

Introduction

Check-in & Introductions

Made Like Him

Epistle Lesson

Hebrews 12:1-3 (NRSVUE)

¹ Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, ² looking to Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God.

³ Consider him who endured such hostility against himself from sinners, so that you may not grow weary in your souls or lose heart.

Bible/Sermon Focus

We are in our second week of a sermon series called, "Charles in Charge: The Hymns of Charles Wesley." Each week we are considering a different theme that can be found clearly in his writings, and this week we are talking about the identity of Jesus. Wesley wrote many hymns that poetically describe the identity of Jesus, including seasonal hymns for Advent, Christmas, and Easter. The question, "Who is Jesus?" is vital for us to think about. And although we cannot possibly fully answer that question because human language is insufficient to do so, when each of us shares our partial answers together we begin to paint a fuller picture of Jesus than we could on our own, with the goal of becoming more and more like him.

In the hymn, "Christ the Lord is Risen today, " we sing the words, "Soar we now where Christ has led, following our exalted Head; Made like him, like him we rise, Ours the cross, the grave, the skies."

As we sing of the "incarnate deity" we hold the tension of Christ's holiness, and also his humanness. And that God, enfleshed in a human, shared the experience of suffering, with all who suffer, a suffering that led first to a cross, and then to the grave. Yet, evil and death did not get the final say, and he rose!

As Christians we may find ourselves hoping for the day when we rise like Christ. Perhaps you were taught to imagine *that* victory only in the afterlife, but that's not all of what our Methodist tradition believes. Yes, we experience the resurrection in the life to come. But we also experience the resurrection right here and now. With each cross and grave we face, we have a God who lifts us back to the sky. And sometimes that's hard for us to remember. Sometimes our suffering is so severe it's hard to remember that promise. Or, maybe it's the opposite. Sometimes we take the resurrection for granted, and find ourselves forgetting when we live like Christ, the trajectory is often the cross. In the words of theologian, ST Kimbrough, "*Eternal life is loving as Christ loved ... It is a perpetually self-giving love, which goes in search of others and God at all costs.*" Beloveds, sometimes that cost is great.

The process in which we are made more Christ-like is called sanctification. In sanctification,

God's grace moves in our lives, and as we respond to that grace, we get better. We sin less, we have more compassion and grace for one another. We stand up for what is right, even if it means suffering.

Sanctification is grace's power over sin. It's root word is *sanctify*. Joe Lovino says "The word sanctify simply means 'to make holy,' but not in a holier-than-thou sort of way. Instead, God's sanctifying grace shapes us more and more into the likeness of Christ. As the Holy Spirit fills our lives with love for God and our neighbor, we begin to live differently."

Discussion Questions

1. Who is Jesus, to you?
2. How has knowing Christ made you live your life differently? Where have you experienced sanctification?
3. Reflect on this quote from Dr. Mary Ann Beavis: *"...traditional theological associations of sacrifice with suffering, self-denial, death, and abjection are foreign to ancient understandings of sacrificial rituals. For the biblical tradition, including Hebrews, the basic meaning of the Latin term sacrificio, 'make sacred,' captures the significance of the ritual better than the English term with its many negative connotations."* How does this speak into your understanding of Jesus' sacrifice?
4. Pastor Andy reminded us that, "sanctification is a group project." What does this mean to you?
5. Hebrews 12:1 mentions the "great cloud of witness?" Who is in your cloud? What saints helped bring you to where you are?

Prayer

Holy God, we thank you for a community in which we may experience your sanctifying grace. We thank you for the great cloud of witnesses that have walked before us. We praise that our salvation is not just for a later date, but available to us now. Help us to receive your grace. Mold us into the community you envision us to be. Amen.

*"Soar we now where Christ has led, Alleluia!
Following our exalted Head, Alleluia!
Made like him, like him we rise, Alleluia!
Ours the cross, the grave, the skies, Alleluia!"
-Charles Wesley*