

First Presbyterian Church of Duncanville

1/1/12

“Why I Follow Jesus” – Youth Pastor Steve Netniss

Opening Image/Decisions: We all make decisions: Energy – How much energy should I devote? (Should I help?) Relationships – How should I handle this relationship? (Is it time for a break-up? Time to move on?) Resources – What should I do with my resources? Time – Where should I spend my time and money? These are things we wrestle with and more important we act on these decisions.

Faith: Acting on our decisions requires faith. In fact, I would argue that every person living, anywhere at any time, has had to take action based on faith.

Beliefs: Our actions require faith. Our faith is not blind faith but it is built upon beliefs. There is a system of beliefs in place which drive our actions. We all have beliefs about the way the world works, is and will be. But these beliefs do not tell us all the possible outcomes and so every action requires a step of faith, a calculated risk. Our actions flow from our beliefs and drive our faith.

Christian Faith: We are a community of faith. This church is a ekklesia, an assembly, a gathering of people who live or should live life according to the Christian faith. We call it the Christian faith because the beliefs which drive our faith are best represented through a man named Jesus the Christ. We have made an active decision that his way is the way we want to follow.

Follow: Everybody is following somebody. Everybody has faith. Everybody has faith decisions to make based on beliefs and these beliefs are given to them by someone. There are a whole slew of artists, musicians, teachers, rabbi's, religious figures, scientists, philosophers who have followers. Now some people say they don't follow anyone... that's an amusing position but where did they get that position from? It came from somebody. Even if that somebody is themselves... which means they are following themselves. Everyone is following someone. We, as Christians, have chosen to order our lives and decisions around, to follow, the way of Jesus.

Subject: Which raises the question we'll be dealing with today. Pastor Ginger asked me to talk about the Top 5 reasons why I follow Jesus. Why, out of the innumerable amounts of options, people, religions, non-religions, why choose Jesus?

Disclaimer: But first a disclaimer. I love talking to non-Christians. I always walk away enlightened and encouraged. But sometimes our conversation degenerate into a “he said, she said” about historicity of the Scriptures and whether or not a man named Jesus even existed. I think these are perfectly legitimate and good questions. If a person is raised from the dead we should have questions. The problem though is when we spend all our time discussing technicalities about whether or not it actually happen and never talk about the implications or the claims that Jesus and the Bible make. We don't talk about life, we spend our time caught up in he said she said. So, as I give my 5 reasons why I believe in Jesus, I won't be diving into all the details about the reliability of it all and instead I'll focus in on what the actual claims are. What

it's all about. Please note those are good questions and fair questions but for the interest in time I will limit my reasons to less technical issues.

Reason 1: The Good News

Broken World: If you watch the evening news one thing is clear. The world isn't as it should be.

External Failure: External failure abounds. Economies fail, divorce, natural disasters, as Charlie Chaplain said, 'greed has poisoned men's heart', extreme global poverty, terrorism, Cats...OOOPS how did that one get in there?

Internal Failure: Yes, external failure exists but we don't need to watch the news to reminded of our own internal failures. Anxiety, addiction, besetting sins, moral decay, depression, when you say something you wish you never said. Both internal and external setbacks exist.

Beauty: And they are so perplexing because they exist alongside miracles. Olympic Athletes with chiseled bodies, true love that has endured faithfully for 30, 40, 50+ years, rescue projects that bring relief, tireless workers who are wild with life, feasts with family. We live in a world of incredible beauty right alongside incredible brokenness.

Transition: Which leaves us confused. We want the world to be as it should. We want healing, renewal and hope for this broken creation. But that requires action. Action that is driven by good beliefs.

Christian Faith: When I look at the world, when I survey all the different systems, religions, movements, philosophies, cults and how they interpret the world. There is one set of beliefs which are honest, and hopeful and those beliefs are what drive the Christian faith. If our beliefs are backwards or unhealthy then they won't lead us to health or renewal. I often hear people with a doom and gloom attitude about everything and I wonder what their beliefs are.

Meta-Narrative: I want to take a minute to rehash the message of the Bible. You know the story...God created a good world that went bad, it had an epic fall, and he has taken steps to redeem the world, to renew, that is the hopeful and redeeming message of the Bible. The one person who best represents this hope is the person who was born, died, and later raised to new life. Jesus the Messiah. This story creates space for you and I and everyone else to begin the work renewing, restoring and healing this broken creation. First in our own hearts and then in the lives of others. You cannot give what you do not have and nobody has resurrection but the one who was resurrected.

Reason1: The first reason why I follow Jesus is because the beliefs and actions his life represents are in my opinion the most intellectually plausible, honest and redemptive(repeat). Which leads me to the 2nd reason I follow Jesus. The way Jesus lived, the kind of person he was.

Reason 2 The Character of Jesus

Race: Throughout his life Jesus had the kind of character which captures the highest ethic humanity has ever seen. He crossed social boundaries. His disciples were puzzled when he said to a Syro-Phoenician woman, “Woman, you have great faith!” What a counter cultural claim.

Culture: Speaking of culture, Jesus created culture. People got on his case because he hung around with shady characters. He drank so they called him a drunk. Yet, when he asked his critics to prove him guilty of a single sin..... they insulted him.

Power: He had power over nature. He and his friends are on a boat, a heavy storm comes and they think they will sink, they go to tell Jesus and what is he doing? He’s sleeping...he wakes up and says, ‘calm down’ and boom the winds calm down. That’s not all. He healed the sick, restored sight, and displayed his power abroad.

Power Remixed: But here is where the Jesus story takes a significant turn, he’s where the phenomenon exists, he had ultimate authority and power. You would think that when his back was against the wall he would use his power to retaliate...but he doesn’t...on the night of his arrest for a crime he didn’t commit one of his disciples pulls out a sword and swipes a soldier, Jesus quickly heals the soldier and says to his disciple, ‘put away your sword, those who live by the sword die by the sword.’ Earlier that night, knowing he was about to be betrayed, he removed his clothes got down on his knees, and looked at the dirty, smelly, feet of his betrayer and he washed them.

Death & Resurrection: Later he hung on a cross, beaten and dying, this man who had ultimate power and authority, in his moment of greatest vulnerability, said, “Father forgive them for they know not what they do.” If that isn’t divine, I don’t know what is. He challenged the authority structures of his day in a radical new way. Caesar had the power to put you to death but 3 days later Jesus is resurrected and a new power is unleashed a power to new and everlasting life which he invites us all into.

Reason Number 2: why I follow Jesus is because Jesus had the kind of character which captures the highest ethic humanity as ever seen. And it was that character which drew in some of Jesus’s followers.

Reason Number 3: For the 3rd reason let’s turn to a pivotal and vital conversation between Jesus and his first followers. Many people have left the Jesus movement because things were getting difficult. Jesus turns to his 12 closest followers and asks an important question: Vs. 67...and in Vs. 68 we hear the 3rd reason why I follow Jesus. Vs. 68. In other words, the 3rd reason why I follow Jesus is because I have nowhere else to go. If, reason 1, that his way is full of life and hope, and if reason 2, that his character is the highest ethic humanity has ever seen then where else is there to go? What way of living a better way to strive for? Where can one find greater redemption and forgiveness? His followers understood that even though his teachings were difficult, they certainly were the best and they realized that anything less wasn’t worth it. There is no shame in admitting that there is nowhere else to go. Why go to church? Because there’s nowhere else to go.

Reason Number 4: For the 5th reason, why I follow Jesus, we will turn to the last verse in a biography about Jesus written by a close friend of his named John. John chapter 21:verse 25 says: The 5th reason why I follow Jesus is because of the endless reasons which we do not have time to cover.

Reason 5 – Personal

It's hard for me to share this reason because it is personal and puts me in a vulnerable position. Some would encourage a public speaker to not be vulnerable in front of the audience but if we can't be vulnerable during a gather where we claim to be worshipping God. If this isn't a safe place for me to be somewhat vulnerable then I wonder who it is we are worshipping.

I know I've got issues. I sometimes think things I shouldn't think. I sometimes do things I shouldn't do. I tell a joke at just the wrong time. Sometimes I don't take on as much as I should, sometimes I take on way too much. I make judgments based on appearance and discredit an awesome human being made in God's image. I'm sometimes indifferent to the needs of those around me. I'm so focused on my own life that I don't enjoy the beauty of what God is doing in others. I've harmed others with my words and used them for some overly selfish purpose. Some of my issues heavily harm myself but many issues affect others.

So I look for solutions to my issues. I could pretend like I've got it all together (which is what many people do) but that doesn't sit right. I could fall flat into depression knowing that I will repeat mistakes over and over. So denying my issues doesn't work, and despair about my issues doesn't cause me to do any better.

When I look at Jesus I notice the opposite of my issues. He says things at just the right time. He isn't indifferent to the needs of others. Again and again he is engaged with the poor and disabled. He doesn't judge by outward appearance but instead chooses 12 unqualified men to build his movement of love around.

And that same Jesus says to his followers that were just like me, I give the keys of the kingdom to you, he says, you will do greater miracles than me. I believe in Jesus because Jesus believes in me.

Make 2012 a year where you get to know the Lord Jesus in fresh new ways. Or recommit to the ways in which you've connected with him in the past.