

January 23, 2022

Third Sunday After the Epiphany

“Being Redefined”

Luke 4:16-30

Our modern culture is way too comfortable with redefining things. Terms such as “racist”, “offended”, “protest”, “insurrection” and even “democracy” have been twisted to mean things they didn’t mean just a decade ago. Scientifically measurable and provable truths such as male and female can be redefined to a plethora of genders simply because somebody feels like doing so. Human life has been redefined to zygote, fetus or whatever it takes to make it acceptable to murder an unborn child if he or she is inconvenient.

All of this causes confusion, uncertainty and chaos, complicating and obfuscating what are in reality simple truths and definitions. And in many cases, these redefinitions act as cloaks for what is truly idiotic at best and downright evil at worst.

Many folks on both sides of the political isle are shaking their heads at this tomfoolery. We in the Biblical Christian church especially rail against this because a great deal of what is being redefined is the very design of Almighty God plainly laid out in both nature and Holy Scripture. We look at these redefinitions and become righteously indignant.

I’m not saying that’s wrong, but I do think today’s Gospel lesson should serve to warn us about being hypocrites, self-righteously condemning society’s habit of redefining the world while we practice doing the same thing, but with He through whom the world was created.

Why is Jesus rejected by the folks in His hometown of Nazareth? Because the truth which Jesus claims about Himself does not fit the way they have come to define Him. “*Is not this Joseph’s son?*” Their experience and understanding of Jesus is not as divine Messiah but as carpenter’s son. Truth is truth; Jesus is the Messiah of Isaiah’s prophecy come to give sight to the blind, bring liberty to those captive to Satan and proclaim good news to poor, miserable sinners. But the Nazarenes find Him offensive because He doesn’t sweet-talk them and do what they want. Ultimately they reject Him to the point of trying to toss Him off a cliff! Obviously, Jesus didn’t fit their definition of Messiah so He had to go.

Do we redefine Jesus? I would say Yes, we have a horrible habit of doing so by happenstance. Worse yet, I think a lot of Christians make redefining Jesus more than a practice, they make it their reality despite the plain truth of who Jesus really is.

Last week I talked about how folks do this by redefining Jesus as the good times turning water into wine guy. No, Jesus’s mission is not to make life great, healthy and happy in the here and now. His mission is to be the Messiah Isaiah foretells saving humanity from sin, death and condemnation. But folks reject that Jesus and redefine Him as the Savior who is going to give me my best life now.

But we can err in that direction also, redefining Jesus solely as the forgiveness of sins guy by acting as if my life is mine and I live it, messing up in my sins, but then I show up on Sunday and get my ticked punched by Jesus. Ding—sins forgiven! Jesus has done His job and now I go back to another week of *my* life. We redefine Jesus to be in the “forgiveness” box and reject Him if He steps too far beyond that.

Young Martin Luther went totally the other direction, redefining Jesus as the righteous and holy judge, bringing anger and wrath for those sinners who fail to live up to His perfect standard. Folks still do that today, defining Christ as the God who hates all the fun stuff and is

just looking to drop the hammer on anybody who steps out of line. Jesus is redefined as their enemy and thus they naturally reject Him.

I could go on and on. Jesus as buddy. Jesus as counselor. Jesus as life coach. Jesus as emergency lifeline. Jesus as mystery. Jesus as boogie man to keep the kids in line. People redefine Jesus in all sorts of ways. But what is the truth? What is the proper definition of Jesus?

Jesus is the God of creation who humbled Himself into human skin to die and rise that you might eternally dwell in His eternal kingdom! Go ahead, try and wrap your head around that definition. You can't. God is too big, beyond, above and outside of your context to be defined by you, *His* human creation. Our mistake from the get-go is trying to define our maker. The creation doesn't define the Creator! The Creator defines the creation.

Jesus defines you!

There is the truth we really don't want to accept. There is the nasty dose of reality that so tempts us to reject this Jesus of Nazareth.

The truth is that Jesus in our Holy Baptism places His name on us, declares us to be His to define as a holy child of God. Faith in Christ surrenders all of our authority to His and leaves us simply accepting this undefinable God of love to be our Lord, King and master.

Our willful self-aggrandizing sinful nature does not like this; rebels against it. Just as the townsfolk of Nazareth believed they knew how things stood and would not accept Jesus's claim to Messiahship, we are daily tempted to reject Jesus's claim to authority over us and toss Him off a cliff by redefining Him to be something less than our Lord. Christians are happy to call Him "the Lord" so long as that doesn't define Him as "my Lord", as in He is the Master and I am the slave.

This is not the earthly culture. This is us; believing Christians who do this stuff. Just think about all those teachings of Jesus from which we try to find a righteous loophole. Love your enemies. Pick up your cross and follow me. Count others more significant than yourself. Humility and serving of the lowly. Giving generously of your time, talent and treasure. We may have moments where we do this joyfully and willingly, but other times, maybe most times, not so much. It's certainly not our default mode.

We talk a lot about surrendering to Christ Jesus, but what does that really mean? A big part of it is allowing Jesus to be the God/man Savior who defines you and not railing against that by trying to redefine Him in ways that fit your desired lifestyle. And when you think about this carefully, this is most certainly how you want things to be.

How does Jesus redefine you? Well, you were dead in your trespasses yet He has made you alive to God. You were under the wrath of God, yet you have been redefined as cherished child. You were God's enemy, yet now you stand an heir of His kingdom. In your rebellion you defined yourself as damned. In Christ you are now the redeemed of the Lord.

How did Jesus do this? In a way He did it by redefining Himself as you. The divine, glorious and holy Son of God redefined Himself as a human Son of Man, redefined Himself as the cursed of all sin, redefined Himself by the cross as the condemned under the wrath of God. He took your definition of "damned" upon Himself, that you would be redefined by His compassion as "beloved of God".

Christ's redefinition of you is a very good thing, so don't be resisting it. Daily appeal to your Holy Baptism into Christ, and be redefined as Him. He is love. He is the humble and suffering servant who counted you and all mankind as worthy of sacrifice. Let what He has made you to be by His blood altogether trump your fallen nature's evil efforts to redefine Him.

Be redefined by Jesus and strive to live in that new reality as forgiven, holy, a slave of the King and an heir of the kingdom.
Amen.