**Who is Jesus – (part 3): Saviour? Jan 30th, 2022**

Have you ever seen any of these signs outside churches?

(Insert Jesus Saves images)

I love that last image!

But seriously, in mainstream Protestantism, and perhaps especially in more conservative churches – ‘Saviour’ is the most often term used to describe Jesus. It is not uncommon to hear TV evangelists crying out before offering an altar call:

“Jesus is the One who saves us from sin and death”

… but oddly enough, Butler Bass in her book ‘Freeing Jesus’, reminds us that the term Saviour appears only twice in the gospels to describe Jesus. One is at the beginning of Luke in the angels’ proclamation to the shepherds:

*“Do not be afraid … to you is born this day in the city of David a SAVIOUR,…”*(Luke 2:10-11)

and the second is in John 4:42, where the neighbors of the Samaritan woman proclaim:

*“we have heard for ourselves, and now know that this man is truly the SAVIOUR of the world.”*

Jesus is called SAVIOUR just two times.

And yet, I am guessing that if you ask random Christians ‘Who is Jesus for you?’ for many of them they will probably answer – ‘Jesus is my Saviour.’

But, saved from what?

Does accepting Jesus as our Saviour mean that we are saved:

* From the fiery depths of hell?
* From damnation?
* From the judgmental wrath of God?
* From our sinful nature?
* That we will be rewarded in heaven while others are punished?

Well, let’s be honest – these are just not things that we focus on in United Church theology. That is not to say that we do not believe that God judges – or that we are guilty of sin – in fact those are part of a wonderful United Church book called ‘Preaching the Big Questions.’

But in the United Church our focus is more on a God of love and forgiving grace. We believe in a God that liberates, unites, and accepts all.

And we state this belief in the words of Our United Church New Creed, where we proclaim that “We believe in God … who has come in Jesus …. to reconcile and make new.”

So if we are not focusing on the wages of sin are death and we need to be saved - let me offer a different interpretation to Jesus as Saviour.

Instead of Jesus saving the world from sin and guilt, and from the perils of hell, think about how Jesus came to save us from separation and alienation from God in this world.

Marcus Borg in his book ‘Meeting Jesus for the First Time’ writes:

“*for many guilt is not the central issue in their lives …but many have strong feelings of bondage, alienation, or estrangement ….being saved from a sinful and unclean nature makes no sense to them, but Jesus offering the good news of a homecoming, … of liberation from victimization or suffering … and an acceptance … that is a Jesus who saves.”*

The very word ‘Salvation’ even implies this understanding of Jesus as Saviour.

The word ‘Salvation’ comes from a Latin word ‘Salvus’ which originally referred to being made whole, to be safe, or in good health.

Salvation is not about being taken out of this life and healed in the after life – it is about being healed in THIS life through relationship with God.

In our scripture that Dianne read for us today – the young man asks, ‘how can he be sure of eternal life?’ He is asking, how can he be saved?

Now clearly this man is a good person – he has kept all the commandments. But Jesus tells him that he must go and sell everything in order to be saved and to have ‘treasure in heaven.’

I’d love to say that this scripture is telling us all to give more to the church – let’s donate all our savings, and cash in our RSP’s, and give it all to the church to be saved!

Maybe our treasurer or our trustees would appreciate that.

But this scripture is NOT saying that.

Jesus’ message to the young man is about reconciling with God.

If the young man’s love for money and assets is more important to him than his love for God – then he is choosing to separate and alienate himself from God.

Jesus therefore tells him how to be saved.

He calls the young man to follow Jesus, and to live in ways that put God first.

Thinking about Jesus the Saviour in this way requires a very active way of looking at things. It requires us to be intentional.

It means that we have to think about what we are doing that maybe separates us from being in close relationship with God.

And sometimes that might mean that we need to look at things that we are not doing.

We need to ask ourselves if we are we truly being active in working to bring God’s kingdom here on earth?

Butler Bass writes:

*Jesus the Saviour spoke and preached about saving the world – a world where oppression ends, mercy reigns, violence ceases to exist …. Jesus the Saviour is the one who brings this dream to reality: he is the peacemaker, light of justice, the good physician. Jesus saves in these ways and more.”*

And when we think about Jesus the Saviour in this way, - then we need to ask ourselves, what are we doing to bring Jesus’ vision to reality?

As we begin Black History month in February, are we willing to truly grow in our awareness of systemic racism; to acknowledge our white privilege; and to step up in our willingness to change? It’s not good enough to just say that we are a rural white community, and so think that this anti racist work does not apply to us.

And last week in Good News at Grace, Paul Bartlett wrote about The Coldest Night walk – are we willing to join the team and spend 30 minutes walking in the cold, not just to raise funds, but to raise awareness of the injustice of poverty and homelessness.

As we continue to work on Truth and Reconciliation with our indigenous brothers and sisters -will you be you willing to sign up and join me in a virtual tour of a residential school at the Woodland Cultural Centre in March? Details of that will be in the newsletter soon.

I know that some of you might be thinking that when we consider Jesus the Saviour in this way, it goes against the message of Jesus’ salvation on the cross. Perhaps when you think of Jesus as Saviour, you only think of Jesus and the old rugged cross.

Certainly, Paul’s letters speak a lot about the Jewish custom of sacrificial atonement:

The idea that only one offering – God’s own son – was sufficient.

That God forgives in exchange for an offering of blood.

That Jesus was the sacrificial lamb.

I am not about to unpack that message here– I’ll save the sermon on sacrificial atonement for another time.

But I would ask you to ponder the thought that if salvation was dependent on Jesus’ crucifixion – then how come Jesus does not speak of that in the gospels?

New Testament scholar Stephen Finlan writes:  
 “*If salvation came only as a consequence of his crucifixion, Jesus certainly forgot to mention this to those who came to him seeking salvation.”*

And, if we are only saved by Jesus’ death on the cross – what about all those people that Jesus saved before he died?

Those who were healed, those whose lives were transformed, those who found oneness with God?

Diana Butler Bass reminds us that “*everything Jesus did saved people long before Rome arrested and murdered him.”*

She suggests that:

*“Jesus was not killed so his death would save people; he was killed because he was already saving them through his message of reconciliation, love, liberation and oneness.”*

And that brings us back to the scripture reading today.

‘How can I be saved’ – asks the young man?

‘Put God first’ – replies Jesus.

Jesus showed the man the way to be reconciled with God; a way towards oneness; a way that is rooted in love.

When we choose to live in that way that Jesus offers us, then we are indeed saved.

Instead of a life filled with fear, or loneliness, or uncertainty, or seeking solace in worldly things – we can instead be assured of comfort, refuge, strength, love, and acceptance.

And when we know Jesus in that way, then we can mostly call him – ‘Jesus the Saviour.’ Amen.