

An Accurate View of Jesus

(A lesson about representing Christ, fits with the April 3rd lectionary reading)

For The Episcopal Diocese of Atlanta

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Key verses:

John 20:29

Objective: To consider how what we do and say play a role in the way people perceive Jesus.

The Set up: Minimal

The Plan:

- Hook: Time to Pay the Piper (10 mins or less)
 - You will be watching a silly video about Jesus from Vintage 21 that portrays him as a miserable keeper of wrong doings.
- Book: Rational Doubt (10-15 mins)
 - Read though the Gospel reading for April 3rd and discuss Thomas' disbelief and how Jesus acknowledges the challenge that other's will face to fully understand him and his sacrifice given their lack of "seeing."
- Look: What do you see? (10 mins)
 - Thinking about how often times the things we learn about Christ comes from what we hear or see another Christian do.
- Took: Mandatory Evangelism (8 mins)
 - "You may be the only Jesus some people ever see" You represent Christ all the time, even when you are not in the mood.

The Supplies:

- Copy of lesson
- Vintage 21 video and a way to share with the group
- Bibles
- Paper and pens/pencils
- Whiteboard and markers

(Open in prayer, announcements, and any other start of gathering traditions)

Time to Pay the Piper (Hook, 10 mins. or less)

In this section, you will be watching a silly video from Vintage 21 where Jesus is telling his followers all the reasons they are sinners and then says there is no hope for them. It's ridiculous, but plenty of people view Jesus that way.

- Show the Vintage 21, Jesus video #3:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pCTAgxsLE3Q>
- *Hint- turn up the volume! Jesus has a super wimpy voice and can be hard to hear!

Discussion Questions (8 mins)

- What would Jesus have said to you if you were in the crowd? (This is intended to be silly, not a time of confession! Maybe give them an example of your own that is silly, like, "Katie, I saw you when you were dancing to that rap music.")
- Why is this video funny?
- If you knew nothing about Jesus other than what you learned from this video, how would you describe him? Would you want to know him?
- Is there anything about this video that gives an accurate portrayal of Jesus?
- Do you think some people view Jesus this way? Why?

Transition:

Say something about:

Hopefully most of us can agree that this is a silly video and is not an accurate reflection of Jesus. If someone thinks this is an accurate representation of him, then they are probably confused! But it's not surprising that people get confused about Jesus and don't quite know what to make of him- after all, he did do some pretty wild things! Even people that knew him personally had a difficult time figuring out who he really was. Let's take a look...

Rational Doubt (Book, 10 mins)

In this section, you are reading the day's Gospel reading and discussing 2 things: Jesus empowered the disciples to grow the church, and Thomas' response to Jesus when he appeared to the disciples. More importantly, we are looking at Jesus' gentle response to Thomas and his acknowledgement of the challenge that future generations will face in their understanding of him.

- Have everyone look up the Gospel reading for the day (John 20:19-31)
- Choose one or more people to read out loud while everyone else follows along.

(Here are the verses for your planning purposes)

That Sunday evening the disciples were meeting behind locked doors because they were afraid of the Jewish leaders. Suddenly, Jesus was standing there among them! "Peace be with you," he said. As he spoke, he showed them the wounds in his hands and his side. They were filled with joy when they saw the Lord! Again he said, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you." Then he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone's sins, they are forgiven. If you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven."

One of the twelve disciples, Thomas (nicknamed the Twin), was not with the others when Jesus came. They told him, "We have seen the Lord!"

But he replied, "I won't believe it unless I see the nail wounds in his hands, put my fingers into them, and place my hand into the wound in his side."

Eight days later the disciples were together again, and this time Thomas was with them. The doors were locked; but suddenly, as before, Jesus was standing among them. "Peace be with you," he said. Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here, and look at my hands. Put your hand into the wound in my side. Don't be faithless any longer. Believe!" "My Lord and my God!" Thomas exclaimed. Then Jesus told him, "You believe because you have seen me. Blessed are those who believe without seeing me."

The disciples saw Jesus do many other miraculous signs in addition to the ones recorded in this book. But these are written so that you may continue to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing in him you will have life by the power of his name.

Discussion Questions:

- Jesus visits the disciples on two separate occasions during this passage. On his first visit, how did the disciples respond to him?
- How do you think you would have responded if Jesus appeared in the room with you just days after his resurrection?
- What did Jesus ask of the disciples on his first visit? How did he empower them to fulfill his request?
- Who was missing during Jesus' first visit?
- Was Thomas' reaction surprising, or do you understand why he responded that way?
- What was Jesus' focus on his second visit (8 days after his first visit)?
- What evidence do we have that Jesus' understands the difficulty in believing his death and resurrection story?
- What does Jesus say about future generations of believers- the ones that will never get to see the proof?

The point/Transition- There are so many things that we could focus on in these scriptures, but for the sake of our conversation today, there are 2 main points you'll want to make sure the youth understand:

1. Jesus commissions the disciples to go and be the church- he breathes the power of the Holy Spirit upon them. This is important. He knows that he won't be with them forever, and the future of the Church depends on other people accurately representing Jesus and his teachings.

2. Thomas reacted in a way that many of us would- he wanted proof! And Jesus graciously gave it to him. In addition, Jesus acknowledges the challenge that future generations will face because they won't have the opportunity to put their finger in his wounds. He says, *"You believe because you have seen me. Blessed are those who believe without seeing me."* I love this verse. I love that God understands why trusting him and his story can be so difficult. This makes the earlier commissioning that much more significant. Future generations will not be able to look to Jesus in the flesh for proof. Instead, the responsibility of accurately and humbly representing Christ falls on the shoulders of the disciples (and ultimately trickles down to everyone who belongs to the Body of Christ).

What do you see? (Look, 10 mins)

In this section we are talking about the things we believe about God and where those beliefs came from- did we learn them from someone else (a disciple), or from God/scripture?

- Give everyone a piece of paper and a pen/pencil
- They can either do this individually or in groups of 2-3. It may be interesting to share answers with friends, but it is more important to write honest answers. Use your discretion.
- Start by having them write down everything they believe to be true about God. They can include things that he has done (or not done), but we also want to encourage them to include things about his character and things he has promised to us. Include positive things, as well as anything negative. Give them just a minute or two to do this- the list doesn't have to be exhaustive.
- Now have them go back, and to the best of their ability, write down where or from whom they learned that truth. Was it a teacher? A parent? In a sermon? On TV? From the Bible? (If they can site the actual verse, that is even better!)

Discussion Questions:

- As you look at your list, how many of your "truths" came DIRECTLY from God? (Either the Bible, hearing God's voice... or some other way I am not thinking of)

- How many of your truths did you learn from an alternate source? (parents/teachers/sermons/conversation)
- Do you have any “truths” that you learned from an alternate source that you have no way of verifying 100%? If so, how do you know it is true?
- What do you think plays a larger role in how you view God- the things you learn in conversation/lessons with people you trust? Or the things you learn when you are studying your Bible?

Mandatory Evangelism (Took, 10 mins)

In this section, we are talking about how we always represent Christ, even when we are not in the mood to do so. What we say and do forms the way people think about God, and that is a responsibility we cannot shake. “You may be the only Jesus some people ever see”

- Say something like: Hopefully those of us that are gathering here in a church have access to sources that help us verify things we hear about God- we can ask pastors, look it up in the Bible, etc. But there are plenty of people who either don’t have access to those sources, or have no desire to do any fact checking! For those people, their ideas of God and Christ come directly from things they pick up while observing others who claim to know Christ. And since none of us are perfect, we sometimes give Jesus a bad name- we sometimes do things that make people think that the Jesus in the opening video is what our Jesus is really like!
- Ask: What are some things that Christians do that give Jesus a bad name, and ultimately give people the wrong idea about Christ?
- Write their answers on the whiteboard. Try to have an exhaustive list of things that average Christians do that are unappealing. If they are only giving answers about the Crusades and fire and brimstone preachers, try to steer them towards other things- things like being judgmental, being impatient, talking behind someone’s back, etc.
- Now have everyone line up, single file in the middle of the room. Tell them that you want them to think about their previous week. You are going to read through the list on the whiteboard and if they did the thing that you mention during the past week, they should take one step to the left.
- Slowly read through the list, letting them take steps if they need to. Try to reassure them that this is not intended to be a time of judgment, but just a way to personally reflect on what you are doing during the week.

- After the list has been read, say something like: One of the most difficult things about being a Christian is that it is not a role that we get to set aside and then pick back up when it is convenient for us. When Jesus breathed the Holy Spirit on to the disciples, he was passing the responsibility of representing him onto his followers. 2,000 years later, that role has trickled down to us. When you do awesome things in the name of Christ, people see that, but when we get tired and run out of patience and respond in a less than perfect way, people see that as well. Just like the old saying goes, “You may be the only Jesus that some people ever see.” It can seem like a tall order, because it is! Even Jesus knew that future generations would have a difficult time understanding him and his sacrifice since they wouldn’t be able to see him in person. But the good news is that the things that we do that are kind, generous, and humble are also a reflection of Christ.
- Now have them brainstorm ways that they can accurately represent Jesus. They can say these things out loud, and for each one they say, have them take a step to the right, and erase one of the negative things off the board.
- If they get stuck, help them think of specific things they can do to improve the situation that made them take a step left in the first place. Can they apologize? Can they admit that they were wrong? No one ever does that! That would be a HUGE testament to Christ!
- Continue to do this until most people are either back to the center of the room, or further to the right side.
- Finally, say something like: There are so many good things about being a Christian. For one, we are forgiven, so even when we make a bad decision we can’t push Jesus away. Second, we belong to a larger family that is all *attempting* to do the same thing: accurately represent Jesus. And three, in the end, we know that the Love of Christ wins.

We may not get a chance to right every wrong we ever make, BUT, since we belong to something bigger than ourselves, we are able to rely on our brothers and sisters to help make up where we have fallen short. And then we get to do the same for them on their bad days. The hope is that on any given day, as an entire body of believers, we are spending more time on the right side of the room than on the left. But even on the days where we all mess it up, Jesus still somehow makes up the difference!

But wouldn’t you rather be team member that is giving Christ a good name? Wouldn’t you rather score positive points instead of negative ones?

- Your challenge for this week is to make a conscious effort to be a positive reflection of Christ. Make an effort to do things that keep us all on the right side of the room. Do everything you can to make it easy for people to believe that Jesus is exactly who he (and we) say he is!

Close in prayer:

- Thanking God for understanding that it can be difficult for people to know exactly who he is and what he sacrificed since we can't see him in the flesh.
- Asking God for forgiveness for the times that we have dropped the ball and did something that gave him a bad name.
- Asking God to clearly show us what we can do to be an accurate reflection of him and his love.
- Thanking God for allowing us to be a part of the Body of Christ and that we get to be a part of a team that works together to reveal him to the world.