## Jesus

Today, we come to the end of our tagline series, our church’s values. We’ve looked at simplicity, service, peace, worship, and community. The last tagline word is “Jesus.”

When Bess and I were first discussing these taglines, I don’t think she was very happy with the very idea of making “Jesus” one of our “values.” Because, of course, Jesus isn’t a value; Jesus is our Lord, the God who saves us. He is of infinite value, but he is not a value himself.

And she is right. But I contend that having “Jesus” in our list is a good thing, just because it moves away from values to the Jesus whom we follow. I know many people outside of the faith community who treasure simplicity for its own sake. There are hundreds, thousands of service organizations. There are many groups, both religious and non-religious, who promote peace. Many gods and even many men and women have been worshiped. And living in some community has been the norm for most of human existence. However, we come together under the banner of Jesus. Jesus, who is our peace; the founder of our community; the center of our worship; who calls us to service and selflessness. Jesus makes all the difference: he turns us from being a club to being a church.

And, even as Jesus makes all the difference, Jesus also unites us with other fellowships and other denominations who are called Christian. Imagine a Christian Copt in Egypt worshiping, the strong odor of incense, the drone of the priest intoning the diving liturgy, the rich art and history, the fear and hope of the Egyptian crisis, remembering the saints. Imagine a large African-American congregation, the choir’s volume raised to ear-hurting levels. Imagine a small country church, the youngest member over sixty, a poorly played organ overpowering the weak voices of the congregants. Imagine any Christian congregation at any place, and at any time, and ask what we have in common: and of course, the answer is Jesus. He is our center.

But the question is why: Why does it matter that we follow and worship Jesus? Can’t be just try on our own to be people of peace, of service, of simplicity, of community? In the words of Bill and Ted, Can’t we just be excellent to one another?

In the early days of the Christian Church, it was revealed that the good news that Jesus brought was to be good news not only to one particular people, the Jews (Jesus’s original followers, and Jesus himself, of course, were all Jews). But through a variety of means, the early disciples learned that God was no longer partial to any particular group of people, but would spread good news to all manners of men and women. In Acts 10, we have the story of the disciple Peter, and his reaction to this, as he speaks to a group of non-Jewish people who wish to be followers of Jesus:

34 Then Peter began to speak to them: “I truly understand that God shows no partiality, 35 but in every nation anyone who fears [God] and does what is right is acceptable to [God]. 36 You know the message he sent to the people of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ—he is Lord of all. 37 That message spread throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John announced: 38 how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power; how he went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. 39 We are witnesses to all that he did both in Judea and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree; 40 but God raised him on the third day and allowed him to appear, 41 not to all the people but to us who were chosen by God as witnesses, and who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. 42 He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one ordained by God as judge of the living and the dead. 43 All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.” [[1]](#footnote-1)

In this briefest of sermons, Peter addresses many of main reasons why we follow Jesus Christ. We declare this simple fact: We are broken off with God, but Jesus brings us peace with God.

Jesus brings us peace by his death and by his resurrection. There are many ways to understand the how and the why of this, and the best theologians are often at a loss to explain it. But when Jesus was raised from the dead, the Scriptures tell us, he brings us with him, out of death into life: “When he ascended on high he made captivity itself a captive.[[2]](#footnote-2)” I see Jesus as a mighty captain, who wages the war on our brokenness and all that seeks to destroy us, and breaks through to free us, and triumphantly rescues us.

Jesus brings us peace by showing us what God expects of us. Jesus went about “doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil.” He taught, and his teaching is of the highest quality; it teaches us how to live at peace with God and others. For as important as it is to be freed from the bondage of our sin and brokenness, we need to learn to be whole, to know the right way. And Jesus did this. He did this in his words as recorded in the gospels, but also in his ways. He went about doing good, and thus models for us the good life: not only knowing the good, but doing the good.

Jesus brings us peace by empowering us to live the good life. When we are freed from the bondage of our oppression, knowing the way to live, as Jesus taught us, is not a burden, but an opportunity. We have power, we have the gifts of God, to do what Jesus has taught us to do. Sometimes, this is hard to feel in the moment: we feel stupid, or bad, or ugly, or broken in a hundred different ways. But the objective truth is that God promises us to make us, well, almost God-like over time, to grow up into the “until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ. [[3]](#footnote-3)

Jesus is the climax of history. Peter reminds us that, in some sense, Jesus didn’t bring us anything new. It was in God’s mind from the beginning to save us through Jesus Christ. “All prophets,” says Peter (and by this, he means the teaching and history of all the Old Testament” point towards the coming of Jesus. Regular human beings, like Peter and the other apostles, ate and drank with him, and were witnesses to what God did. And Jesus will be the judge of the living and the dead. Jesus, was, and is, and will be the savior and judge of the world.

We participate in Jesus’s peace by our belief in him. Peter declares, “everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.” The first step of belief in Jesus starts simply: we acknowledge our own brokenness and sinfulness before God, and acknowledge that Jesus is the one who brings us peace with God. We trust Jesus at his word; we rely on him to plead our case; we accept the pardon he offers. And this belief grows and grows, as we more and more fully learn how to trust him in more and more areas of our lives, as individuals and as a community together.

Does this make sense? Jesus brings us peace by his death and by his resurrection. Jesus brings us peace by showing us what God expects of us. Jesus brings us peace by empowering us to live the good life. Jesus is the climax of history. We participate in Jesus’s peace by our belief in him.

If you haven’t taken that first step, of trusting Jesus to heal us of our brokenness and bring us forgiveness before God, now is a good time to do it. Those of us who have done so would be glad to help you understand this better. If you have taken this step, let me hear your testimony: how has Jesus been your peace?

1. *The Holy Bible : New Revised Standard Version*. 1989 (Ac 10:34–43). Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. *The Holy Bible : New Revised Standard Version*. 1989 (Eph 4:8). Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. *The Holy Bible : New Revised Standard Version*. 1989 (Eph 4:13). Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)