

Christ Episcopal Church, Valdosta, GA  
Proper 19B Year 2, September 12, 2021  
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Yesterday is now over but the feelings it left us with will last forever. Twenty years ago, on September 11<sup>th</sup>, most everyone in this church can remember exactly where they were around 9am EST. We all probably gathered around a TV that day. Yesterday, I heard that the four words most repeated that morning were: “Turn on your TV.” President Bush’s visit to a Sarasota, Florida, school system where he was reading to elementary school students was interrupted by a whisper to his right ear informing him that two planes had hit the World Trade Center Towers. His facial expression said it all.

I moved to New York City in 2011 during the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of 9/11. I worked with faculty and staff who had lost family members. My dean was from a small township in Pennsylvania very near where the plane crashed into a field. Its flight attendant and a few brave passengers decided that they would offer their lives to save who knows how many from a hijacked plane on a Washington DC flight path. All in all, almost 3000 people died that day. Years later, I spent a whole day in the 9/11 museum located on Ground Zero. When I emerged from that underground time capsule, I was a different person than the one who entered 8 hours before. I stood beside melted fire trucks. I saw an entire exhibit of shoes, ID badges, glasses, wallets, purses, all manner of debris that had fallen from those towers and scattered on the streets of lower Manhattan. There was a section where voicemails from those trapped in the towers and those on those planes who knew their fate, told their families how much they loved them.

The deacon that I worked with at St. Mary the Virgin in Times Square spent days and weeks ministering to those who searched for survivors, cleared debris, and with grieving family members who gathered in hope. She never wore a mask. No one did. She told me the pockets of

certain smells. Jet Fuel. Smoldering debris. Acrid smoke. Concrete Dust. She later developed a condition called pulmonary sarcoidosis and began treatment at Bellevue Hospital. I heard on the news yesterday, that now, 20 years later, more people have died from conditions suffered from breathing in that air every day, than died on September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001.

In light of what happened 20 years ago, today's Gospel can be seen in a way never before imagined. There is one scene from 9/11 I will never forget. It is the scene captured from a camera that was pointed at one of the top floors of that first tower. A human being is hanging out of a high floor window waving a white towel hoping that a helicopter will somehow offer rescue. The entire floor behind that person was a burning inferno and there was nowhere else to go. When that human being finally realized rescue was not possible, that human being jumped. A National Geographic special that I watched last night had a camera in the lobby recording the first attempts of the NYCFD to send first responders to those floors to rescue survivors. Those who gathered in the lobby of the World Trade heard for the first time, with cameras rolling, the sounds of those poor individuals as they fell to their deaths. When the people inside finally realized what those sounds were, and when they actually saw what they represented right outside the lobby, you could see new images of horror, fear, sadness, empathy, and powerlessness.

Today, a day after the 20<sup>th</sup> year anniversary, Jesus asks you and me: "Who do you say that I am?". It's a fair question. Good people of Christ Church Valdosta, when it is time for you and for me to stand on whatever precipice it is that divides all that we have known in our lifetime from those next few moments that will take us into the forever unknown, who do we believe Jesus to be?

A name tells us very little about the person who bears that name. As human beings involved in everyday life, there are many Jesus's in our midst today. There is patriotic Jesus

wrapped in an American flag who helps us win wars with the assumption that the American way is blessed by God. There is the politically conservative Jesus who stands for family values. There is the politically liberal Jesus who screams out for social justice. There is judgmental Jesus who condemns those who do not measure up to Biblical standards to eternal hellfire. There's touch-down Jesus who helps athletes win Super Bowls and NBA championship rings. There is red carpet Jesus who helps actors and singers win prestigious awards. There's Hollywood Jesus who is meek and mild with rugged good looks, blonde hair, and, of course, is Caucasian.

*Who do you say that I am?*

Simon Peter answered him: "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." And there you have it. Not just another prophet or rabbi or teacher; not just another wonder worker. Jesus WAS ***the one*** they had been waiting for: Yahweh in the flesh, the one to establish God's reign and rule. And in this same sense, Simon Peter echoes others in the Gospel stories who got the answer right as well, among them: John the Baptist, the Angels, Simeon, Anna, the dying thief, the Roman Centurion, the Blind Man, Bartimaeus, the crowd outside Jerusalem, even demons knew who Jesus really was and they openly said so!

To know Jesus is to explore every meaning of what it means to love and be loved even in the midst of evil. No scare tactics, no threats, no pushing, just the sharing of a relationship and a willingness to be open and honest. Jesus is the Son of the Living God, a merciful and just savior who is looking for followers to share a message of grace so that the Son of God, Father God, and the Holy Spirit, are real.

Jesus often told His disciples to tell no one who he was or what he was doing. He did this because it wasn't time yet. Had they gone over the land preaching that Jesus was the Messiah, opposition would have grown so great and so fast that Jesus would have been unable to complete

His work. But now we have a full picture. In the midst of the reminders of the most horrible evils this world has to offer, we have been given the vision and the hope and the reality of the redeeming work of Jesus Christ.

I close with a similar question and its answer from our Outline of Faith, commonly called the Catechism as found in the back of our BCP.

*The Question: Who is Jesus the Christ?*

*Answer (and I quote):* “Jesus is the Son of God; the only perfect image of the Father, and who perfectly shows us the nature of God, which is love. In him we are freed from the power of evil and given the gift of the life eternal.”

In him, we are freed from the power of evil and death. In him, those we love, and you and me, will never die.           +   +   +