

John 10:22-30

Intro

I find this morning's opening passage interesting if no other reason than because of where it takes place: in the Temple. To put it into a parlance that makes sense for us...it happens at church. What takes place is this: unnamed people gather around Jesus and ask him to cut through all of the 'maybe's' and answer if he is the Messiah.

So, with that sort of a truncated set up, who would you expect to be hanging around church?

The answer that I came up with?

People who go to church. The people who are asking Jesus who he is, are people who put out there on several levels that they are folks who 'believe'.

But what do they believe, and correspondingly, whom do they follow? The scripture reads this way.

John 10:22-30

22 At that time the festival of the Dedication took place in Jerusalem. It was winter, ²³and Jesus was walking in the temple, in the portico of Solomon. ²⁴So the Jews gathered around him and said to him, 'How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly.'
²⁵Jesus answered, 'I have told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in my Father's name testify to me; ²⁶but you do not believe, because you do not belong to my sheep. ²⁷My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me. ²⁸I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one will snatch them out of my hand. ²⁹What my Father has given me is greater than all else, and no one can snatch it out of the Father's hand. ³⁰The Father and I are one.'

Revelation 7:9-17

Intro

Our second passage is part of the vision of the Apostle John.

Obviously, anytime that you meander into visions, you are going to have a wide variety of interpretations as to the actual meaning of that passage.

However, I would like to try and cut through some of that by asking you the following question: why? Why are the people who are robed in white able to gather together before God? The scripture reads this way.

Revelation 7:9-17

9 After this I looked, and there was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands. ¹⁰They cried out in a loud voice, saying, ‘Salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the throne, and to the Lamb!’

¹¹And all the angels stood around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshipped God, ¹²singing, ‘Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God for ever and ever! Amen.’

13 Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, ‘Who are these, robed in white, and where have they come from?’ ¹⁴I said to him, ‘Sir, you are the one that knows.’ Then he said to me, ‘These are they who have come out of the great ordeal; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

¹⁵ For this reason they are before the throne of God, and worship him day and night within his temple, and the one who is seated on the throne will shelter them. ¹⁶ They will hunger no more, and thirst no more; the sun will not strike them, nor any scorching heat; ¹⁷ for the Lamb

at the center of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of the water of life, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.’

‘May the (Fill in the Blank) Be With You’

So...how did you celebrate the holiday this past week?

I’m getting some blank stares...and some of you are looking at me with an expression that says, ‘what happens on Cinco de Mayo, stays on Cinco de Mayo’, but no, that is not the day to which I am referring.

Anyone?

There it is! May the 4th! As in, ‘May the 4th be with you’ the unofficial kind of official day when anyone who enjoys the world of Star Wars is able to get as Star Wars’d up as they want. Have a shirt? Wear it! Have a Jedi outfit? Yes, please! Want to be a Sith Lord? You be you!

How present is May the 4th in certain parts of our culture? Well, when I got into the office on Wednesday, Roxanne showed me a picture of her grandson looking like he was Obi-Wan Kenobi (without the beard). She then showed me a picture of him walking into school...however walking doesn’t fully capture it: he was striding!

Austin clearly heard about it (and no, it was not from Jen or myself!), because as we were running errands after he got home from school, he kept saying something about droids, like, ‘Droids? These are not the droids.’ When we started to ask him about it, he shot back, ‘use the force!’, at which point Jen says, ‘May the force be with you’, to which he responds, ‘and also with you’ (that’s what you get when you combine a preacher’s kid and Star Wars!).

That night, as Austin was sitting on the Star Wars blanket that sits at the foot of his bed telling me about his favorite characters (who are Rey and Ben for those who are interested!), he

started making the hand motions (with sounds!) of someone using the Force, and being the Dad I am, I appropriately fell backwards (the force is strong with that one!).

In any case, the reason that bring up these stories is because the foundational principle of the whole Star Wars saga is that there is, as has now been mentioned a few times, a force that moves through all people. Some people follow the good side of that force. Others follow the Dark side.

Sound familiar to anything that you have ever heard before? Like here in church?

It should, because since the day that Star Wars hit the public consciousness, there has been an understanding that this battle between good and evil, light and dark, can be understood as a Christian allegory.

Yes, it's a fun sci-fi soap opera...but what it speaks about are also themes that are a part of our scriptures.

The reason that I bring up these stories is because so often we hear the readings from scriptures (especially the end of time visions that speak of heaven and hell) and we pay them little mind.

Why?

Because as time has passed (now 2000 years since Jesus died) the truths that we have been taught have started to sound more like polite suggestions that are said in the demurest of ways in order to help us 'be better people' ...and in today's culture of 'follow what is popular', demure 'better people' doesn't sell all that well.

But they're not.

These passages are meant to be heard with an urgency that makes us want to dive in with everything that we are...like so many folks are able to do in regard to fictionalized stories...like

Star Wars. So many of us are willing to be led by the shepherds who create these movies or those stories, who lead this political campaign or offer those opinions that feed into the thoughts that we have fostered through our lives to the point that we buy the shirts, put on the bumper stickers, or contribute the coin.

Sure, we go to church, but our buy in is so much less...in so many ways.

That is why our first passage is so instructive.

Jesus is at church, he is in the Temple, when he is surrounded by people who say that they believe, but in reality they have actually bought into something else (in their case, it was the teachings of generations of theologians who said that the Messiah that is foretold of in Scripture will reestablish the Davidic Monarchy).

And then Jesus calls them out on it: 'why do you even ask? You have seen and yet you do not believe.'

Are we all that different? In so many ways we are able to bear witness to the truth that the God of all Creation still moves in and amongst us...and yet we hedge our bets, we question. We see the power of the force (aka: the Holy Spirit) and too often either we ignore it, or even worse, we go the other way, because the power of the dark side (aka: sin and separation from God) is so strong.

This reality is why the passages like the one that we have heard in Revelation are so important because they remind us that the forces that we follow can either mold us into people who will see and believe and ultimately join the chorus of those eternal voices who are praising the eternal God, or leave us seeing and thinking that what we saw really wasn't all that important or necessary and that we are ultimately on our own.

Look, this stuff matters, and not only to us in the here and now, but also to those who are watching.

This past week I was able to put together the words of four of our young adults into their Credo's, their 'I Believe' statements that the Elders will be able to read. It was so reassuring because in their own individual ways, I was able to hear how they see, hear, and feel God. And they were not just parroting answers: they were describing how they feel God is real and present.

You want to know one of the stories that a whole lot of those kids contemporaries know really well? Star Wars.

You want to know a story that a whole lot of them don't know or have been taught is fiction? The reality of Jesus Christ.

As tough as it is to hear that sort of a statement my prayer is that it acts as a motivator to begin to take the calls to live a life of faithfulness more seriously. Because if we, as the head, heart, and, hands of Jesus in the world today, are not willing to live faithfully and display that, then what else are people around going to think is true?

The best way for people in the midst of the world to begin to think about the possibility of God (let alone the reality that God is actually still moving in their lives today) is for the people who say that they believe to live in such a way that they are passionate about the God whom they say loves them. If we aren't passionate about the love and presence of God then why would anyone out in the world, anyone who is at a countless number of secular gatherings be in the least interested?

You want to know why Austin is excited about stories like Star Wars?

Because I have been excited about it; because I have known it.

How many of us are able to say a similar thing about the people in our lives in regard to sports, hobbies, likes, and dislikes? We need to grow in our passion for the story and the reality of God, of Jesus in our lives. We need to become more comfortable in the retelling of how God has been with us (and I mean that retelling in regard to the people who are around us) so that when God is in their presence, they begin to see that movement as actually being of God (instead of just being ‘a really interesting coincidence’).

We need to be passionate about the force that is in our lives. We need to tap into that force so that not only are we positively affected, but so that those around us are shown what we have been led to profess as true...is true.

But let’s be real: those stories mean nothing if we aren’t sharing them, or at the very least, sharing their impact in our lives.

So here’s my goal for each of us for the week: share one of your stories of how you felt God in your life, of how you were reminded that God is real; share the impact of that story; share the passion of your faith (I leave the ‘what’ up to you)...with someone outside your normal circle. We need to plant the seeds of passion in those who are around us.

Why?

Well, not only have we been called to do so (‘Go therefore and make disciples of all nations’) but the reality of faith that grows from that seed planting can make (in God’s timing) an eternal difference.

Look, I know that can be a difficult thing (I’m already trying to figure out who I can share with in such a way and I’m not sure how to fulfill the goal that I have placed before us!), but we are not talking about a small thing: we are dealing with an eternal consequence. So, if you are there (like me), then start with a prayer as simple as, ‘Lord, help me share Your story in

my life. Reveal whom I should talk with.’ Pray ceaselessly. Breathe it in and breathe it out.
‘Help me to share Your story.’

And then, as your led, step forward. The words will not be your words so don’t worry about them. Just share them...with another.

May the Force be with you: so many of us know that line because we are passionate about that story.

The Holy Spirit is with you! That is a truth that needs to be shared with the world for as it is, not only will our connection, our passion for that reality deepen, but others will be invited to grow in their connection to those truths as well.

The Force is with us and the Force is God.

After Sermon Prayer

Lord, we are able to display passion for so many things. Lead us to be able to display passion for You, for Your work in our lives, for the truth that You sent Your son so that we might be able to know Your voice and worship before Your throne...forevermore. Lord, hear our prayer. Amen.