



Prayer:

Gracious God, may Your Holy Spirit guide me to walk in the way of Christ so that I might know You in the depths of my being. Amen.

Connect to God:

Where have you seen God at work in your life this week?

Connect to Neighbor:

What good have you done for someone else this week?

Connect to Scripture: Matthew 16:13-20 (CEB)

13 Now when Jesus came to the area of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say the Human One[a] is?”

14 They replied, “Some say John the Baptist, others Elijah, and still others Jeremiah or one of the other prophets.”

15 He said, “And what about you? Who do you say that I am?”

16 Simon Peter said, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”

17 Then Jesus replied, “Happy are you, Simon son of Jonah, because no human has shown this to you. Rather my Father who is in heaven has shown you. 18 I tell you that you are Peter. And I’ll build my church on this rock. The gates of the underworld won’t be able to stand against it. 19 I’ll give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven. Anything you fasten on

earth will be fastened in heaven. Anything you loosen on earth will be loosened in heaven.” 20 Then he ordered the disciples not to tell anybody that he was the Christ.

Last week, Dr. Jay preached a marvelous sermon titled, “Do You Know Jesus?” Such a question is the perfect way to begin our Lenten journey because that is what Lent is ultimately about: it is a season in which we refocus our lives upon Christ and reassess our understanding of who God is.

One of my (Nathaniel) favorite Christian philosophers is a man named James K.A. Smith, who specializes in the philosophy of liturgy and desire. He often repeats his famous formula: “You are what you love, you love what you desire, but you don’t always desire what you think.” Lent is a time of examining and reflecting upon our desires and loves, and (hopefully), developing new habits for curating our desires toward Christ, so that we might become more like him.

Connect to Context:

In his sermon, Dr. Jay made a wonderful observation about the Matthew passage. One of the reasons why Peter was able to recognize Jesus as “the Christ, the Son of God” is because Peter spent time with Jesus. He was learning from Jesus and walking in the way of the Kingdom of God. This gave him an intimate connection to what God was doing in the world,

and thus it was through the activity of God that Peter came to know Jesus' identity.

To relate this back to what James K.A. Smith said, Peter had spent so much time with Jesus that his desires were transformed. He began to want what Jesus wanted, and he desired what Jesus desired. Through this transformation, he came to love Jesus and was thus able to accept the revelation of who Christ was.

If you recall, Smith's last line of the formula is, "You don't always desire what you think." Our desires are often not formulated through abstract, rational argumentation (though certainly that does happen). In many cases, our desires are formulated in more bodily, emotional, and even unconscious ways. They grow within us over time based upon our habits.

Certainly, understanding the theology of early church fathers like Athanasius or the debates surrounding the Nicene Creed will help clear up confusion about the relationship between Jesus' human nature and divine nature, being truly God and truly human. I've found it beneficial in my own life in a number of ways. But, as Dr. Jay pointed out, to truly *know* Jesus, we must be actively engaged in the work of Jesus; we must enter into those spaces where Christ is already present. This means we must minister to the poor, the rejected, the marginalized, the hopeless, and those who think their sins are too great to ever be forgiven.

However, it is not only in the extremes that we get to know Christ. Peter walked with Jesus daily. There were simple, "everyday" interactions as well — eating, drinking, walking, laughing, gazing at the beautiful night sky, listening to the sounds of birds singing, etc. Our desires for Christ are not only formulated in the extremes of radical ministry (though this certainly does happen), but also in the everyday. When we develop a new mindset —

when we start to see how everyday habits can draw us closer to Christ — then the world can be permeated with divine glory. When we see each moment as an opportunity to grow closer to Christ, it can bring a new sense of wonder to the everyday experiences of saying hello to a neighbor, changing the seed in a bird feeder, or planting flowers. The "everyday" becomes an opportunity for us to participate in the healing of God's creation in accordance to the Kingdom of God brought about by Christ. And by participating in the life of the Kingdom of God, we come to know Jesus.

Connect Heads:

What does it mean for Jesus to be “the Christ” and the Son of God?

What is the Kingdom of God?

How does this event of Peter’s confession relate to the rest of the story of Jesus’ ministry?

What does it mean when Jesus said, “Anything you fasten on earth will be fastened in heaven. Anything you loosen on earth will be loosened in heaven”?

Connect Heart:

What has been most influential in formulating your desire to know Christ and be more like him?

What habits distract us from getting to know Jesus?

What are some “everyday” experiences that teach you about the love of God?

Connect Hands:

What are some habits that help us develop a desire and love for God? How so?

Did you cause harm in word or deed to someone this week? (self-examination). If so, confess your sin to God, then seek to reconcile with your brother or sister.

Share your prayer concerns and celebrations.

Ask a member of the group to pray for the concerns and give thanks for the celebrations.

Notes Sections

Prayer Concerns:

Celebrations:

Daily Reflection Questions

Where have I seen God at work in my life today?

What is one thing that I am thankful for?

What is one thing that broke my heart today?

What is one good thing did I do for someone else today?