

**“IT’S ALL ABOUT JESUS”**

Mark 11:1-11; Mark 14:3-9

Rev. John Park

I shared this joke once in my previous sermon. “At a prayer meeting, the congregation’s wealthiest member decided to share a portion of his faith story. ‘I’m a millionaire,’ he said, ‘and I attribute it all to the rich blessings of God in my life. I can still remember the turning point in my faith, like it was yesterday: I had just earned my first dollar and I went to a youth meeting that night. The speaker was a missionary who told about his work. I knew that I only had a dollar bill and had to either give it all to God’s work or nothing at all. So at that moment I decided to give my whole dollar to God. I believe that God blessed that decision, and that is why I am a rich man today.’ When he finished and sat down, a wise senior lady in the pew leaned over and said: “Wonderful story! I dare you to do it again!”

Do you know that my mind came back to this joke every so often? I ask this question myself, “John, can you repeat again something you did when you had a little?” When I sensed God’s call in my life to become a minister of the Word and Sacraments, I was a university student. Of course, there were some things I valued very dear that I had to give up in order to pursue the new calling I sensed. Many people asked me, “John, how could you give up that dream of becoming a doctor? How could you give up what you already achieved in the University? Don’t you regret the five years of studying Medical Biophysics at the University? My answer has always been and still is, “No, I never regret it, because what I gave up was so little compared to what I have gained.” What I gave up looked huge, but really if you think about it, I was young, single and I had not much to lose. It’s not like I had built a great monument that I was tearing down. Figuratively speaking, it was really a small building block tower made by kid’s toys.

So it’s great that I gave my life to the Lord, but it wasn’t much. But, can I do it again, especially when I have so much to lose now? If God calls me again and asks me to let go of everything I have, can I do it again? Now, it does sound different, because I have so much to lose. I have a stable full time paid position. I now have a family, wife and two children. “John, I dare you to do it again.”

And I’m happy to say today that I am willing to do it again, because the glory God will give us on the day of the Lord Jesus Christ is far greater than what you and I are going through right now here on earth. Jesus says, “Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away” (Matthew 24:35). Everything here on earth is temporary; his word is what lasts forever. If I have to invest my life, I want to invest my life to something that will last forever. Jesus himself is the word of God (c.f. John 1:1) and I believe it’s worth following him my whole life.

In fact, I believe it’s all about Jesus. When you first believe and follow him, it’s often not about him and there is nothing about this. It’s usually something about him that attracts us and causes us to follow him. It’s love, grace, mercy, power, sense of belonging or some kind of benefits in following Jesus that attracted you and made you follow Jesus. Initially, it didn’t have to be Jesus, because what

you wanted was not really Jesus, but really all those benefits and attributes that are associated with Jesus. Let me give you an example. When I first met my wife, I wasn't attracted to her, because she is Grace. I was attracted to her, because she is the same age as me, because she shares common interests with me, because she is pretty, because she has the Christian faith. You see, it didn't really have to be her, but the attributes and qualities she had attracted me and made me want to get to know her more. Likewise, when we first came to know Jesus, it's not necessarily because he is Jesus, we follow him. But, his character, lifestyle, teachings and miracles make us draw near to him and want to know more of him.

As you get to know him more, however, you eventually come to the point of realization that it's really about him. Let me go back to the earlier analogy. Initially, I became attracted to my wife because of her character and the benefits I found in having a close relationship with her. But, now all these benefits have become secondary to me. What she's interested in is irrelevant to how much I love her. If she becomes interested in something that I'm not interested in, I will make an effort to learn what she's interested in, so we can enjoy our time together more. It's no longer about her character, attributes or anything about her. It's my wife herself that I am in love with and everything else is really secondary. Likewise, I find that when you follow Jesus long enough, you will find that everything you desired from him, every reason that made you follow him initially and every benefit you have gained from following him will eventually become secondary to Jesus himself. You may even find that all these benefits are really meaningless and worthless compared to knowing Jesus himself. Initially it was about being loved that you desired in following Jesus, but now you love Jesus a lot. Initially it was about finding peace and security in Jesus, but now you don't really care how dangerous it is to follow where he takes you as long as you are with him.

Jesus, in today's readings, is not shy of making the claim that it's all about Jesus. Here, Jesus comes close to the end of his life, and he knows it very well. Up until this point, Jesus often hushed his followers to avoid calling attention to himself because the excitement of crowds often threatened to turn his mission into some kind of carnival. As he came to enter Jerusalem at the end of his ministry, however, he actively orchestrated the entire scene of his provocative entrance, almost encouraging the whole crowd to proclaim his name jubilantly from street corners and rooftops (Garland, D. E. *Mark*, p. 428). In another Gospel account, he even rebukes the Pharisees, who ask him to stop the disciples, by saying "I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out" (Luke 19:40). Yes, Jesus is making a public declaration to the world here, "Yes, it's about me."

Later, when he visits the house of Simon the leper, there is a woman who comes to pour expensive ointment on his head. Many are upset that she wastes the ointment that is worth more than three hundred denarii, which is equivalent to a year's wage for a day-labourer (Remember in Mark 6:37, two hundred denarii would have been sufficient to provide a meal for five thousand people). Notice how Jesus affirms her action as "a good service." I think we often assume that this is a good service because it commemorates his imminent death. But, we also have to remember that the Scripture does not indicate what this woman actually had in mind when she poured the ointment. Did she know Jesus was about to die soon? Was it simply the expression of her affection towards Jesus? Whatever her intention was, Jesus gave spiritual meaning to this performance.

Then, he makes a very interesting comment, “For you always have the poor with you, and you can show kindness to them whenever you wish; but you will not always have me” (Mark 14:7). This is obviously not Jesus’ pronouncement that we always have the poor in this world; that’s not his point. I believe he is saying something about priority. He’s claiming that there is something that precedes helping the poor and it’s Jesus and his death and resurrection. Yes, the woman might have been able to feed more than five thousand poor on the street that evening. But, there is something greater. You can feed the poor, help the oppressed and voiceless, teach God’s word, raise and equip the next generation and serve the world. But, there is someone who precedes everything. The Bible, in both the Old and New Testaments, has constantly pointed to this single individual, who was called the Messiah, or in Greek, Christ. He walked on earth and fulfilled every single prophecy about himself and finally according to the prophets he took the cross and climbed that hill and died for my sins and your sins. Even if we had everything but did not have Jesus, we missed everything.

Friends in Christ, this is my last sermon to you, and what more can I say other than the name of our Lord and Saviour, true King and Head of the church, the most Excellent and Powerful and Glorious and Beautiful and Awesome, the very Reason you and I are here and the only One our hearts will ever adore and praise and follow. I will follow him wherever He leads me. I only appeal to you, by the mercies of God, to follow him. Blessings in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.