

Bellaire Community United Methodist Church

February 7, 2016

“A Heavenly View”

Encountering Christ, part 6

Revelation 5:6-14 and 19:11-16

It is good to be here with you this morning. You know, at times I am absolutely amazed that God uses us to spread the good news of Jesus and proclaim this amazing thing called the Kingdom of God. Let's face it: we are all broken people. We make mistakes. We mess up. And yet in Jesus Christ, we get a second chance. We have a hope that we can share. God is for us, not against us. That's pretty amazing. So if it took you four cups of coffee to get going this morning, or your makeup is only halfway applied, don't worry. You are in the right place, and you are not alone.

I invite you to pray with me this morning, extending your hands with your palms open, ready to receive what God has for you.

Lord Jesus Christ, You alone are worthy. Help us to see You this morning in a new way. Help us to respond to Your love and grace. And may the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable to You, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

Have you ever failed to see something that was right in front of you? I miss stuff all the time because it doesn't appear where I think it will be, or it doesn't look how I think it will look. I am the guy who can't find the butter in the fridge. It's not because it's hidden or gone, it's because I expect it to be in the first place I look, and when it's not, I give up and call my wife. She is telepathic and has x-ray vision, by the way, because she knows what I'm looking for before I even tell her,

and she knows exactly where it is. I swear, she might have to tell me, “The car is in the garage, silly.”

I don’t just miss little things. For example: I got lost when I went skiing this week. The thing is, I was on the right trail, and I knew exactly what landmark I was looking for: a huge radio tower, at least 300 feet tall. I was at the bottom of the hill, only 50 yards away, but snow and fog clouded my vision. It was a huge tower, impossible to miss. But I did. And as a result, I spent an extra hour wandering through the forest.

I realized something, though. Missing that tower is a metaphor for missing Jesus in our lives. See, Jesus is powerful. Jesus is a beacon of light. But we miss seeing Jesus, because He doesn’t show up the way we think He will. It is not that He isn’t there. We just aren’t tuned in to the right channel. We have a preconceived notion of what Jesus looks like, what Jesus will do, and yet many times Jesus fails to meet our expectations. He doesn’t look like the pictures we have seen. He doesn’t appear the first place we look.

Can I ask you: What is your image of Jesus? Is there a specific picture that comes to mind? Or an analogy from the gospels? Go ahead, shout out some answers. (A rabbi. The good shepherd. The light. Loving, kind. Human. A Jew. Easter themes – crucified, beaten, broken. In a white robe with long brown hair.)

I found some of these images on the internet when I searched for Jesus. Frankly, I am not surprised. (*Show them.*) Lots of these are based on historic religious artwork, much of it probably from the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. Notice how most of them are the European, long-haired Jesus? It’s like Da Vinci painted his picture, and now that’s the number one image we have.

But there's an important point I want you hear today. If your personal image of Jesus is limited, your relationship with Him will be, too. It's easy to think that Jesus is the long-haired rabbi from two thousand years ago, and that makes Jesus somewhat distant from us. We need to paint a bigger picture. That is why we also need this heavenly view of Jesus from Revelation. We don't want to miss this view of His awesome power.

Take a look at Revelation 5. Admittedly, there are some strange images here. Look at some of the phrases. A lamb that was slain. He has seven horns and seven eyes. (*Next picture.*) Flip over to Revelation 19. Jesus is riding on a white horse. His eyes are like blazing fire. He is crowned with many crowns. He is wearing a robe dipped in blood.

What's going on here? First of all, understand this is poetic imagery. Revelation is an apocalyptic book. It's not meant to be taken literally. But what do these images convey? And why is there so much activity going on around Christ? Living creatures, elders, and angels, and finally all of creation join in praising Christ together.

The author is trying to tell us one thing about Jesus. Jesus is so powerful and majestic, that He is the center of all the worship of heaven and earth. Try to wrap your mind around that, if you can!

I am assuming that you already know that Jesus is the Son of God. In the last few weeks, we have talked about His miracles. We talked about His power to redeem people, to surprise them, to teach them, to save them. Now, this passage in Revelation tells us what Jesus will look like in heaven. Jesus is awesome and mighty! Even though Jesus looks like one who was crucified and defeated,

because of His sacrifice, He is the only one worthy of praise. He is the rider on a white horse...a king...who will conquer his enemies.

Christ is not weak. Christ is not irrelevant or distant. And the author of Revelation is trying to tell us that one day we will meet Jesus, and his power will be undeniable. Honestly, this heavenly view should cause us to fear Jesus. These images should leave us shaking in our boots.

But this fear doesn't have to paralyze us. We shouldn't just run away and hide. Rather, this is a fear that puts us in the proper position of humility. When we see Christ displayed this way, we should admit, like the prophet Isaiah (6:5) says, "Woe is me. I am a man of unclean lips." (And heart, and mind, and hands, as well.)

The power of Christ should overwhelm us. But remember, Jesus was slain to redeem us. So while these passages might concern us, confuse us, and even frighten us, we know that God's love was revealed in Jesus. When we submit to Him and ask Him to rule in our lives, we no longer have to be afraid of this powerful King. Instead, we can join with all creation in praising Christ. We can sing, "And I will adore You."

Honestly, it's easy to forget who Jesus is. When I'm down, I forget Jesus is the conqueror. I forget He is greater than any problem or situation I can ever face. When I was lost in the woods, I probably should have been praying, "Lord, please help me."

I honestly believe that if we pray to Jesus and open our eyes, He will show up in our lives. Matthew 25:40 promises if you are serving one of the least of these, you are serving Jesus. Matthew 18:5 says if you are welcoming a little one in Jesus' name, it is the same as welcoming Christ Himself.

When a miracle happens, Jesus is there. And when you're burdened, disappointed, and mad at God for not showing up in the way you thought He had to, Jesus is there. You just need to change your view. Jesus is there.

When we leave this earth, as we all will, we will finally see that these powerful pictures painted of Jesus in the Book of Revelation are true. (*Last picture.*) I don't know if Jesus will appear white, black, Chinese, or Norwegian. Maybe He will appear to be all of those, or appear different depending on our own backgrounds, but we will recognize him. And Philippians 2:10 promises that "Every knee will bow, and every tongue will confess that Jesus is Lord."

The question is, when you bow to Him, is it going to be a natural reaction based on a life-time of worship, or will it be awkward and forced, because you spent your life distant from Him? Right here, right now, I am asking you: Do you recognize the power of Jesus?

I want to challenge you this week to think of your personal image of Jesus. And rather than focus on a painting someone else has done, try to recognize Jesus by what He has done for you. In the end, it doesn't matter if Jesus has long hair or short hair, or a beard or a mustache. What matters is, He is Lord, and He loves us. I don't want to miss Jesus in my life because He didn't conform to some preconceived image I already had of Him. And I'll bet you don't either.

You and I both need to pray that we will see Him. We can ask God to show us Christ in a way we can recognize, understand, relate to. And we can be blown away by who Christ is. This awesome, wonderful, amazing Son of God chooses to call you friend. We all have a chance to have a relationship with the most powerful being ever, who became human and lived among us, who died on a

cross to save us, and who will come again in power, not as a suffering servant, but as a conqueror. That's an image we can all keep in our minds.

(Prayer and communion follow the message.)

Memory verse

Revelation 5:12 - "In a loud voice they sang, 'Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!'"

Reflection questions

1. Have you ever failed to find something you were looking for because it appeared different than what you expected? What was it?
2. What types of images come to mind when you think of Jesus? A bearded, robed Rabbi? A crucifix? A Caucasian Jesus? A different ethnicity?
3. If Jesus showed up right now, would you recognize Him? How?
4. Have you ever thought what it would be like to meet Jesus in heaven? What do you think you would do? How are you preparing for that moment?