

**“W W J D?”**

**Mark 1:14b – 15**

Sermon by Jan Edmiston – Fairlington Presbyterian Church

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There was a scene in the TV show “Grey’s Anatomy” last season when Izzie – the blonde doctor – is angry at her former boyfriend Alex because he was unfaithful to her. And then Alex failed his medical boards so his colleagues were all taking turns tutoring him in the fine points of diagnosis. Even Izzie took a turn and clearly, she wasn’t happy about it.

“Why are you helping me?” Alex asked her. And she said, “Because it’s what Jesus would (@#\*%) do.”

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You’ve seen it on posters and bracelets. It’s been usurped by environmentalists (“What would Jesus drive?”), peace activists (“Who would Jesus bomb?”) and nutritionists (“What would Jesus eat?”).

And I could have chosen countless stories from the Bible to read this morning describing the specific activities of this rabbi from Galilee and what he did. Among many other things:

Jesus walked on water.<sup>1</sup>

He healed Peter’s mother-in-law.<sup>2</sup> And Jairus’ daughter.<sup>3</sup> And the hemorrhaging woman. And the man with the shriveled hand.<sup>4</sup> And lepers.<sup>5</sup> And the demon-possessed.<sup>6</sup> And the blind.<sup>7</sup>

He told parables. Lots of parables . . . about seeds and banquets and hidden treasure . . . and a Samaritan who was good.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 14:22-33

<sup>2</sup> Mark 1:29-31

<sup>3</sup> Matthew 9:18-26

<sup>4</sup> Matthew 12:9-14

<sup>5</sup> Luke 17:11-19

<sup>6</sup> Matthew 8:28-34

<sup>7</sup> Mark 1:29-31

<sup>8</sup> Mark 4:26-32, Matthew 22:1-14, Matthew 13:44-46, Luke 10:29-37 (and many others)

He preached sermons about people who hungered for spiritual things,<sup>9</sup> about people who were grieving and persecuted.<sup>10</sup> He preached many, many sermons about money and the importance of treasuring the proper things. About 15% of his teachings were about money.<sup>11</sup>

But most of the time he preached about what the Kingdom of God looks like.

Jesus performed food and drink miracles: turning water into wine,<sup>12</sup> turning five loaves of bread and two fish into a feast for thousands.<sup>13</sup> One night he served his disciples bread and wine and called them his body and blood.<sup>14</sup>

Once he was so angry that he turned over the tables in the temple.<sup>15</sup> He offended powerful leaders.<sup>16</sup> And he was eventually arrested.<sup>17</sup> He was flogged.<sup>18</sup> He was nailed to a cross where he died.<sup>19</sup>

He was raised from death.<sup>20</sup> And then he was raised into heaven<sup>21</sup> just after telling his followers to make followers of other people.<sup>22</sup>

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This is what Jesus did.

Our scripture lesson basically captures his most basic message: In spite of the world's evil (and because of the world's evil), Jesus came to share the Good News of God, and saying

*“The time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.”*

Last week we heard Jesus say that *with his arrival* the kingdom of God was here. They could see it. He was standing there before them in flesh and blood. If you want to know the Good News of God, watch him. Listen to him.

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<sup>9</sup> Matthew 5:6

<sup>10</sup> Luke 6:21-22

<sup>11</sup> *The Treasure Principal* by Randy Alcorn. (Multnomah: 2001). The only subject Jesus discussed more than money was The Kingdom of God.

<sup>12</sup> John 2:6-10

<sup>13</sup> Matthew 15:32-39

<sup>14</sup> Mark 14:22-25

<sup>15</sup> Luke 19:39-44

<sup>16</sup> Matthew 23:1-36

<sup>17</sup> Mark 14:43-52

<sup>18</sup> Matthew 27:26

<sup>19</sup> Mark 15:25

<sup>20</sup> John 20:1-18

<sup>21</sup> Luke 24:51

<sup>22</sup> Matthew 28:19-20

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The assumption is that we who claim to be followers of Jesus will want to do exactly what Jesus did. As I mentioned last week, the original twelve disciples considered Jesus to be their rabbi. They were his students. And their job – as the “students” of Jesus, the disciples of Jesus – was to follow their rabbi everywhere, to do what their rabbi did.

The problem with this as 21<sup>st</sup> century disciples is that Jesus lived in a very different time and place from those of us who call him our Rabbi or our Savior today. The times are different. The culture is different.

Jesus never ate pizza or ice cream. He probably didn’t brush his teeth. He never celebrated Christmas. (☺) And I guess we could say he celebrated Easter, but not with leg of lamb and mint jelly.

He didn’t marry (no matter how creatively Dan Brown spins the story of *The Da Vinci Code*.) He probably didn’t own a pet, wear a tattoo,<sup>23</sup> or cook his own dinner.<sup>24</sup>

Jesus was celibate, worked in manual labor, didn’t own a home, isolated himself to pray, and engaged in long periods of fasting.

So what does this mean for us? “What would Jesus do?” is a good question. It helps determine what *we* are supposed to do.

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Jesus’ First Century culture and our 21<sup>st</sup> Century culture are very different, and so how do we select which activities to copy? “How do we figure out what aspects of Jesus’ life were simply his participation in his culture and what activities were to be translated into other cultures as expressions of the kingdom” of God?<sup>25</sup>

Are we already way off track if we are married or hope to be married or used to be married, if we have office jobs, if we wear close-toed shoes every day? Are we supposed to live lives that will get *us* nailed to a cross?

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<sup>23</sup> Tattoos were in violation of Jewish law according to Leviticus 19:28

<sup>24</sup> Women almost always prepared the food from the picking/grinding to the milking/cooking.

<sup>25</sup> Gibbs, Eddie and Ryan K. Bolger, *Emerging Churches: Creating Christian Community in Postmodern Cultures*. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker, 2006) page 49.

Each year during Holy Week , a group of Christians in the Philippines reenact the flagellation and crucifixion of Jesus by subjecting themselves to similar torture.<sup>26</sup> They are whipped and then literally nailed to crosses. Health authorities have tried to discourage them, citing outbreaks of tetanus every spring in that region. And then infection is exacerbated by the fact that those with any strength left after this ordeal follow their reenactment with a plunge into nearby rivers to symbolize a cleansing of their sins.

Is this what Jesus would want us to do?

The problem for human beings today seems to be either one of two things:

1) either we see Jesus as a great and holy man and maybe we even believe he is the Savior of the world, but we believe that it's not necessary to respond in the way we live our lives. "Jesus did all that for humanity. Nothing is required of us." Once and for all time, Jesus took care of any requirements for salvation.

OR

2) we decide to respond by living a certain way – doing what Jesus would do – but we tend to pick and choose the things we already want to do. Recycling? Sure, Jesus probably would recycle so I will too! Drive a Hummer? Jesus probably wouldn't mind if I drove a Hummer even if it gets only 10 miles per gallon. Besides, I need it to haul my stuff.

The real answer to this question: What Would Jesus Do? seems to be found in the essence of his life. Jesus practiced a way of life that was in perfect harmony with God.

One theologian put it this way:

*"There is one distinct "realm" in which we must imitate Jesus and that is **in the way we deal with evil and the way we deal with power**. Servanthood replaces domination, forgiveness absorbs hostility. Thus – and only thus – are we bound by New Testament thought to be like Jesus."*<sup>27</sup>

When Jesus taught the disciples to pray, he told them to pray **this** way (like he prayed) and he even gave them the words: "*Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.*"<sup>28</sup> This is it!

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<sup>26</sup> Dizon, Nikko and Christian Esguerra, "Tourists Here to See Filipinos Crucify Selves" Inquirer News Service, March 22, 2005

[http://news.inq7.net/nation/index.php?index=3&story\\_id=31317&published\\_site=16](http://news.inq7.net/nation/index.php?index=3&story_id=31317&published_site=16)

<sup>27</sup> Yoder, John Howard, The Politics of Jesus (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), page 131.

<sup>28</sup> Matthew 6:9

If Jesus' main job was to show us what the Kingdom of God looked like and work towards making the world more like God's kingdom on earth, then doing what Jesus did means the same for us.

Of course people get in trouble every day (or they should) for declaring that they absolutely, positively "know" God's will. Trying to figure out God's will for the world is a lifelong process. But Jesus gives us many, many clues:

"The new way of life that Jesus inaugurated," God's will on earth as in heaven was exemplified by Jesus this way:

- "the outsider was included"
- "the poor were shown generosity" and
- "enemies were loved."<sup>29</sup>

Jesus spent time in prayer and taught his disciples to pray and by this I perceive that Jesus expects us to pray too. Maybe prayer is the only way we can be transformed into people who indeed include outsiders and lavish generosity on the poor and love our enemies. I know I am going to need major spiritual help if I'm going to do these things, if I'm going to try to do what Jesus would do. I like my own little posse of friends, so I'm going to need God's help if I hope to include outsiders. I have a hard time being generous sometimes, even to the poor. Going to need God's help with that too. And loving my enemies? This especially requires divine assistance.

The whole world is in dire need of divine assistance. The world needs Good News. Wars between nations, wars against terrorism, wars against disease, wars against poverty ensue. Will they ever end?

We are days away from the first anniversary of Hurricane Katrina and just now families are losing their FEMA assistance and finding that their newfound security is fragile. There is a new influx of people who need help.

We are weeks away from the 5<sup>th</sup> anniversary of 9-11, and nobody can say with a straight face that the world is safer today than it was back then. Talk of liquid bombs and shoe bombs and suicide bombs are sprinkled in our conversations. We are waiting for the next attack which experts say is inevitable.

It is into this culture that Jesus still brings Good News. First we must repent – which means turn from our old ways into a new direction. And we must believe.

- Believe in a power greater than bombs, greater than AIDS, greater than greed.
- Believe that sharing is a better way to live.
- Believe that even our enemies can be transformed by the Holy Spirit of God, if that is our prayer.

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<sup>29</sup> Gibbs and Bolger, page 218.

What would Jesus do today in the face of global warming and corrupt world leaders and desperation in the poorest of the poor nations? What would Jesus say to those who hunger and thirst for something eternal?

Over all these things, there is still Good News. “The time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the Good News. We can make a difference. We can make a difference by modeling our lives after Jesus.

The anatomy of our spiritual problems stems from a failure to follow Jesus well. We have forgotten that our job as Christians is to follow our Rabbi as disciples of Jesus Christ. This is what it means to be a Christians. It’s an ongoing journey – trying to live as Jesus lived. Trying to do what Jesus did . . . even if it’s the last thing we want to do.