

# “Silent Lamb, Silent Sheep”

*“But Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger.” John 8:6a*



**Matt Wolfington**  
Pastor

*“But Jesus still made no reply, and Pilate was amazed.” Mark 15:4*

*“What I tell you in the dark, speak in the daylight; what is whispered in your ear, shout it from the housetops.” Matthew 10:27*

Scene 1: The woman is caught in the act of adultery and publicly brought before Jesus by the religious leaders of his day. Normally, the leaders didn't even pay attention to her or what she did. But she is a pawn in an attempt to trap Jesus. The scene is harsh and loud as the spectacle is created. He knows what the strict interpretation of the law is. He knows that they know he is not going to approve her stoning. Will he stone one of those whom he possibly ate dinner with or greeted on the street? Or will he appear to condone her behavior, therefore encouraging breaking of the laws of Moses? Jesus simply doodles on the ground. He responds with “he that is without sin cast the first stone” and then returns to doodling. At the comparative silence of Jesus (he did say something), the religious leaders leave, having been caught in their own trap.

Scene 2: The religious leaders thrust Jesus before the Roman governor, just as they had thrust the woman before him in the previous scene. The atmosphere is louder and more chaotic. This time the trap is both for Jesus and Pilate. By falsely setting up Jesus for sedition charges, Pilate is put in the position of enforcing or not enforcing Roman law and authority. To the obviously trumped up charges, Jesus is silent – and Pilate is bewildered.

Scene 3: Jesus prepares his disciples for their first major missionary effort, giving them authority “to drive out evil spirits and heal every disease and sickness.” He warns them of their controversial task and that they eventually would be persecuted and possibly killed. They are to bring out that which is hidden and proclaim what is whispered in their ears.

About the things that religious leaders of his day were loud, Jesus was silent. And about the things that Jesus was loud, the religious leaders were silent. If we, today, were to take polls in most Sunday morning sanctuaries, asking the question, “What are Christians the most concerned about?”, what would we discover?

The hot buttons of our day, by what I hear preached in services and on television are homosexuality, abortion, biblical interpretation, war, evangelism, the survival of the Church and the challenge of other religions. Most of the topics represented in those concerns were common in Jesus day as well, but, with the exception of evangelism, he said very little about them.

At the same time, why does the church not become loud about the things Jesus did: advocacy for the poor, the disabled and the outsiders in society, hypocrisy in religion, and the promotion and demonstration of the kingdom of God on the earth? On one hand we have a silent lamb, Jesus; and on the other hand, we have silent sheep, the Church.

The pulpit and Sunday School Jesus, as well as the Jesus of political campaigns is often a caricature of Jesus that is far from the Jesus of the gospels. He has been reduced to simplest terms, an “easy answers” Jesus. We live in confusing times of rapid change and high risk. Simple is good. But is it Jesus? Jesus has been tamed, so as not to challenge the lifestyles, morals and politics of people. But is this Jesus, who is removed from the social, moral and political conflicts of our day the Jesus of the gospels? The strange thing is that in the name of “Christianity” we validate our social, moral and political viewpoints, when many of those viewpoints are ones on which Jesus is silent, or worse, on which Jesus speaks and acts in total opposition. The church properly is one that speaks loudly what Christ spoke loudly and is quiet where Christ was quiet. We are not that.

Between now and Easter I pray that we have a fresh encounter with the Jesus of the gospels and the first chapter of Acts. As Christian people, and as the church, this is the core of who we. This is not to discount the Old Testament because for one I find there the roots from which Jesus taught and acted. My seminary studies at Asbury this semester focus on the Old Testament. It is inspired of God, just as the gospels are. Both the Old and New Testaments are selectively used to justify our beliefs in morality and society and sometimes to even counter the other. Sometimes we just lump it all into “Christianity” and move on.

So if we are to use our Christianity as a basis and platform for who we are then we should ask this question: “What is a Christian?” For some, a Christian is someone who is loving, kind, and courteous. For others, to be Christian is to never strongly differ with others and never to make controversial decisions. That is to be “unChristian” because someone might be offended. A biblical reading of the gospels would show otherwise. For others, being Christian means following a conservative morality. If you are honest, upright, sexually chaste, and hard-working, then you are in harmony with Christ. To follow Christ does mean that...and a whole lot more. For still others, being Christian is about being open to all people and looking out for the least and lost in society. To follow Christ does mean that... and a whole lot more. For still others, being Christian is accepting Christ as Savior and experiencing a spiritual rebirth. To follow Christ does mean that... and a whole lot more.

Christian literally means “little Christ or Christ one.” A Christian is someone who believes in Jesus and follows his life and teachings. So the question then becomes, “Do the life and teachings of Jesus apply to all of life or just part of it?” Do they apply to our personal love lives, our government, or how we teach in public schools? Do the teachings apply to our marriages, our jobs, or how we raise our children? Some people insist that Jesus was apolitical. I maintain that while Jesus did not identify himself with the political parties of his day, he was seen as quite political, in a way we cannot relate. The claim that “Jesus Christ is Lord” was to make a statement over against the claim that Caesar was Lord. Nero even claimed the title of “king of kings and lord of lords.” Belief in the apolitical Jesus is convenient because then we don’t have to put his life and teachings against the sticky political issues of our day.

At the same time, others claim that the life and teachings of Jesus are socially outdated. They rightfully note that many of the social problems faced today are not the same as those in first century Rome. So, do the life and teachings of Jesus have nothing to say about sexual ethics, poverty, life vs. life issues, marriage, justice and fairness, etc? The socially obsolete Jesus is just as convenient as the apolitical Jesus, for then we don’t have to listen to the confrontation his life and teachings have with our desire for free choice. Biblically, we fall into the trap the book of Judges describes in “everyone did what was right in his own eyes.”

There are two hypotheses in our church today that I believe are a trap for all Christians:

**Hypothesis:** If people have a born-again experience of God’s love in Jesus Christ, they will change the world.

**Truth:** The problem is that people can be born again and be personally transformed without making a measurable difference in their world.

**Hypothesis:** If we get born-again God-fearing leaders in place, then the world can change for the better.

**Truth:** Tragically, human beings are in charge of this physical world and therefore it will always be a mess. People everywhere use religious language to justify their agenda. Some countries will agree and others will not. Some days political parties will work together and some days they will not. Common sense also says that the most religious and/or most popular leader is not always the most gifted for the position.

Hear me church: The first hypothesis turns out to be Pharisaical. If we can reform the people's faith, they will automatically change society. The second turns out to be like the Sadducees. The secret is to co-opt the government so we can make our difference from the inside. Both strategies are doomed to failure, for, in the end, they ask Christ to follow us, rather than us to follow Christ. It is worth remembering that it was a coalition of the Pharisees and Sadducees who co-opted the Roman government in the crucifixion of Jesus.

I believe that the life and teachings of Jesus are for the whole of our life and not just part of it. Jesus' vision of the kingdom of God for this world is still the Christian's pacesetter for witness and behavior, personally and socially. Jesus is either for all of life or he is for none of it. For me, that means we cannot conveniently isolate Jesus from any of the issues of daily life. Furthermore, it means taking the life and teachings of Jesus much more seriously than we do. For some issues, struggling with Jesus will allow fresh answers to emerge. For other issues, his life and teachings will make situations more difficult.

I am a born-again, spirit-filled Christian. I have been so of my own free will since I was 12 years old. Yet the question I have today for myself and you, is that if we claim that meeting Jesus, who is our Lord and Savior, as central to who we are, why are we not making Christ and his teachings the center of what we say and do? It is time to begin truly following Jesus! But beware, following Jesus has never been safe nor has following Jesus meant keeping the status quo. Safety and security are not what Christ has promised. And for the Church, that's a problem. There is a real sense that the biggest problem the Church has...is Jesus.

We are not here to allow each other to remain the same today as we were yesterday. We are to be transformed. We are to follow the vision Christ has set before us, both as a community of Christ and as individuals. I am not leading you to a mission and vision of what every other church is doing. We are to be unique for Jesus and be bold for change. Are you ready to be challenged? Are you ready to be changed? Are you ready for.....anything and everything?

Today, I declare 2007 as the year of our Lord, Jesus Christ in this community of believers called St. Luke's Southwest of which you are a part of and many more will join. Folks, this church has set sail for our future in Christ and pray that for you personally as well. We are moving forward and remember, yesterday is gone so there is no turning back!