

A communion meditation delivered by the Rev. Timothy C. Ahrens, senior minister at the First Congregational Church, United Church of Christ, Columbus, Ohio, August 4, 2013, Proper 13, dedicated to the memory of Barbara Kemery Heer Reed, who entered eternal life on Monday, July 29, 2013, and whose service of thanksgiving was held at First Church on August 3, and always to the glory of God!

“Jesus is Living Proof” ***Hosea 11:1-11; Luke 12:13-21***

(Part I in V in the sermon series “What a Difference Jesus Makes”)

Two months ago, I asked two questions of the members and friends of First Congregational Church. First, ***“When you hear Jesus’ name, what comes to your mind?”*** and second, ***“Whatever your response to the “name of Jesus,” how has your answer made a difference in your life?”*** Almost 50 of you responded via email or verbal response. Thanks to all who took time to respond. I will only use the names of people when I have had permission to do so. Since I that wasn’t clear when you responded, you may hear your answers today without your name attached because in my moving around for the last six weeks, I have not had time to clarify your wishes. By the way, I am still open for your thoughts and feelings . . . new ones from the same people and new ones altogether!

From your answers, the five sermon titles were formed – *“Jesus is Living Proof,” “Jesus is Teacher and Healer,” “Jesus is Protector and Hope,” “Jesus is Resurrection Life”* and *“Jesus is Love and Grace Everywhere.”* Over the next five Sundays I will try to “unpack” the difference Jesus has made in our lives.

But let me begin with two carryovers from our service of memory and thanksgiving for Barbara Reed – held here just 19 hours ago. When I asked Barbara what Jesus meant to her life, she

smiled and said, "Everything . . . He means everything to me." Yesterday, I shared that from the back pew of First Church, and like the great Danish existentialist, Soren Kierkegaard before her, Barbara sat where she sat because she saw Jesus there. I am deeply missing my friend Barbara this morning. Church is not the same without her in the back pew. I have placed a rose on her seat this morning.

I would love for all of us to claim Barbara's one word for Jesus – "Everything" – at end of our days when asked, "What does Jesus mean to you?" But more important than that, I pray that you will feel the loving presence of God alive in your life so richly, so beautifully, that you will live more like Jesus every day. Please pray with me.

+++++

Let us pray: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of each one of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our rock and our salvation. Amen.

+++++

In 1906, Dr. Albert Schweitzer wrote these words about Jesus in his landmark book *The Quest for the Historical Jesus*:

"He comes to us as One unknown, without a name, as of old, by the lakeside, He came to those men who knew Him not. He speaks to us the same words: "Follow thou me!" and sets us to the tasks which He has to fulfill for our time. He commands. And to those who obey Him, whether they be wise or simple, He will reveal himself in the toils, the conflicts, the sufferings which they shall pass through in His fellowship, and, as an ineffable mystery, they shall learn in their own experience Who He is." Quoted from *The Quest of the Historical Jesus* (New York: MacMillan, 1956), p. 403.

For Dr. Schweitzer, Jesus was God's real presence in our world. He was God's true stillness. He was the Way, the Truth and the Light of God. He was One who needed to be experienced. And in the real presence of experience with him, you would be surprised

by his mystery, healed by his encounter and powerfully transformed by his love.

I felt such power, transforming presence and love as I opened your emails one by one six to eight weeks ago – and two more only yesterday! Your words for Jesus were nothing short of transformational for me.

For you, Jesus is ultimate peacemaker, open arms, open hands, open heart, comfort and security, hope and eternal life.

He is teacher, thought-changer, paradigm-shifter, bringer of knowledge that ALL people are worthy. He is the do not be afraid guy. He is one who forgives, and “tells me to get over things and get on with living.”

He is the one who is with us – encouraging us, challenging us, calling us to love and justice, nudging us to be stewards of his earth and his resources.

He is the “face of the Divine for Christians.” He is the Ground of Being (Paul Tillich would be so proud of this comment!).

He is my savior, brother, friend, my intercessor, my joy, my sorrow, my delight, my goad. He is my companion, my teacher, my rabbi. my prophet, my priest.

He is love, mercy, justice, Savior and Son of God. He is infinite mystery and he is ultimate and intimate presence of God.

He is comfort, strength and hope.

He is radical love embodied in revolutionary hospitality.

He is the embodiment of the Golden Rule – “Do unto to others and you would have them do unto you.” That’s Jesus!

“For me,” one member writes, “I cannot say his name meanly . . . Whenever he comes out of my mouth he sounds like peace and hope.”

He is *“God walking in our shoes, clarifying his will for personkind, demonstrating divine love, washing away the guilt of our sinful nature and demonstrating life after life on earth.”*

Jesus is my safe, secure, loving presence.

Jesus is the one who teaches me how do deal with money and power. He calls me to be honest and to be a great stewardship with my resources.

He is Love. Great sacrifice for us. Love. Forgive others. Love.

He is my role model for living; THE example of what one person can do to “make a difference” in this world; a true “child of God”; focused in his work.

He is the one who challenges me daily to care for the poor and relate in healthy ways to my neighbor – that would mean everyone!

Peace, promise, challenger, sender, often where we don’t want to go, joy, forgiveness, Yeshua – “The Name Above All Names,” Beautiful Savior, glorious Lord, Emmanuel, God is with us, Blessed Redeemer, Living Word, Presence, Restoration, healing and hope, Safety in the dark, when death and fear overwhelms, Servant, Friend, “Keeper of the lonely, lost and forgotten ones; Justice exemplified and wrapped in grace; Blessing of the Living God, with us now and always.”

He is Everything!

One of our members who has battled through cancer twice, writes these words:

“When I hear Jesus' name, I immediately think of a young white man with long brown hair and white flowing robes. I think of him as surrounded by a group of people, outside in a green meadow. The people are comforted by him, uplifted by him and feel safe with him by their side. And those are the feelings I associate with him.

“This has made a difference in my life because no matter what I am going through, I do not feel alone. I may be alone in a room

physically, and, especially during my second bout with cancer, feel abject as I stare at my bald head and feel the chemo poison flowing through my veins, but I do not feel alone: I feel comforted, uplifted and safe. This holds true today as I look at my head (almost!) full of hair and feel strength and life coursing through my veins. For me, Jesus equals being comforted, being uplifted and being safe.”

Another member shared that when she was a child facing one of the worst days of her childhood with family was fighting and hurting one another on Christmas Day – no less with lies, profanity, violence all around her . . . and when Jesus had all but been lost to her and certainly was not present for his birthday celebration, she went into a room alone and laid on a bed which didn't feel like her bed, it didn't feel safe. There she laid weeping hysterically all night long and wondering where God was in all of this . . . She writes:

I knew my Bible stories, but I don't remember if I was thinking of them or not. Anyway, I looked out the window, and I saw the star that led the wise men to the holy family, and I knew that the holy family and the wise men had made a long and difficult journey through the desert, and I decided I would watch that star all night and think about the baby Jesus.

*I watched and I watched and I watched that star.
I still know exactly what that star looked like,
and I thought about the holy family – especially Jesus.
As I watched that star, God let me know that God would protect me,
and the star comforted me,
and I felt the miracle of peace and hope of the Christmas story
of an innocent baby born to this poor couple in a desert place,
that the star guided them all to this baby that gave hope to the world
– hope for peace and kindness.*

*PEACE PEACE PEACE
HOPE HOPE HOPE*

End of story. Beginning of my conscious relationship with the Holy Trinity.

Cori Rowley wrote a few days after the birth of her son, Wyeth,

“This answer would have been very different before we had Wyeth. The day he was born I felt like I was constantly in prayer. I was constantly asking God and Jesus to help me have faith.

“When I hear ‘Jesus,’ I think of warmth, I think of trust, I think of loving hands that no matter who you are reach out in helping, loving, selfless fashion.

“These thoughts of Jesus helped me push past my fears, to have faith that His spirit would guide medical staff. These thoughts also allowed me to find such an amazing comfort in praying with Ben as I went into surgery.

“Our entire experience at Mt Carmel East I felt as though Jesus was embodied by the people helping us, before, during and after Wyeth's delivery. Because of this I am grateful. I am blessed. I am full of hope for our little family's future.”

*Love,
Cori*

You see, Jesus is living proof! If you don't believe me, ask our members. Ask Wythe as a cord was tight around his neck as he was being born in June and he is now healthy and happy. If you don't believe me, ask a little girl whose Christmas was in ruins and she lived to tell the story of star moving through the night sky that saved her life. If you don't believe, ask our twice cancer surviving member who saw through her darkest days a Savior who protected, comforted and healed her.

If you don't believe any of them, ask Liz Cook who in the midst of battling cancer, wrote to me Friday:

“We are excited to begin your sermon series on Jesus with you this Sunday – and I meant to tell you earlier, I am fine with your bringing me out of anonymity. . . . I don't mind letting people know that Jesus walks right into surgery or an examination with me whenever I have to face a health trial! Thanks be to God!

And if you don't believe Liz, ask me. When I was nine years old, I was drowning in the Atlantic Ocean. I had been swept out by a strong undertow and could not find my footing, water instead of air was filling my lungs. I was panicking and began to pray. As I called upon the name of Jesus to save me, my brother arrived, put a hold around my chest and pulled me to safety. Jesus was on my lips and in my heart and he sent my brother to save my life. I have never panicked in prayer again. But every day since, my living proof of God has been the saving, loving, embracing, strong presence of Jesus who showed up in the form of my big brother 46 years ago this month.

If you don't believe my living proof of Jesus, remember Barbara's "Everything" and Dr. Schweitzer's mystical "yes."

May you find in Jesus your own living proof as you enter this week to serve him. Amen.

Copyright 2013, First Congregational Church, UCC