

Sixth Sunday after Pentecost • July 16, 2017

St. John's Lutheran Church, Alexandria, VA

Rev. Braun Campbell

Romans 8:12-17

“Jesus Christ: God’s Son, Savior, and Intercessor (Augsburg Confession III, XXI)”

The man stood there, speechless. It’s not that the last question was really out-of-left-field or anything like that. He just hadn’t really thought about the answer all that much – at least, not in a way that had him ready to give an answer. He had done pretty well with the first question his friend asked, really: “Who is Jesus to you?” “Jesus is the Son of God, the Savior. He became human and was born as a baby of the virgin Mary. He lived, suffered, and died as the perfect human being, taking on the sin of the whole world. He rose on Easter, then ascended into heaven forty days later. On the Last Day, he’ll return to judge the living and the dead.” Honestly, he was kind of proud of himself for answering so well. The Creed that he studied years ago in Confirmation and confessed with other believers in worship services – when he was in worship services, at least – came back to mind when he needed it. But when his friend followed up with, “So why does that matter?”, he wasn’t sure how to respond. He knew that it mattered who Jesus was; however, it’d been a long time since he’d considered why – if he ever really had at all.

What do you suppose you’d hear if you asked people who aren’t Christians “Who is Jesus?” Assuming that someone is going to give you an honest answer, you could very well get a response that sounds something like, “I think that Christians believe that he’s God’s Son, but from what I’ve read and heard about him, he was just a really nice guy who taught that people should love each other and do good.” That picture of Jesus is pretty safe and inoffensive because it puts him in the same bucket as a whole bunch of other “teachers of niceness” across history. The accounts of who Jesus is that we have from the Bible, though, don’t give us the option to think of him that way.

As the Lutheran princes and laypeople were presenting their statement of faith at Augsburg in 1530, they wanted to show that what they believed was in line with what the Church had taught since the time of the Apostles. When it came to answering the question of “Who is Jesus?”, they went straight to the Scriptures and the ancient, ecumenical creeds of the Church. When you read through Article III of the Augsburg Confession, you’ll see that it hits all the key points of the creeds: Jesus is the Word, the Son of God, become incarnate through the Virgin Mary; he is true God and true man; he suffered, was crucified, died, and was buried; he descended into hell; he rose again on the third day; he ascended into heaven; and he will come again to judge the living and the dead. It’s easy to simply glide through all that when we confess the creeds in worship, so let’s spend a couple of minutes looking at what we’re saying about who Jesus really is.

Who is Jesus? He is the Son of God, the second Person of the Holy Trinity. He was with the Father and the Holy Spirit before creation, before time existed. He is eternal, all-knowing, all-powerful, and perfect. Out of love for His creatures who had become broken by sin, the Father sent the Son into creation to be become a human being, to be one of us. The human and divine became intertwined in the incarnation, a baby born of a virgin named Mary in a particular time and place and culture, and was named Jesus. He showed His human nature by being born, suffering, being crucified, dying, and being buried. (Consider the Church Year and see how it points to each of those.) Jesus experienced every human condition except for sin. (If you want to know more about the nature of sin, go back to last weekend’s sermon in this series.)

Who is Jesus? He is the world’s Savior. The God-man lived a perfect life in line with God’s design, serving as humanity’s representative before our heavenly Father. He fulfilled the entirety of God’s Law in our place. He went to the cross as an innocent sacrifice on our behalf, taking the guilt of the entirety of the world’s sin on himself, giving up his life in exchange for all of ours. Jesus reconciled us with his Father and our Father, restoring the ultimate relationship that sin had broken.

Who is Jesus? He is our intercessor. The God-man ascended back to heaven and remains in the power and glory that is his with the Father and the Holy Spirit. He is still both human and divine, fully God and fully man, standing before the Father as our representative. He defends us against the devil and the power of sin. He will be the judge of the living and the dead on the Last Day when heaven and earth are recreated and death and sin are forever put away.

That’s who Jesus is. So why does that matter?

Why does it matter that Jesus is God’s Son? If you or I are to have any hope of a restored relationship with God, we need someone who can bridge the gap between us and our Creator. As the only being who

is both human and divine, Jesus bridges the gap. He knows what it is to be human, to feel suffering and hunger and temptation as we do. As the one God-man, Jesus shows that God is not distant and removed from His creation; on the contrary, He cares so much about it that He dives in to the depths of it to get His hands dirty – bloody, even – tackling its brokenness head-on. And because Jesus is the Son of God who took our place on the cross, we get to take His place before the Father. God calls you His own because of Jesus. We are heirs of all God's promises: not just the blessings that He gives, but also Christ's perfect and imperishable glory. That's what St. Paul's pointing us to in today's reading from Romans 8. We are heirs with Jesus, adopted children of the Father and members of His household.

Why does it matter that Jesus is the world's Savior? For starters, it means that he came to save you. Jesus is the one who would rescue you from slavery to sin – when our every inclination bent towards it from before our birth – and from the dread of God. Because you have a Savior in Jesus, you have been liberated from the doom that comes to everything and everyone that is an enemy of God. Because you have a Savior in Jesus, you have life with God both now and into eternity.

Why does it matter that Jesus is our intercessor? You don't need anyone else to take your prayers to your heavenly Father. Article XXI of the Augsburg Confession warns against worshiping or praying to the saints, those who have gone before us in the faith. You have Jesus as your mediator and advocate. You need no other: you've got the best! As Paul writes, you can go to God with the cry of "Abba!" as your loving Father. Your prayers are heard by the creator and sustainer of the universe by the power of Jesus' Name. That said, we can look to the saints as examples of faithfulness to learn how God has worked through their lives so that we might, in the words of Article XXI, "follow the example of their faith and good works."

Why does it matter? When the question is asked, what will you say? Look to God's Word and see His promise for you, for your neighbor, and for all people. Share the hope that is yours in Jesus: God's Son, Savior, and Intercessor.

**Amen.**