

Who is Jesus? If you did a survey on the streets of Duncanville, most people would know about Jesus. But I'm not sure exactly what they would say. Almost everyone has heard of Jesus but let's watch this video and see what they really know.¹

The gospel centers in Jesus, yet many people do not actually know he was God become human. As you heard, some believe he was a teacher, and I suppose they ask themselves, "WWJD," like the popular bracelet worn a few years ago, and they try to follow that admonition. Or, they think Jesus is just one of many ways to God. Richard Peace points out that, in fact, knowledge about who Jesus really claimed to be is pretty minimal.

Yet Jesus is the center of the gospel.

Therefore to share our faith, we must share stories of Jesus – who He was and what He did. We especially need to share stories about Jesus' death and resurrection. When you think of Jesus, what stories come to mind? What stories do you love about Jesus?

When you are in love, it's only natural to think about stories of the one you love. This week was my 27th anniversary – and naturally, I thought about what I love about my husband. He's enthusiastic about lots of small things – I love that. He loves to explore places he's never been. He's the most generous person I know. I could tell a story that expresses each one of those things. In fact, I say those things about him because of a particular time and place he did something.

Everyone has someone special in their life. My granddaughter Evie came to me this week with a picture of her cousin Lauren. "I want Lauren," she said. "We'll see Lauren at Christmas," I said. "I want Lauren." I said, "Lauren lives in California; we can't see her right now. We'll see Cole, your other cousin, in two weeks." "I want Lauren to play with me," she insisted. She remembers with great affection Lauren playing with her this summer.

It's that sense of personal relationship; of friendship; of being together.

Do you have the same familiarity and affection for Jesus? What stories do you recall about him that you love? Richard Peace says we need to not only tell the stories of what Jesus has done in our lives, but we need to be prepared to tell stories about Jesus. What about the time He . . .

Came down off of a mountain where he had been preaching and a man came up to him with a disease – a terrible skin disease called leprosy. He was isolated in his community because the disease was highly contagious and there was no cure. So alone, he came to Jesus and knelt before him, saying, "Lord, if you choose, you can make me clean." Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him. He said, "I do choose. Be made clean!" And immediately the man's leprosy was cleansed (Mt 8:1-3).

I love that because he wasn't too horrible for Jesus to touch.

¹Check out the video at: <http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=6584665402911014787#>

Then after synagogue Jesus went to Peter's house for lunch but Peter's mother-in-law was in bed, ill with a fever. He touched her hand and the fever left her, and she got up and made dinner. Later that evening people from everywhere began coming to him, bringing the sick and demon possessed and he cured them and cast out those evil spirits with a word, fulfilling the Scripture in Isaiah that says, "He took our sicknesses and removed our diseases." (Mt 8:14-17)

Another story – kind of a ghost story you might tell late at night at a slumber party.

Jesus and the disciples crossed the lake and landed in an area called Gerasenes. A homeless man met the boat, who lived in the tombs in a nearby cemetery. He was naked and he howled. He was a cutter, cutting himself with stones. He was mentally ill. People tried to restrain him but couldn't. It was a bad scene, but when Jesus encountered him, He commanded that the evil spirit leave the man. The spirit argued with him, pleading that they (for they were many) not be sent away. So Jesus sent these spirits, named Legion, into a herd of swine, who then ran off a cliff and drowned. When the townspeople heard the rumor and came to check it out, they saw the man sitting there with Jesus, clothed and in his right mind. Well, that man regaining his sanity scared everyone to death! So they asked Jesus to leave. Sometimes Jesus' power frightens us. (Mt 8:28-34, Mk 5:1-30, Lk 8:26-39)

There are stories about the process of making disciples out of these guys who were fishermen and tax collectors and such.

Once he sent out seventy disciples to go into towns ahead of him and pave the way. Jesus gave them the power to heal and to cast out demons. When they returned they were so excited! They said joyfully, "Lord, even the demons obey us when we use your name." "Yes, that's right," Jesus said, "but don't rejoice because evil spirits obey you; rejoice because your names are registered in heaven."

What mattered most to Jesus was that they would be with him for the long haul.

Another time he was teaching them to forgive. Jesus said it's impossible that no one will offend you or be offended by you. So, if another disciple offends you, even if he sins against you seven times a day, and turns back to you seven times and says, 'I'm sorry,' you must forgive." But, forgiving seven times a day is a tall order, so the disciples cried out, "Increase our faith!" (Lk 17:3-5)

What are your favorite stories? Paul told us to be ready to give an account for the hope we have within us because of our faith. This is a way to do it. Do you know the stories? They only take a few minutes to tell. Tell them casually and in your own words.

Remember how Jesus took on the religious leaders? He was mad because they put rules first, before people. So he seemed almost to seek out people at synagogue who had disabilities, like the man who had a withered hand, and heal them. Those people were ecstatic, of course, while the religious leaders wanted to kill Jesus! But Jesus said, "If you had a sheep and it fell into a pit on the Sabbath; wouldn't you reach down and lift it out?" That kind of mercy motivated Jesus to heal people (Mt 12:9-14) So I love those power plays because Jesus cared about people first, and that tells us about God's love and care.

Once as Jesus went into Jerusalem he stopped at the top of the hill overlooking the city and wept, saying, “How I often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! (Lk 13:34)

Oh, I bet I know one you like, because all of you at First Presbyterian Church Duncanville would do the very same thing. I can just see you doing it. There’s a crowd around the door of Jesus’ house; a huge crowd. But your friend is paralyzed. You put him on a mat, carry him to the roof, dismantle the roof, and lower him down in front of where Jesus is teaching. You would do that – you carry each other to Jesus in prayer all the time, and like here, you receive many answers to prayer.

In this story, though, Jesus says more. He said, “Son, your sins are forgiven.” When you bring your friends and neighbors to Jesus, their sins are forgiven. They are forgiven because God is the only one who can forgive sins. And Jesus is God. That was a problem for some people in the crowd that day, just as it is a problem for some people today, like we saw in the video. But that’s who Jesus says He is, God’s Son, the way to God.

That claim culminated the night before Jesus’ death. All his closest disciples were gathered around and they were celebrating the ancient tradition of the Passover meal. And Jesus does something different than was normally done at Passover. Paul tells us He said this: READ 1 Corinthians 11:23-26

He reinterprets that 1,200 year old meal. Jesus is proclaiming He is the Suffering Servant in Isaiah 53. And it’s obvious he is anticipating that these friends will desert and betray him. He interprets his pending death according to that prophecy of Isaiah 53. READ Isaiah 53:2-12

So this was God’s plan from ancient times. It was a plan where God Himself, through His own Son, would step into our place so that He could rescue us. And Jesus gave His life away for us. Isn’t that amazing? As the choir sang, Jesus gave His life away. Jesus thought it was worth it; that you are worth all the pain and anguish He suffered so that you can be with Him forever.

Do you know the stories about Jesus and how are you moved by them? In learning them, we also learn the great love of our Savior for us.

AMEN