

2nd Sunday after Christmas
January 3, 2021
Lincoln Heights Lutheran Church
John 7:40-43

Get to Know Jesus This Year

Dear Friends in Christ,

Those of you who love to read books will know what I'm talking about. One of your favorite books is made into a movie, or maybe worse, a made for TV miniseries. Book fans are almost always disappointed if not outright disgusted at the screen adaptation of the book. The producers leave out a character, drop an important scene, and usually add something for dramatic or romantic effect that changes the plot. It is not the same as the book and the book was perfect!

It is usually worse when someone attempts to put the accounts of the Bible on the movie or television screen. I have trouble watching most adaptations of the Bible for the screen because they almost always get something wrong. They get the order of events wrong or add a character or change a story to make it more dramatic or change a miracle story to make it less dramatic. There are exceptions, but most adaptations of the Bible for the screen just not very good because they change the story.

With secular books and movies, the producers can count on the fact that most people don't know or care about the book very much so that lots of people watch the movie. In biblical movies, the same must sadly be true. Most people either don't know or care about the Bible enough to know if the movie is accurate or not. Surveys of American Christians show this to be true. Many, even a majority, of American Christians do not know the very basics of the Bible. They don't really know who Jesus is. My friends, in the year of our Lord 2021, make sure you are not one of those who don't know much about Jesus. Instead, make this the year of getting to know Jesus. In today's gospel lesson, Jesus revealed himself to the Jews in Jerusalem and he continues to reveal himself today. Get to know Jesus this year.

Jesus Revealed Himself at the Feast of Tabernacles

John 7:40-43

On hearing his words, some of the people said, "Surely this man is the Prophet." ⁴¹ Others said, "He is the Christ." Still others asked, "How can the Christ come from Galilee? ⁴² Does not the Scripture say that the Christ will come from David's family and from Bethlehem, the town where David lived?" ⁴³ Thus the people were divided because of Jesus.

Jesus had gone to Jerusalem for the Feast of Tabernacles. This was one of three festivals each year for which the Jews made the pilgrimage to Jerusalem. Jesus' brothers had urged him to go to this festival with them and do some public miracles to prove that he was the Christ. John tells us the reason they wanted him to do this: "For even his own brothers did not believe in him" (John 7:5). Jesus did not attend with his brothers, but attended secretly at first. The festival was a week long and Jesus began to teach the people in the temple courts. He was not doing miracles, but teaching with the powerful Word of God.

Now, the Feast of Tabernacles was a harvest festival. The Jews thanked the Lord for the end of the fall harvest season. In this way it was much like our Thanksgiving. But Tabernacles also was a week to remember how the Lord brought the Jews through the forty years in the wilderness. Families would make temporary shelters (little tabernacles/tents) outside of Jerusalem and live in

these for the week. Parents could use that week to recount the stories of God's loving providence for the people at the time of Moses, how the Lord provided water from rocks, manna from heaven, quail from the sky and how their clothing and shoes never wore out. They would remember and thank the Lord who rescued and preserved their ancestors and look to the day when the Messiah would come to rescue all from sin. At the time of Christ, the Jews had added a custom during this week. A priest would take water from the pool of Siloam and pour it out at the temple while the people chanted Isaiah 12:3. "With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation." (From Ylvisaker, *The Gospels*).

At the end of this week, Jesus stood up called out loudly: "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him." (John 7:37-38). And that is what set off the debate in our section from John today. Jesus has just claimed to be the one to give the water from the wells of salvation. Jesus has claimed to be the one who provided water for the Jews in the wilderness some 1,500 years earlier. Jesus is claiming to be the Messiah, the Christ.

Some thought he might be the Prophet, the one Moses prophesied would come. We'll look at that prophecy from Deuteronomy in a few weeks and see that Jesus is certainly the one Prophet who was to come. Some thought Jesus might be the Christ. They knew what the Christ was supposed to do and be like and Jesus was fitting the bill. Notice that Jesus did not tell the people to go to God for the living water of salvation. He told the people to believe in him. He is salvation. But others were not yet convinced.

They knew the Scriptures well and asked, "*How can the Christ come from Galilee?*" ⁴² *Does not the Scripture say that the Christ will come from David's family and from Bethlehem, the town where David lived?*" This is a good question. These people are not doubting Jesus' claims based on their own ideas but based on the Bible. They knew Micah 5 and 2 Samuel 7 and more. When they come to know that Jesus was born in Bethlehem in the line of David, then perhaps their attitude will change and the Holy Spirit will bring them to believe that Jesus is their Savior.

If we were in Jerusalem for the Feast of Tabernacles, would we have recognized Jesus as the Christ by his teachings? Would we have known the Scriptures well enough to ask such questions about Jesus? Do we know enough about Jesus to recognize when the modern media and popular teachers tell lies and half truths about Jesus? I've seen many well meaning, intelligent Christians pass on messages (used to be through email chain letter, now through social media) that do not agree with biblical teaching and do not tell the truth about Jesus. Why should those living 2000 years ago know more about Jesus Christ than we who have the benefit of the entire New Testament?

Jesus Has Revealed Himself to Us

Jesus has revealed himself to us. The Holy Spirit has called us to believe in the Christ who gives the living water that gives salvation. So why don't we get to know Jesus better? Maybe I'm just speaking for myself, but we are lazy. We use the grace of God as an excuse to be lazy in our knowledge of Christ. Since Jesus forgives all my sins and those who believe in him will have eternal life, I don't need to do anything other than believe. We treat Jesus like an insurance policy. Once that insurance is in place, I don't need to bother with it unless there is an accident. So I have Jesus for emergencies but I don't need to know all about him. I don't need to know everything he did and taught in the Bible. The Bible is a big book. Just give me the summary. I'm lazy.

Or maybe we don't get to know Jesus because we are distracted. We have to know everything about our favorite sports team or athlete but just the basics about Jesus. The latest news out of Hollywood is read before the good news in the Bible. The ever changing political news keeps us distracted as our hope or despair for a good year rests on sinful human leaders. The ever updating social media is endlessly thumbed through. Notifications continue to distract us. Oh, and there is the always changing work and school at home or in person or some combination. We are distracted.

Our laziness and being easily distracted from getting to know Jesus better all comes down to mixed up priorities because we are sinners. In our sin, we put Jesus way down the list of what is important in our life. We might say Jesus is the most important, but our words and thoughts and actions betray us. So how can we lazy, mixed up sinners get to know Jesus better?

Know this: Jesus came for lazy, mixed up sinners like you and me. The Lord provided for his lazy, mixed up people in the wilderness. They complained, doubted, and got distracted. Yet, the Lord kept his promise to bring them to the Promised Land. As the Son of God was with them and rescued them, so the Son of God has come to rescue us and be with us. Christ will bring you to the eternal promised land of heaven. Christ did pay the price to forgive our laziness and mixed up priorities and every sin. He gave up his life to make you his own. Jesus is your Savior, your Redeemer, your Good Shepherd, your Friend, your King of kings and Lord of lords.

This is why we want to get to know Jesus better this year. He knows us and still loves us. He knows us and forgives us. He loves us and promises eternal life. Of course we want to know him better. Of course we want to know what Jesus has done for us, everything he has done. Of course, we want to know what Jesus has said to us, everything he said. Where will you get to know more about Jesus? He is not going to whisper in your ear. Go to your Bible for there you will get to know Jesus.

I'm not making any predictions about when this will happen for I am no prophet. However, sometime this year we are going to be transitioning out of pandemic mode. That means that there will be more activities and more distractions and the devil will attempt to pull you away from God's Word for just a little while. My friends, resist the devil and instead make this the year of getting to know Jesus better.

Amen.