

The Mystery of Christ and Why We Don't Get It

#5 in August 2011 series based on Robert F. Capon's book by same name

Over this past month at Cap we've been talking about the gospel of Christ. Each week we've looked at the Gospel of Christ from a different angle.

All this to answer the question afresh—what is the gospel? Since I'm probably the only one with a perfect attendance record the past five weeks, allow me brief review.

- Our first view was from Romans 5:6-7
 - *Christ arrives right on time to make this happen. He didn't, and doesn't, wait for us to get ready. He presented himself for this sacrificial death when we were far too weak and rebellious to do anything to get ourselves ready. And even if we hadn't been so weak, we wouldn't have known what to do anyway*
 - Out of this text I offered this summary of the gospel: *"The Lamb of God has not taken away the sins of some — of only the good, or the cooperative, or the select few who can manage to get their act together and die as perfect peaches. He has taken away the sins of the world — of every last being in it and he has dropped them down the black hole of Jesus' death..."*
- Our second view was from the parable of the wedding banquet
 - Main point: all are invited to a party with God; count yourself in
- Our third view was from the parable of the unmerciful servant
 - Main point: God's lavish generosity and compassion forgives huge debts of sin. He invites not only to receive such lavish forgiveness but also imitate it with those who wound us.
- Our fourth view last week was from Colossians 2—about the mystery of Christ
 - Main point—the mystery of the gospel is this—Christ in you. I summarized the gospel's reality in four points
 - You are accepted
 - You are forgiven
 - You have authority to choose good over evil
 - You are not alone

I said at the outset that I wanted us as a community to get the gospel of Christ—to experience the gospel and shaped by the gospel. At our staff meeting this week we had a vigorous discussion about how I might close this series. I asked the question. “What have I left undone in looking at the gospel?” The discussion could be summed up in this question: **what does it look like to ‘get’ the gospel and live out of it?**

This week I also met with my spiritual director and we talked about this month my experience of preaching this month and the discussions that have arisen from this series, my director said to me:

- I hear you two things from you
 - You are passionate about people getting the gospel
 - You like to push and provoke people
- Here is my question
 - If Jesus was to ask you what’s in your heart, which would you say is more important?
 - I answered—*and no, I’m not going to tell you my answer. I need to hold it close and do more processing of it and not think that I am finished because I’ve said something publicly. It is part of my travel there first with a small company before you talk broadly about it action plan*
 - Next question—which of the prophets do you identify with and why?
 - I answered
 - Last question—thinking of the gospel stories—if Jesus was to call to you and offer you the gospel in which story would you find yourself?
 - I answered

Another reason I’m not sharing my answers to those questions because I want you to see the process not my content. The process is one that brings me face to face with Jesus to see what is in my heart; what direction my heart is taking and to work out the next step with Jesus. My director was doing the gospel with me—bringing my heart and Jesus together.

What I will tell you from that session and preaching this month is that I am more aware of the lavish generosity and compassion of God in Christ than I have been form some time, and it is retooling my approach to pastoral care.

If I could do a pastoral care session with each of you at the end of this month, then I would ask two questions:

- If Jesus was to ask, how is the gospel shaping your heart, what would you say is important?
- If Jesus was offering you the gospel in which story would you find yourself?

What does it look like to 'get' the gospel and live out of it?

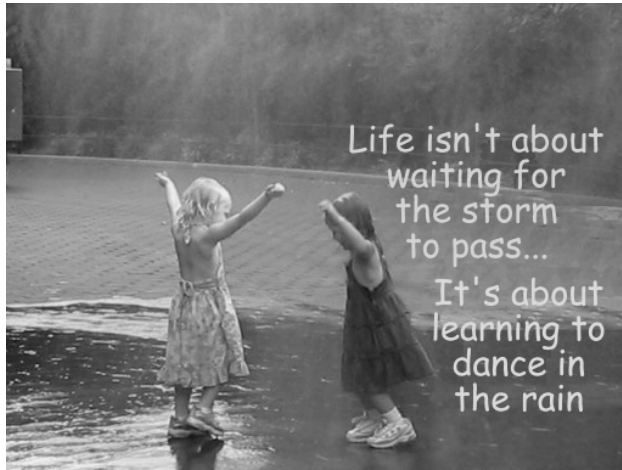
There are several ways I could answer this question

- I could talk about the NT's main image of living out the gospel—choose to live in step with the Spirit rather than follow the passions apart from the Spirit
- I could talk about the transformed life; the Spirit-filled life from Romans 12 or Ephesians 4-6
- I could talk about what it means to put on Christ's love, peace, patience and live with his word dwelling in you richly from Colossians 3

But—I've decided to leave you with a picture and a metaphor of what it is like to get the gospel and live out of it. The picture is dancing in the rain.



Here is a variation of the picture with the Hallmark-style memo: life isn't about waiting for the storm to pass; it's about learning to dance in the rain. I want to suggest that getting the gospel and living it out is like learning to dance in the storm of life.



For me this is more than a cheesy Hallmark jingle; it is more than a metaphor from my recent love of Scottish country dancing; it comes from an event in Jesus life and ministry that for me captures the essence of the gospel he brought to the world.

Here is the event in Jesus life. The text I give you is a composite of the gospel accounts about this event from Matt 21; Mark 11; Luke 19; and John 2

When Jerusalem came into view, Jesus wept over it. "If you had only recognized this day, and everything that was good for you! But now it's too late. In the days ahead your enemies are going to bring up their heavy artillery and surround you, pressing in from every side. They'll smash you and your babies on the pavement. Not one stone will be left intact. All this because you didn't recognize and welcome God's personal visit.

When it was almost time for the Jewish Passover, Jesus went up to Jerusalem. In the temple courts he found people selling cattle, sheep and doves, and others sitting at tables exchanging money. So he made a whip out of cords, and drove all from the temple courts, both sheep and cattle; he scattered the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables... He would not allow anyone to carry merchandise through the temple courts. ¹⁶ To those who sold doves he said, "Get these out of here! Stop turning my Father's house into a market!"... 'My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations'? But you have turned it into a place where robbers hide"

¹⁴Blind and lame people came to Jesus in the temple and he healed them. ¹⁵But the chief priests and the teachers of the Law of Moses were angry when they saw his miracles and heard the children shouting praises to the Son of David. ¹⁶The men said to Jesus, "Don't you hear what those children are saying?"

"Yes, I do!" Jesus answered. "Don't you know that the Scriptures say, 'Children and infants will sing praises'?"

Then Jesus left the city and went out to the village of Bethany, where he spent the night.

Every day he was teaching at the temple. But the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the leaders among the people were trying to kill him. Yet they could not find any way to do it, because all the people hung on his words.

His disciples remembered the Scripture: "Urgency and fervour for your house will consume me."

These events commenced in Jesus' life on what we call Palm Sunday. In six days Jesus will be hanging on a cross. But on this Sunday he comes to Jerusalem where the temple symbolizing God's throne on earth stood. In one sense Jesus in coming home—he is coming to an earthly symbol of the throne he would sit on after the resurrection. But at this point no one sees that.

Early Sunday morning Jesus leaves Bethany to walk to Jerusalem. It takes about an hour. He first walks down 300' to the foot of the Mt. of Olives, then up 700' to the top of the Mt of Olives and then down 300' to the base of the walls of Jerusalem. Jesus instructs his disciples to bring a colt that has never been ridden for him to ride. The colt was the royal mount used by King David some 1000 years prior—it was an animal of peace not war. The prophet Zechariah prophesied in 500 BC. that Jerusalem's King would come with righteousness, salvation, and gentleness, on a colt that had never been ridden with the mother donkey in tow. (Zech 9:9).

When Jesus started down the Mount of Olives, within sight of Jerusalem, about ½ km away the exclamations of praises begin—six varieties of Hosanna = Save us! Saviour, save us! It doesn't take much imagination to picture the drama—Jesus, the true King leading a salvation parade, palms waving, cloaks being laid in front of Jesus on the road, shouts of praise...then two very contrary things happen.

Some Pharisees press through the crowd faces flushed—(most unusual for Pharisees to be pushing common folk out of the way—normally avoiding them)—until they are close enough to Jesus to yell, "Jesus, rebuke your disciples—this is blasphemy! Are you crazy? This is insanity for you to accept this praise. How dare you let this go on? Who do you think you are, God?" The crowd fall silent.

Jesus looks into their hearts and shouts so that the entire crowd could hear, "I tell you the truth, if they keep quiet the stones on which you stand will cry out." (Hab. 2:11). The Pharisees turn away in disgust. Everyone's adrenaline is pumping—the crowd cheers—and, Jesus begins to weep. Jesus has felt the sting of the Pharisee's blindness as he has caught sight of Jerusalem.

The tears stream down his face as he utters a lament and a prophetic prayer that only his disciples can hear: (Luke 19) If only you had known that peace came to you this day.

In this mixture of sadness and praise Jesus enters the city. The procession on Sunday would have weaved through Jerusalem's narrow streets all afternoon. Before dusk Jesus went somewhat secretly into the Temple looked at everything and then went back to Bethany for the night with the 12 disciples. He was sombre, sullen, and disturbed—preoccupied with something he had seen in the Temple and did not talk much of the day's events on the hour walk. Jesus had a fitful night's sleep.

On Monday morning-Jesus made a whip of cords—long enough to reach across a wide table and strike the vendor behind. In leaving Bethany Jesus was hungry--he likely skipped breakfast in his determination to do what must be done that day. As Jesus walked toward Jerusalem he spotted a fig tree that had leafed early. He went to see if there were any figs on the tree even though it was too early for figs. When he found no fruit, he cursed the tree—"May no one eat fruit from you again". The he set out for the Temple.

What Jesus had seen the night before in the Court of the Gentiles in the Temple broke his heart--vendors selling animals for sacrifice to the pilgrims who flocked to Jerusalem for the feast of Passover; multiple booths doing currency exchange for travelers so that they could pay the temple tax, purchase animals for sacrifice and make offerings in local currency. There was also price gouging and cheating. But what broke Jesus heart was that there was no place for Gentiles to pray and worship; no place for people to seek and find God; no place for them to "get the gospel". The gospel obscured by profit taking, commercialism; and the blindness of the leadership who could not see Jesus for who he was; who did not recognize the kingdom of God and were keeping people from experiencing God's love.

Jesus cracked his whip, drew attention, then began overturning tables of money; benches of animal sellers—"Get out! This is a house of prayer—not a den of robbers—Get out!" Shouting, pushing, and resistance—it must have taken 4-5 hours—well into the afternoon, to clear out 1000-2000 merchants and 75,000+ buyers & pilgrims.

Then an amazing thing happened. The gospel writers tell us that with the Temple area cleared of commerce, the blind, lame, and children came into the temple courts where Jesus taught them, and healed them, and the children began to dance and sing, “Hosanna to the Son of David”. What a scene—this went on for the rest of the day and into the evening.

Here is Jesus doing the gospel—doing the gospel of His kingdom. What is the gospel acted out here? What is on Jesus heart? Jesus is removing ever every obstacle that stands in the way of the least, last and little coming into relationship with God.

And when they come—when they get the gospel—what do they find: Healing; sight; joy; hope and the concomitant dancing and singing. What does it look like to get the gospel? Exactly this: relationship with God accompanied by initial doses in already-not yet amounts of healing, vision, joy, hope, dancing, and singing.

After this initial meeting, what is it like to live in the gospel? Simply put—learning to sing in the rains that come. Or, less metaphorically—staying close to Jesus in good times and no so good times. Let me illustrate from my vantage point of being a grandparent.

The other night I was over visiting and enjoying the grandkids. It was near bedtime and I asked one of the twins if I could read them a book. A book was selected and she crawled up next to me and I began to read, involving her in what colour is this; where is the bird; how many ducks and so forth. And in the middle of a page she left me without even any forewarning and made a bee-line to her mom as there on that lap were her two sisters being read to. My side was no match for mom’s lap and family. There she found primary relationship, comfort, love, familiarity and much more.

I love to watch the granddaughters and how they come to their parents. They come for tickles; they come for attention; they come for kisses and band aids when have “owies”; they come when their desire for the same thing causes fights and scratching and look to their parents for creating peace and doing justice—which usually means we set the timer and when it dings, then your sister gets a turn; they come when they have relationally wounded their sibling and

feel shame and don't know how to save face and make things right—and in these and many more cases—mom and dad figure out a way and the kids follow and find life.

I just imagine in the hours in the temple when Jesus enjoyed the singing and the dancing of the kids and healed the lame and the blind that the same kinds of things went on in microcosm. Some of the kids wanted tickles. Some scraped themselves and wanted kisses for their owies. Some fought over things left by the merchants and needed a just intervention. Some called another a name and didn't know how to make it right—and they came to Jesus who led the way.

What does it mean to live out the gospel—it means—come to Jesus—come to the wisdom left by him and his disciples in the bible; come to the wisdom in the mature followers of Jesus and follow their lead.

- If you want to know how to love yourself and respect your body—come learn how Jesus treats you and follow suit
- If want to know how to live around family are friends who don't love you but insult you come learn from Jesus where he stands; where he backs down; where he pushes; where he meets harshness with generosity. Follow his lead and trust that he will be with you in this.
- If you want to know how to be a generous person who gives life and dignity to others come learn about God's generosity and imitate it.

Expect on the way—on the pilgrimage—for Jesus to say again and again: Let's go over the basics: You are accepted; You are forgiven; You have authority to choose good over evil; You are not alone;

On pilgrimage expect Jesus to also say again and again—what's in your heart? Let's see how your heart is being transformed by the gospel. Learn to dance in the rain. The rains come—to all—learn to dance in the rain.

After only a few hours of healing; singing and dancing in the temple on Monday night of Jesus' before his Friday crucifixion, *the rains came*—in the form of the Pharisees. They reappeared—pushing through the blind, lame, the children with a singular complaint about the children's

praise—like impatient adults in a bus full of children—“Don’t you hear what these kids are singing—it is blasphemy—Stop it! Stop it! Stop it!”

Jesus responds, “Yes, I hear it. I love it. It is entirely appropriate. Children—sing on, dance! God is pleased with you. The rains came and then the thunder. The Pharisees stomp out around the dancing children, mumbling, “Where is that Judas when we need him!” We must get rid of this Jesus and get our markets back in the temple and teach the people that God has nothing to do with this Jesus.

Some more singing and dancing then Jesus after long, eventful but good day doing the gospel walks back to Bethany in the crisp night air full of joy at the mercy of God the blind, lame and children have just experienced.

Rain and thunder—obstacles to living in relationship with God in the here and now; obstacles to healing; obstacles to enjoying God’s love; teaching from religious leaders that confuses rather than clarifies important life issues; and Jesus withdrawing and seemingly less easily accessible. Rain and thunder. What does it mean to live the gospel? Learning to dance in the rain.

So at the end of this series on the gospel of Christ I extend this invitation—come to Jesus; come into relationship with God; come experience acceptance; come experience forgiveness; come receive the Spirit and the authority to choose good over evil; Come live in the fellowship of Father, Son, Spirit, and the community of faith. Come rain or shine. Come for life and let’s learn to dance.

