

I believe in . . . and in Jesus Christ, His only Son, Our Lord.

Sermon by Rev. James Brassard

Homily "I Met Jesus Again this Year" February 5, 2006

Apostles Creed series: I believe in . . . **and in Jesus Christ, His only Son, Our Lord.**

Romans 10:9-13 "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and be saved"

Mark 2:1-12 Jesus heals the paralytic

Creeds set out to accomplish two things. First, they define who you are and what you believe. Second, they define who you are not.

In the early days the followers of Jesus distinguished themselves from other surrounding religions and cults by worshiping Christ "**as if a God.**" To elevate Jesus to this stature put them at odds with the Roman government that required citizens to offer sacrifices to the emperor as a god. Rome drew the line in the sand. Citizens were given a clear choice, Christ **or Caesar?** If you chose Christ it well might have led to your death.

Today, calling Jesus, the Christ, is crucial for Islamic/ Christian relations. The holy book of Islam describes Jesus as a great prophet and attests many of his miracles and credits him for his powerful teaching ministry. Islam says that God vindicated his ministry by receiving him into heaven. But Islam denies some crucial events in Jesus' life. They deny that he died on a cross—saying only that a likeness was crucified. That God would take human form is inconceivable to the followers of Mohammad. That God would suffer and die is abhorrent. Yet for Christians this is the basis and the glory of our faith. Sadly, the history of violence on all sides makes this important discussion difficult but all the more necessary.

This phrase in the creed comes from the pivotal question Jesus asked his disciples about two thirds of the way through his ministry. On a trip to Caesarea Philippi, Caesar's summer palace on the Mediterranean, Jesus asked his disciples, who by this time knew him well, "**Who do people say that I am?**"

They answered that there were varied opinions. Everyone acknowledged his greatness. Some were speculating that he was the reappearance of Elijah, or the prophet Jeremiah. The belief was that these great figures would reappear on earth before the Messiah arrived.

Then Jesus pushed them, "Who do **you** say that I am?"

Peter grasped it in a flash - "**You are the Christ, the son of the Living God.**"

To say that Jesus is the Christ—the Messiah, the chosen one was to **attach** something **universal** and **eternal** to Jesus. Messiah means that someone has come into the world to "**be the hope**" of the world, to be the fulfillment of every promise, to be the answer to every prayer.

The Messiah was the One who would straighten out all human tangles and right all earthly wrongs and bring in a better day. That was the idea behind the title "Christ."

And we can see that to claim Jesus as the Christ today has even more meaning as the years pass.

As we are driven by the difficulties and stresses of today's world, we realize that the one hope of the world is the recognition and the acceptance of Jesus as God's guiding word to our generation.

Everything depends upon whether we are ready to say with Peter, "**You are the Christ.**"

The phrase in the Creed begs the question: Why is Jesus Christ, the **only** Son of God?

The title “son of god” was a common one in the ancient world. Many ancient rulers were called son of God because their majesty and power supposedly proved that they were offspring of the gods. In the New Testament period one could meet everywhere men who called themselves “son of God” because they claimed they had miraculous divine powers. Some of them also called themselves Savior.

The fact that Jesus was a miracle worker and spoke with authority was not in itself unique. If he had only been a son of God or a savior on the basis of the miraculous powers he demonstrated, he would have been nothing unusual. Certainly not the **ONLY SON** of God . . .

Other mighty rulers commissioned lavish public works projects to draw attention to themselves. -- Pyramids. Obelisks. Statues... and broadcast their claim. The Bible gives us a Christ who fled his fame.

The unique thing that set Jesus apart from the many “sons of god” and set the Christian religion apart from the other ancient religions was not Jesus' strength but **his weakness**, not his majesty power but his suffering, not his authority and rule but his obedience.

Jesus was the lowly son of God.

We see this in several decisive points in his life.

You know them well. He was born in an insignificant colony of the Roman empire. Born in a stable to the wife of a common laborer. This is not an “appropriate” start for a mighty son of God to make his arrival!

There is the Temptation story. Jesus spent 40 days in the desert. There he renounced once and for all any chance to get a throne by miraculous acts. He refused to demonstrate his powers for personal gain. He refused to turn stone to bread; He refused to throw himself off the pinnacle of the temple. This Christ would **win hearts** by **self-giving** and **suffering love**.

In Jerusalem, in what we now call Holy Week, Jesus arrived riding a crest of popularity. There was expectation that this was the warrior king arriving as David did before him to claim the throne. An uprising was ready to be launched. Jesus only had to give the word. But no . . . he came to suffer and be killed for what he believed and embodied.

Finally, it is the centurion, himself a man of authority with 100 armed and crack troops at his beck and call. The centurion watching Jesus die on the cross says, **“Truly, this man was the Son of God.”** It is precisely in failure and defeat that God's presence and work in Jesus is recognized. And the centurion just echoes Peter's confession.

Remember the classic scene in the movie, **“As Good as it Gets”** starring Jack Nicholson and Helen Hunt. Jack plays what has become a caricature of himself: an incorrigible, obsessive compulsive, self-centered bore. He hates people and likes to antagonize them so they will completely leave him alone in his own misery. He even treats dogs badly. But something happens when he gets to know Carol, a woman played by Helen Hunt. He starts to change...and the change is transformative. Yet, the rough edges make him difficult to stay close with.

After being extremely rude, he comes to apologize to Carol for his latest acts of cruelty.

“I have come to offer you a compliment,” he says.

Carol braces herself for what is to come.

“You make me want to be a better man,” he says.

Carol is moved and more than a little surprised, says, “That's maybe the best compliment of my life” Melvin smiles, “ Well maybe I overshot a little, because I was aiming at just enough to keep you from walking out.”

If you want to know what it means to be a human being and to stand for the best that humans can be---look at Jesus Christ.

If you want to know God---one who is not distant and uncaring---but willing to enter into the messy mulch of human existence---look at Jesus Christ.

That is what we confess when we say, “I believe in Jesus Christ his only son our lord.

This confession does not come because of evidence from the outside. The conviction that coaxed Peter's confession and the centurion's only comes from **an inward revelation** from God.

It's a great story, our gospel message. If you are like me, you heard it as a child and you have loved it ever since. Here is a sick man blessed with incredible friends. The kind of friends everyone would hope to have. They are so eager to get him in front of Jesus that they cut a hole in the roof of the house where Jesus is teaching, surrounded by the crowds.

Over the years I have met people who **DON'T WANT TO BE AROUND JESUS..**

They have had a bad experience with the church as a child, or a college professor in a religion course thrashed Christianity and now they have big doubts. Some just like to sleep in on Sundays. The list is long and the reasons varied.

But here is a man in desperate need, with a group of friends who want to help him, but because of the crowd, the inner circle studying with Jesus—they are shut out!

Other stories like it---little Zacchaeus—had to climb up the sycamore tree to see Jesus—so great was the crowd.

As a pastor who gives his life to caring for and worrying about the church, I hate to admit it but sometimes the primary reasons people don't follow Jesus is because of the church. We get in the way of people getting in front of Jesus. I am as much to blame as anyone. My sermons are sometimes inaccessible, or too political. I get too caught up in institutional management and miss out in being available for people in need. Sometimes faithful church folks are so excited about talking with their friends they overlook the stranger in their midst. Sometimes we are too busy to see the grief or spiritual hunger of those seated right next to us or living next door. Sometimes, and usually not intentionally, **THEY CAN'T GET TO JESUS AND HEAR WHAT HE IS SAYING AND SEE WHO HE TRULY IS BECAUSE OF US.**

But thankfully that is not how the story ends. His friends hacked a hole in the roof, and while the crowds stood there with their mouths open . . . Jesus healed the man. He miraculously told him to get up and walk. Jesus says: **I DON'T CARE ABOUT THE ROOF; I AM HERE TO RAISE THE DEAD AND HEAL THE SICK AND COMFORT THE LONELY.**

If you are someone in need, paralyzed, and desperate, go ahead. Knock a hole in the roof so Jesus can touch you and make you whole. It is not fair to keep Jesus to ourselves. Jesus asked his followers, “Who do **you** say that I am?”

I hope we can answer, **“You are the Christ, the son of the living God.”**