation for the end of futility and decay.

We know we’ll experience exaltation and exultation with Jesus,
but for now, we are united with Jesus in his humiliation and sorrows.

Everything has changed in Jesus’ victory;
and yet we weep and long for everything to be made new.

Friends, never forget this: these disciples, who in the Upper Room were
confused even when they *thought* they had finally understood;
who were scattered that very night and pretended they didn’t have anything to
do with Jesus;

these same disciples experienced the victory of Jesus with such power and
conviction when he was raised from the dead and exalted to God’s right hand,
that they went all over the world, and to their own deaths, fearlessly
proclaiming his victory.

Everything they once avoided— disgrace, trouble, persecution, loneliness,
isolation— they soon accepted and bravely endured, because they had won
the victory in Jesus Christ.

You might have heard of the shoe company called Nike. Know what Nike
means? It means exactly what Jesus says here in verse 33: triumph.
Overcoming. Jesus uses that same word.

You need to embrace the victory of Jesus as your own.

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Because you need to be able to persevere, no matter what sorrows and griefs come, in the strength of the Victorious One, whose victory is yours.

Jesus says: embrace my Victory, cause it's your victory in me.

The Intimacy of Jesus

Then second, Jesus says that we can have his intimacy. He looks at his disciples, who have asked him all these questions, who have asked him to do and to be so many things for them in these past 3 years.

And he says to them, I'm going. And you think that means that you can't ask my help any more.

And he says something utterly wonderful beginning in verse 26:

You've noticed I'm pretty close to God, right? That I call him Father? I'm not going to the Father in order to bring him a list of your requests, your needs. I'm going to the Father so that you can speak directly to him, as *your* Father.

See, the reason we have a problem with Jesus not being here among us, and the reason the disciples had that same problem, is because we think that invisibility means a lack of intimacy. We can't see God, and now we can't even see Jesus, who is God and a human.

But the problem of our intimacy with God is not the Father's invisibility, but the fact that we're prodigal sons and daughters.
Our intimacy problem is not invisibility but iniquity.

But Jesus offers us intimacy with his Father and, even better, the ability, in him, to call the God of the universe “Father”.

Because Jesus is no runaway son! Jesus is the man after his Father's own heart!

The disciples, one day after he said all this, saw the whole world—Jew and Gentile alike — treat Jesus as though he was the worst prodigal of sons, the biggest traitor, the furthest thing away from God.

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But when he rose from the dead, they knew for certain that this Jesus, with whom they had been so intimate, so heart-to-heart in the Upper Room, was going back to the real Upper Room in heaven, to live forever, heart-to-heart, with his Father.

And now Jesus is saying that everyone that loves him can speak to his Father, in Jesus’ name, directly.

Isn’t this a mystery?!

We go in Jesus’ name— we can’t go to God apart from Jesus.

But as we go in Jesus’ name, we go, Jesus says, *directly*. We ask the Father himself!

Why? Because (27) the Father himself loves us!

You know that Jesus doesn’t have to beg his Father to love us, right?

He didn’t die for us to earn his Father’s love for us.

He died for us to express the Father’s love for us.

And once that comes home to your heart, you won’t be praying to some void you call “God.”

You’ll be pouring your heart out, intimately, to the ruler of the universe, whom you call, like Jesus did, “Father.”

The Jubilee of Jesus

So we have the victory of Jesus, and the intimacy of Jesus. Last, we have an opportunity to experience the jubilee of Jesus.

What is the result, when you experience the victory of Jesus for yourself?

When you realize you’re included in that victory?

What is the result, when you begin to experience the intimacy Jesus has with his Father for yourself? When you realize you’re included in that intimacy?

The result is that you begin to experience the jubilee of Jesus for yourself.

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His victory is yours. His intimacy is yours. And so, no matter what happens, no matter what *real* sorrows you experience, his jubilee is yours.

Unspeakable, un-take-away-able joy (22).

You’ll experience all the pain and exhaustion of a mother giving birth (21). But you’ll get the jubilee of that mother when the child is finally born.

Only if you’ve experienced real defeat— only if you come to the Father through Jesus the Son and say, “I cannot make up for my sins and failures, and I can’t muster the strength to fight my temptations. Help me!” — only then can you experience the victory of Jesus, and the jubilee that comes with that victory.

Only if you’ve experienced real isolation— only when you realize that our sin and our broken world has made it humanly impossible for us to be truly known and truly loved— can you begin to experience the intimacy of Jesus with his Father and ours, and the jubilee that comes with that intimacy.

Conclusion

Friends, what could we need more in a time of pandemic than the assurance that Jesus has overcome the world?

What do we need more in a time of social distancing than the realization that the Father himself, invisible as he is, loves us?

What could help me and my son Cliffe, who both have birthdays in the next week, have joy despite the pathetic Zoom parties we’re going to have, if not the jubilee that comes from knowing we’ve won in Jesus, and we’re one with Jesus?

When Jesus asked his disciples: “Do you now believe?”, it was his kind and tender way of telling them that they have no idea what he’s saying, much less what it means to believe and live like you really believe.

But those disciples soon did believe. Just 4 days later.

What about you?

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Do *you* now believe?

Having been defeated by your sin and disheartened by the world, have you experienced victory in Jesus?

Do *you* now believe? Having been scattered and isolated even from those you *can* see, have you experienced intimacy with your Father in Jesus?

Do *you* now believe? Having been overcome with grief, and still facing troubles and sorrows of many kinds, have you experienced the jubilee of Jesus, which no one and nothing can ever take away?

It's all yours in Jesus. The only question is: do you now believe?