

Seventh Sunday after Pentecost – 2024

Ezekiel 2:1-5

2 Corinthians 12:1-10

Mark 6:1-13

You don't get to choose how God is going to save you. Does that bother you? God didn't consult you when He created the heavens and the earth (Job 38:4-11). God didn't consult anyone when He sent His Son, conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary. Very deliberately, the Almighty chose a young lass who was altogether forgettable in the world's eyes to bear the Savior of the world. God took no opinion poll; He consulted no focus group; He did not survey the cultural zeitgeist. The Great I AM has a predetermined *modus operandi* and it's not changing. The eternal Author of Creation has a method of operation and it's not changing. No man, no woman, no human force, no demonic entity can alter what the Lord has established or entice Him to waylay His design for some preferable alternative. The Pope can't change God. Joel Osteen can't change God. The LGBTQ people and their politicians can't change God. The Wall Street people, the cultural influencers, Hollywood people – God is not going to change in order to “get with the times” or to curry favor with glitterati.

Some folks don't like God's ways. I realize that this is not a “newsflash” but it's worth iterating. Let's play a little game. It's a simple fill-in-the-blank game. It's an easy X and Y fill in the blank game. “If God would just X then I would Y.” Have you ever heard someone say that? I've heard it. Here's the X and Y that I've heard: If God would just reveal Himself to me, then I'd believe in Him. Some say that as though their belief would be doing God a favor. Well, God walked into Nazareth. God taught in the synagogue in Nazareth. God revealed Himself in Nazareth. And the people were scandalized. “Where did this man get these things? What is the wisdom given to him? How are such mighty works done by his hands? Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and the brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon? And are not his sisters here with us? And they took offense at him” (Mark 6:2-3). Did Jesus then reinvent Himself into something more agreeable to these people's expectations? Did our Lord adjust His *modus operandi* so that more of the Nazareth folks might get on board the Jesus train? “Oh, you don't like the humble Savior who is going to go the cross to atone for the sins of the world approach? Well then, let's just try something else.” No; the Lord Christ is not a religious populist. He is eternal truth. He is eternal righteousness. He is life and light and hope and His power is made perfect in weakness. That is His M.O. It will not change.

St. Mark tells us that Jesus marveled because of their unbelief (Mark 6:6). “He came to his own and his own people did not receive him” (John 1:11). “He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him” (John 1:10). When He taught His disciples about eating His flesh and drinking His blood, some of them couldn't take it and they bailed. “When many of his disciples heard it, they said, ‘This is a hard saying; who can listen to it?’” (John 6:60). “After this many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him” (John 6:66). And Jesus let them go. The Lord didn't chase after them with a modified Gospel. The Son of God didn't adapt His teaching to suit their religious palette. He's going to give us His flesh to eat and His blood to drink and those who don't like His M.O. are going to be scandalized. What do you think of that? Do you think that that is callous on His part? Do you want the church to change Christian doctrine to suit the times? Do you believe that the ark of

Christ's church is to sail according to the religious winds that blow differently in each age? Is the cross a scandal. Is a crucified God a scandal?

It certainly was when it happened. Peter knew exactly what kind of scandal the cross was. "Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you" (Matthew 16:22). Oh, well, if you think that it's a bad idea Peter, by all means, I'll reevaluate my salvation template. No, no, no! I'm being cheeky but humanity flirts with this notion all the time and it has to be stamped out. God does not adapt His plan to our notions of wisdom or glory or justice or morality or how we want to be saved. The cross was a scandal and He chose it. The cross is His M.O. and He does not depart from it regardless of who is scandalized. Is it a scandal that we say, with the bible, with Jesus, that the bread of the Eucharist is His body and the cup of the Lord's Supper is His blood? It's a scandal to some. Do we care? What I mean is does the fact that others are scandalized move us to change what the Scripture says so that others won't be scandalized? What new thing will the world be scandalized about tomorrow that the church has believed for two millennia?

God has a Modus Operandi, a method of operation. He saves us by grace, through faith (Ephesians 2:8-9). Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of Christ (Romans 10:17). We walk by faith and not by sight (2 Corinthians 5:7). God actively chooses those things which human wisdom regards as the antithesis of deity, the antithesis of the divine (Isaiah 55). Humility, shame, weakness, poverty – there He is, crucified and bleeding. The religious leaders mock him, His disciples desert Him, He is forsaken by His Father – and the universe cannot contain His glory. Majesty shows itself in shame – that's God's M.O. Power manifests all its might in weakness – that is God's M.O. The best and highest way to know who God is is to see Him in His crucifixion – forlorn, alone, suffering. That is God dying there. That is the revelation of Himself that He wants you to grasp. It's not your biological eyes that see His glory. He's not immediately recognizable as God on the cross. Those who want a direct revelation are playing that X and Y game and they're never going to get it (Exodus 33:18-23). He makes Himself visible to the eyes of your heart. It is a revelation. What is hidden to the eye of sinful man is revealed to the eye of faith. That is God's M.O.

Jesus came into His hometown and He demonstrated His command of God's Word. His teaching was a powerful revelation. He taught as one who had authority. And those folks rejected Him. I suspect that in their heart of hearts they knew that He was divine and they just didn't want that kind of God. Maybe you think that's harsh or judgmental or too facile an explanation for something way more complex. I believe it strongly. Men often build faith communities to suit their own religious desires, not to follow Christ. Is that us? How familiar are we with Christ's humility? That is the gateway to the depth and beauty and wonder of Christianity, Christ's humility. How eager are we to immerse ourselves in that humility? The prophet Isaiah wrote this about the Word made flesh: "He had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief" (Isaiah 53:2-3). Christ crucified is God's M.O. It always has been and it always will be. There is nothing higher. There is nothing bigger, better, faster.

Do you know what does change? You change. God pours out His blood and by that blood you are made holy. Faith changes you. You have been changed. You've crossed over from death to

life. Jesus said: “Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life” (John 5:24). You change. God changes you. By His grace, by His love God changes you. You adopt the Lord’s M.O. You have taken His yoke upon yourself, you learn from Him and you change (Matthew 11:28-30). You give without expecting repayment (Luke 6:35). That is a profound change. You sacrifice for others without expecting a parade. You confess Christ as your Savior when you know that it will scandalize others and you are brave. Christ the King calls us by name and we follow Him. Change happens in our hearts, our souls. We become more like Him (Galatians 2:20). And in death we will be changed remarkably. What is perishable will be clothed with the imperishable (1 Corinthians 15:53-54). Christ’s M.O. is resurrection. A new creation; confession is death and absolution is resurrection. His M.O. saturates this Divine Service. In baptism you were buried with Christ and raised a new creation (Romans 6:1-11). That is His M.O. “Behold, I am making all things new” (Revelation 21:5). The power of God is in you (Ephesians 1:18-22). That power comes through humble means. Hold fast to this truth. Celebrate it in your heart. Look for it, for God has hidden it for the express purpose that you find it. This is most certainly true.