

WHERE DOES JESUS LAY HIS HEAD?

LUKE 9:57-62; 12:13-21
LETHBRIDGE MENNONITE CHURCH
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We talk about Jesus a lot in church.

Perhaps this seems to you like among the most obvious and unremarkable statements that a pastor could make on a Sunday morning.

Duh. Who else would we talk about in church?!

Our faith is *in* Jesus, our hope is *in* Jesus. Jesus is the reason we gather in the first place, right?

Right.

But I think it goes beyond this. Jesus is not just the subject matter of the beliefs that we hold. Jesus isn't just the one who died once upon a time on a cross like the one that hangs behind my head, or the one that the bread and juice symbolize when we gather for the Lord's Supper as we will do again next week.

Jesus isn't just the religious guy that our theological doctrines are based upon.

He was also, of course, a human being—and a human being whose behaviour we get glimpses into throughout the gospels, a human being who lived a certain way, a human being who showed us a God's eye perspective on what a human life is supposed to look like.

And the human Jesus is an immensely intriguing person! We've been seeing this throughout our summer series on the actions of Jesus.

A few weeks ago, a blogger and psychology professor that I read named Richard Beck published a short article in response to the question, “ What keeps me holding on to faith?”

His answer was the response that many of us would give, I suspect.

We are drawn to Jesus.

Not necessarily to theological doctrines *about* Jesus or official explanations about what he did and what it accomplished or will accomplish or whatever, but to the *person* of Jesus, to stories about how he lived and loved *in* and *for* the world.

However each of us might have come to faith, and whatever the reason(s) we cling to it (sometimes in the teeth of many doubts), behind all of it on some level is the simple truth that the person of Jesus is enormously attractive for many, *many* people.

This is true for me. Jesus is why I have faith.

Long after my theological “positions” have been proven partial or inadequate or plain *wrong*, long after the words that I have written or preached *about* Jesus along the way are forgotten, I will still be unable to shake Jesus himself.

I am haunted by him. I am drawn to him. I am broken and reconstituted by him, rebuked and liberated by him, brought low and lifted up by him. I admire him and aspire to be like him.

His is a love and a life that I cannot turn away from and do not want to.

And yet, if I’m honest with myself, I look very little like Jesus. And I hate to break it to you, but neither do you!

I should probably explain what I mean before you get angry with me. 😊

Let’s start with the obvious stuff. On a physical level, roughly half of the human population can’t look like Jesus because they’re women.

(This maybe sounds silly to say out loud, but I've always wondered how women hear the call to imitate a male Jesus...)

And as for men? Well, our chances aren't a whole lot better.

Most of us are whiter than Jesus would have been, regardless of what our Sunday School pictures of Jesus as a trim young German-looking fellow with a well-manicured beard and a flowing white robe might suggest. 😊

And, if we're older than our early thirties, we don't look much like Jesus when it comes to age either—at least the Jesus that is the subject of most of the stories recorded in the gospels.

(I remember this startling me when I turned thirty-four: “Hmm, I'm older than Jesus now.”)

Perhaps this, too, seems a little silly to you. **Of course we don't look like Jesus literally.** That's not really the point!

OK, let's push beyond the obvious things like Jesus' physical appearance and age.

Let's look at Jesus' *life* itself. Here, too, we see that his life bears very little resemblance to many of ours.

For starters, Jesus wasn't married, despite the more salacious hidden “truths” about his life that the tabloid writers are eager to sell us!

(Neither was the apostle Paul, for that matter, and both Jesus and Paul spoke favourably about singleness and the opportunities for the kingdom that it presented. Which ought to give us pause in the church. We often hold up marriage and family as the defaults that everyone ought to aspire to, and we often tailor our ministries and programs to this. But we must never treat those who are single, whether by choice or by circumstance, as second-class citizens in the church!)

Also, Jesus didn't have kids. He loved kids, but he didn't have any of his own. So, if you are raising or have raised kids, you've done something that Jesus never did!

Let's go a step further. And this will take us into today's texts.

Most of us have homes.

Our home, for many of us, is what eats up the bulk of our monthly income. There are gas and electricity bills to pay, yards to maintain, repairs to attend to. Our homes are our refuge—particularly here in Canada during the winter months!

Home is where we entertain guests, where we play games with our kids, where we watch movies and prepare meals and listen to music and all kinds of other things.

Having and maintaining a home—both the physical structure and what it represents to us—is in many ways what keeps us working day in and day out for long years.

And yet, according to our primary text this morning, “Foxes have holes and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head.”

Jesus was a person of no-fixed address. Have you ever thought of that? Jesus was homeless!

What do we do with this?

Should we all hand over the keys of our houses to the bank and become wandering nomads, dependent upon the hospitality of strangers?

What do we, as relatively wealthy people, do with a Jesus who had no home, and whose life was devoted to very few of the things that occupy most of our days?

How do we imitate a Jesus who looks so little like we do?

For starters, I think we can rule out a few things.

Just because we’re not like Jesus in *every* area of his life it does not mean that we’re failing as disciples.

This is probably more or less obvious, and you have likely been thinking something along these lines as I have tediously rehearsed the many ways in which we’re not like Jesus.

Jesus had a unique vocation—one that none of us have.

None of us are called to the exact life circumstances that Jesus faced in his three + decades on the earth.

We are not called to gather disciples and preach and teach the kingdom of God in the precise way that Jesus was.

We are not called to be the unique and revelatory incarnation of God and Jewish Messiah.

We are not called to be the Word made flesh, to suffer and die for the forgiveness of sins, and to be raised from the dead as the Lord of life.

All of this is obvious, of course, but it serves to highlight the simple fact that the call to “imitate Christ” is not a call to woodenly mimic everything about Jesus’ life circumstances, but to ***translate Jesus’ teachings character into our own circumstances.***

Having said that, Jesus *did* have an attitude toward possessions and money and the security we imagine they provide, that challenges us at every turn.

We see this in our second text.

Here Jesus is very critical of the desire to acquire and preserve and protect our possessions, imagining that they provide us with security, forgetting that “our lives will be demanded of us”—and the things we accumulate will do nothing for us when we die.

The metaphor Jesus uses is that of building bigger barns to store our excess, and there could hardly be a more apt one for our culture where we are conditioned to always want more, where the economy must grow, where desire and dissatisfaction and a hunger for *more* must constantly be manufactured to keep the system going.

In his book, *Being Consumed*, William Cavanaugh says that our economic system is predicated on an ongoing,

search for novelty, for bigger and better, for “new and improved,” and for difference experiences. The shaving razor with one blade had to be surpassed by the double-bladed razor, which was bested by three blades, then four, and now

an absurd five blades on one razor. This is more than just a continuing attempt to make a product better; it is... “the organized creation of dissatisfaction.” How can we be content with a mere two blades when the current standard is five? How can we be content with an iPod that downloads two hundred songs when someone else has one that downloads a thousand? **The economy as it is currently structured would grind to a halt if we ever looked at our stuff and simply declared, “It is enough. I am happy with what I have.”**¹

Jesus has a word for people who buy into this madness. *Fool!*

Your **stuff** will never provide you with the security you imagine.

Yet, this is our culture. We are constantly building bigger barns, constantly accumulating, constantly storing up treasures, constantly feathering our nests, the places where we lay our heads.

We are in need of what Richard Foster calls “prophetic simplicity.” Foster says,

We need voices of dissent that point to another way, creative models that **take exception to the givens of society.**²

These are important words in a culture where we are consuming ourselves and the world to death.

So, Jesus points us toward a different attitude toward our *stuff*.

Jesus also had an attitude toward *people*—particularly the poor—that challenges us at every turn.

Our culture’s attitude toward the poor is very often one of suspicion, blame, and further marginalization. They’re lazy, we assume. Or they’ve made bad choices and are getting what they deserve. Or they’re “just like that.”

¹ William T. Cavanaugh, *Being Consumed: Economics and Christian Desire* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), 46-47.

² Richard J. Foster, *Freedom of Simplicity* (New York: Harper & Row, 1982), 135.

We tend to assume that life is a straightforward meritocracy.

We tend to assume that **we** got where we are by hard work and industry and **they** got where they are by laziness and immorality.

But, as always, things aren't as simple as we might prefer.

Very often, people who find themselves on the margins have come from situations of abuse, dysfunction, addictions.

Or, they are embedded within institutional structures that mitigate against flourishing, as is the case with many of our indigenous neighbours who continue to deal with the fallout of the injustices of the residential school system.

Similarly, those of us who do *not* find ourselves on the margins did not choose the families and social structures that we were born into. Many of us have received opportunities that we did nothing to earn or deserve.

And, we must *always* remind ourselves, that it is *the people on the margins* that Jesus called his friends while on earth.

It is these people who were drawn to Jesus. And, very often, it was the rich, the privileged, the religious that wanted nothing to do with him.

Jesus was a friend of the poor. We must be as well.

We must resist quick and easy labels that stigmatize and dehumanize precious human beings who are loved by God.

Over the last few months I've had the opportunity to spend a bit of time in big cities like Chicago, Ottawa, Las Vegas, New York. In each of these cities, as I walked the streets, I would encounter homelessness and poverty in unavoidable ways.

Often, I would uncomfortably walk by. Sometimes, I would stop.

Invariably, when I stopped, I would be reminded of a vitally important truth that I should not need to have been reminded of—that the people on the side of the street were

human beings with stories, human beings who desired love, human beings who could teach me things, and through whom I could encounter God.

Human beings who often simply hungered for someone to notice them, to talk to them like a person and not an object of pity or a “social problem.”

Human beings who are loved by God.

I want to close by returning to the quote from Luke 9 that I read earlier.

I don't think that in saying that the Son of Man has no place to lay his head, Jesus was bemoaning his life situation, or somehow exalting homelessness as an inherently superior mode of existence.

The context of his words makes it clear that Jesus is simply saying this: discipleship is costly. It takes priority over everything, including family obligations, including the many “givens” that we imagine provide us with security.

In saying that the Son of Man does not have a fixed address to lay his head, Jesus was, I think, saying that he had chosen to lay his head elsewhere.

He was saying that the life of discipleship is a daily choosing to live according to the truth that “a place to lay our head” will never provide us with the ultimate security that we imagine it does.

A fixed address is but a temporary place to lay our heads. We know that we will one day leave our homes, leave this life—that our lives will “be demanded of us,” and we will have to give an account to God.

The only safe place to lay our heads is ultimately in a life of unreserved trust in God himself.

Our stuff will not save us. We will one day leave it all behind.

Our stuff does not demonstrate that we are more worthy than anyone else. We so often use the size of our barns to rank and value human lives, but this is not the calculus God uses, and it never has been.

As followers of Jesus we must not use it either.

And so, the good news this morning is twofold:

1. We are set free to reimagine our relationship to **stuff**—we are free to “take exception to the givens of society.”
2. We are set free to reimagine our relationship to our **fellow human beings**, particularly those who find themselves a long way from the bigger barns—we are called to resist the simplistic narratives that our culture so often defaults to, and to love

May God help us always to seek to be conformed to the image and character of his son in these crucial ways.

Amen.

