

Invitation of the Lion

Last Sunday I began by asking you the question, "Who are you and how are you to know you are who you think you are? I talked about the various sources of input that people typically rely on to figure out who they are. I also noted that many of those sources give us false or distorted information. If we really want to know who we are we need to look into the word of God and into His perfect law that gives freedom. The Bible tells us that we were created in the image of God to bring glory to God. And, that creation and that purpose, though interrupted and hidden by sin, have not changed. Jesus Christ came to seek and to save that which was lost. He came to call sinners to repentance. He came to restore that which was lost in the fall of man in Genesis 3, so that all who believe in Him might know themselves to be God's beloved children, and to begin again to live into that truth which means to live in the freedom, love, authority, and joy which belongs to all who belong to the royal household of God.

This morning I have another question for us to think about. This question is "Who is God?" And specifically, who is God in relationship to us? What are God's intentions toward us? This past Wednesday evening, I had what some call a kairotic moment. "Kairos" is one of the Greek words for time and is a special kind of time to be contrasted with the other Greek word for time that is "Chronos." "Chronos" is the kind of time that we are normally talking about when we use the English word time. When we are watching the clock or paying attention to the calendar and thinking in terms of past, present, and future, we are dealing with "Chronos." "Kairos," however, is to be understood as a special moment in time, or as we sometimes say: "a moment when time seems to stand still." "Kairos" is the language of lovers, poets, and theologians. Theologically, "Kairos" is a God moment, a moment when God makes a part of Himself or some aspect of His kingdom clear to us. I had one of these moments Wednesday night.

A couple of weeks ago I had brought two stuffed animals over to the church to symbolize the peaceable kingdom--that time spoken of in Isaiah 6 when the Lord will reign on earth and the wolf, lion, lamb and calf will lie down together in safety. The lion and the lamb have become the composite symbol of this time. The symbol has been strengthened by the writings of C. S. Lewis in his *Tales of Narnia*, and in *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*. In these stories, Jesus is represented by Aslan, the

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great lion who gives his life to defeat the spell cast by the White Witch, and to free the inhabitants of Narnia from her evil reign.

After the meeting when I used the lion and lamb as a symbol for contemplation, I decided to leave my friends here at the church. I placed them on the top shelf of the coat rack in the Gathering room. Then during Light the Night, I put them on the snack table so that the children who came in from the street could see them. Last Sunday, however, I discovered that someone had taken them out of the way and had stuffed them in cupboard beneath the usher's table. Wednesday evening I rescued them from their mean imprisonment and took them over to the Annex to serve as a symbol during the Promise Keeper's meeting.

It was there that the "Kairotic" moment happened. I was looking at the Lion and the Lamb and I sensed God saying something like this, "What you see represents two possibilities and I need you to decide which one you will embrace as true." Either this picture means that the Lion has captured the Lamb to eat him or it means that the Lion is with the Lamb to protect him. It's one or the other, not both, and you need to settle this within yourself. " Frankly, I thought it was settled, had been settled, a long time ago, but apparently the Lord wasn't satisfied with my trust level. He wanted me to restate my choice.

I've put together a little power point program to explain: In the first picture is seen the Lion and the Lamb. The second picture identifies the Lion as Jesus and the Lamb as me and you. The third picture shows Jesus as all-powerful and me and you as powerless in His presence. The fourth picture presents one possibility: perhaps the Lion is going to kill and eat the Lamb? The fifth picture presents the other possibility: The Lion is protecting the Lamb, protecting me and you, from harm. As I stared at the Lion and Lamb Wednesday evening, the Lord reassured me that Jesus is my protector. But what does the Bible say about this?

Jeremiah 29:11 says, "For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." The truth is that God is for us and not against us. That's what Paul says in Romans 8:31: He asks, "What then are we to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us?" In John 3:17, Jesus says, "God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world but to save

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the world through Him." The 9th slide on my Power Point presentation says, "Yes, we are not lunch." This is Good News: the Lord is with us to protect us, not to harm us.

But perhaps the Lord's protection for us serves some perverse purpose? After all, cats are known to play with their prey. They let the prey live and defend it from other intruders not out of kindness but to torment it for themselves. They will throw the mouse in the air and catch it again. They will let it run short distances for the thrill of chasing and catching it once more. When the cat tires of the game, then and only then, will he kill and eat the mouse.

The 10th slide on my Power Point proposes the question, "Does God mean to shame us?" The Psalmist asks God, "What is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you visit him?" Perhaps God takes some perverse pleasure in shaming us and watching us squirm. Some human parents and authority figures have been known to act in this manner. Maybe God is this way also?

The 11th slide on my Power Point expresses the other alternative: Or does God want to forgive, free, and love, you and me? Which of these scenarios is true? How do we know? In Psalm 34:4-5, David affirms, "I sought the LORD, and he answered me; he delivered me from all my fears. Those who look to him are radiant; their faces are never covered with shame."

In the story of Jesus with a woman who had been brought to him for judgment after being caught in the act of adultery, we read the following verses: John 8:10-11 say: "Jesus straightened up and asked her, 'Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?' 'No one, sir,' she said. 'Then neither do I condemn you,' Jesus declared. 'Go now and leave your life of sin.'"

And, Paul says to Timothy in II Timothy 1:12 ". . . Yet I am not ashamed, because I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day."

The last slide on my Power Point Presentation says "Yes." Yes, we are protected, safe, blessed, and cherished in the presence of Jesus. When we are close to Him, He will not abuse

us; He will not shame us. There is instead, healing in His presence. We can trust Him for protection. We can trust Him for understanding and forgiveness. Those who trust in Jesus will never be put to shame.

Take a moment to take this in. If we have received Jesus Christ as our Savior and mean to live for Him as our Lord, then the picture of the Lion and the Lamb is for us. Jesus, Lion of Judah, is our protector. He is our healer. He is our champion. He is our closest companion and dearest friend.

What difference would this make in our lives if we believed this--not just conceptually as a profession of faith--but actually, emotionally, in our heart of hearts? I mean, if this were not only true for us intellectually but real for us in experience, what would we be afraid of? Who would we be afraid to talk to? What would we be afraid to do or to give? In what Spirit would we pray for self and others? How would we serve? It seems to me we would be absolutely fearless. If we could just feel the warmth of His presence and feel the breath of that mighty Lion blowing on our necks, we would possess a confidence and a holy boldness that would turn our worlds upside down!

The good news is that we can have this. We can absolutely have this. If we ask for it, if we seek for it, if we knock on this door and keep on knocking, we will have it. Jesus said, "if you earthly fathers though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him." Who is the Holy Spirit but the breath of God blowing life into us and through us? All we need to do is to keep on asking, seeking, and knocking until we have Him--or more accurately--until He has us.

I don't know about you but I want to know Him to the degree that I can sense the brush of his great mane along my cheek. I want to know Him to the degree that when I speak, I can sense Him standing beside me and going before me, to empower those words. I want to know Him to the degree that when I pray for people I can see Him breathing healing and new life into their souls and into their bodies. I want to be able to look into your eyes with the understanding of His eyes and when you look into my eyes I want you to be able to see His eyes smiling at you and loving you. I want all of this to be real for you as well.

I want us together to be able to see the needs of the people all around us with His eyes and to hear the cries of their hearts with His ears and respond to those cries with His compassion and with His selfless courage. I believe that's what we are here for and that that's what He wants.

I had another "Kairotic" moment after I got home Wednesday night and one that was further explained to me Thursday Morning: Wednesday night my cat was laying on my lap, and I wanted to get up from my chair. I discovered some time ago that the easiest way to get the cat to move without getting my legs scratched in the process is to confine him. If I hug him and hold him close, he will invariably struggle to get away. All I have to do is let go and he will jump down off my lap. I used this technique Wednesday evening. Thursday morning, as I was looking at the Lion and Lamb picture I used in the Power Point I noticed something interesting: the Lion is not holding on to the Lamb. Rather, the Lion's paws are flat on the ground, allowing the Lamb to lie freely in His shadow. There is no coercion here, only the offer of free protection and companionship. Like the Father in the Parable of the Prodigal Son, Jesus won't force us to come to Him and Jesus won't force us to stay. But if and when we come to our senses and come to Him freely, He will never reject us or force us to leave.

The question is do you want Him? Do you sense His invitation to come under His protection? Are you willing to seek His Presence and yield to His Lordship in your life? If you will draw near to Him, He will draw near to you. I'm going to ask the Lord to bless and sanctify our imaginations just now, that when we close our eyes we will be able to perceive Jesus waiting for us in the privacy of our own minds. Will you choose to see Him there? Will you go to Him there? Will you give your life to Him so that He can give His life to you? Will you say "Yes" to Him? Or, perhaps you will see Him at the prayer rail at the front of the sanctuary. Maybe you want to come and say "Yes" to Him there?

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Sermon for November 6, 2011

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**Isaiah 11:1-10;
Revelation 5:1-5**

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