

The Invitation of Jesus

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[0 : 0 0] Good morning. Sorry, it's me not leaning in close enough. Good morning. It's good to be here with you. This Sunday is Transfiguration Sunday, and this past week I realized I actually preached on Transfiguration Sunday last year, and so for a hot second I thought, I'm going to just bring out my old sermon and just recycle it, but I didn't. I have something different on my mind for this Sunday.

Ash Wednesday is this coming week. I made a joke earlier that it's on a Wednesday this year, which we should all keep in mind, and it's the start of Lent. Lent is one of my favorite seasons, which actually sounds a bit odd.

Advent is my other favorite season because I love the sense in Advent that Jesus is coming into the world and it's all going to be okay. But I love Lent because for me it's become a season of going deep with the Lord.

Lent for me is definitely about repentance and definitely about giving something up, but more than that, it's about deeply meditating on Jesus' death on the cross and what he accomplished on the cross.

And deeply meditating on the cross is profoundly linked for me with going deep with the Lord. There are some really beautiful liturgies that were developed for the occasion of Lent. So I'm going to talk about intimacy or going deep with Jesus.

[1 : 2 7] And intimacy or being deep with Jesus is one of the most important things that we can experience as human beings. Intimacy with Jesus is knowing Jesus as a real person and not just about him.

It's knowing what his presence is like, what it's like when he speaks to you, or when you are hearing from him. And so this morning, to prepare us for Lent, to prepare us maybe for a season of going deeper with Jesus, of being more intimate with the Lord, I want to lead us through a kind of walkthrough of two different keys that are a little bit meditative in nature to help us with being closer and going deeper with Jesus.

So key number one, identity. So it's so important to have a heart level knowing of who we are. We all carry many identities all at the same time.

Maybe it's parent, daughter, son, sibling. Maybe it's an identity related to our skin color. Maybe it's a work-related identity. Maybe it's about where we're from.

Maybe it's a work-in-law. The identity that we need, though, that we need our hearts to be anchored in, is a multifaceted identity that's revealed in Scripture. So we'd all probably say that we know we're made in the image of God, we're loved by God, that we're a child of God, and these are all true and powerful and are not to be dismissed.

[2 : 5 2] But I want to read through some Scriptures about your identity that you may not be as familiar with, but they're definitely there in Scripture. So this is going to be a little bit of a participation moment.

I'm going to read these Scriptures, and I'd like to ask you to, as I read them, to try and receive them. I want to ask you to notice how you react inside when you hear these things.

What do you feel? What comes to mind when you hear these things? Does any of what I read feel true? And what maybe doesn't feel true, and why? So I'm going to read through these.

I'm not going to stop to say book and chapter and verse, because that's going to get clunky, but just know that everything I'm reading is all Scripture. So settle in, and let me read these words from Scripture about who you are.

Before the creation of the world, God knew you and loved you. God chose you in Christ from before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love.

[3 : 58] In love, he predestined you to be adopted as his beloved son or daughter. When God formed you and brought you into the world, he made you in his image.

So you are of him, and you resemble him. Jesus died for your sin because you're valuable and loved by him. And yet more, you are crucified with Christ.

You are dead to sin, dead to the world, and with Christ you've died to the elemental spirits of the universe. That's Paul. Your old self is crucified with Christ.

You are raised up with Christ, a new creation. The old is gone. The new has come. You are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, prepared beforehand for you to walk in.

Before the creation of the world, you are in God's presence, and you are good and meant to do good. You are seated in Christ in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority, and power and dominion, in this age and the one to come.

[5 : 05] You have authority over the demonic. You are in Christ, and Christ is in you, the hope of glory. You are united with Christ, and one with him in spirit.

Nothing can separate you from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus the Lord. That means you are loved by the Lord, forgiven by the Lord, accepted by him.

You belong to him, and you are safe in him. Now, I could go on. The scriptures have so much to say. The Lord has so much to say about who you are.

And it's easy to think that one of these other identities that I mentioned earlier is our truest and deepest identity, but it's not. What I read is who you truly and most deeply are.

Having this key in your hand is the first key to intimacy with the Lord. It is the Lord's words, the Lord's truth about who you are, and being grounded in that is an important part of being grounded in him.

[6 : 09] And as much as he has to say about who you are, he also has a lot to say about how he feels about you, and that's the second key. So let me turn to that. There's something about story that speaks to our hearts in a way that direct speech just doesn't.

And I think it's why Jesus spoke in parables and analogies so much. You can say to somebody, God loves you, and that's true, and those words can go deep into the heart, but those words don't fully capture the intensity of God's love for you.

There's a story that came to mind as I was preparing this. It's the story of the prodigal son. We all know this story. It's much loved, much preached about, lots of books written about it.

But there's this one part in the story where the younger son's coming up to the house, coming up the road towards his father's estate. He's uncertain of how he will be received given how deeply he's rejected and humiliated his dad, how much he sinned with his dad's inheritance and life's work that was gifted to him before he left.

He has nothing left. He hopes only to be a servant because he thinks being a son is over and will never be possible again. The dad's response is everything.

[7 : 22] He sees his son, and when he does, he starts running to him. When he gets to him, he hugs and kisses him, overjoyed that his son is back safe with him again. The intensity of the dad's love is visible.

The dad is compelled by this emotional love and tenderness and grace. He can't help his reaction, and he doesn't even try and hide it, and he probably couldn't if he tried.

He has an overwhelming emotional love for his son, and that is exactly how the father feels about you, who knew you and loved you from before the foundation of the world, and he's wanted nothing more than to have you back with him again this whole time.

He's not mad at you. He aches to have you with him. Jesus, everywhere he went, was compelled by his love to stop and heal and teach and forgive and cast out demons and many, many other things.

One of my favorite stories is when Jesus was at a synagogue, and he saw this woman bent over for 18 years, and he knew that to heal her during the service would make the leaders of the synagogue angry at him and would energize opposition to him.

[8 : 33] He could have said to her, you know, come up quietly to her and said, look, you've waited 18 long years and another 45 minutes won't kill you. Meet me behind the synagogue and I'll take care of this.

But he didn't. He couldn't hold himself back. He was compelled by an overwhelming love to reach out and set her free right then, right there, even at cost.

And that is exactly how Jesus feels about you when you come to him with your pain. So these two keys, your identity, knowing how Jesus feels about you, what happens when they come together.

I'm going to be a little bit personal here. I'm going to take a risk. This is some of what I've experienced, so I'm going to share it. I'm a little nervous to do so. But here, these two keys, identity and knowing in your heart how Jesus feels about you, unlocks a place of intimacy with the Lord.

When I'm anchored in who I am and in how the Lord feels about me, I become incredibly sensitive to the Lord's presence and his voice. My heart opens to the Lord and I invite him to come in more and more.

[9 : 47] My prayers flow with the leading of the Spirit. I find myself able to go to what has been described by others as a secret place of worship.

It's a place where you're able to go with the Lord in worship, a deep place in his presence. It's a place of greater and greater surrender and yieldedness as the Lord and his presence does something to my heart.

Tears come in this place. Not sad tears, not happy tears. That sometimes can happen. But what people have described as spirit tears. Praise and tears pour out at the feet of the one who loves me and gave himself for me.

And I know myself in that place in a way unlike any other way in those moments. So, to be a little bit practical, what do you do to know Jesus more intimately?

What do you do with all this stuff? So, first, ask to know him. This sounds ridiculously obvious, but it's surprising how this one gets missed.

[10 : 59] Ask Jesus to make you to know him. Like, to really know him. What he is like. What he cares about. What his heart is like. Ask Jesus to make you to want to know him.

To long for his presence and his voice. Ask him to make you familiar with his voice and his presence so that you know that you know when he's speaking to you and when you're hearing from him.

Ask Jesus to show you how he feels about you. Take the risk. Ask him, honestly, how do you really feel about me, Jesus? I remember in seminary, someone told me about how God sees us through the lenses of Jesus.

And I remember thinking, that's horrible. Have I ever shared this? I felt like God was wearing Jesus goggles. And the thought was, God's wearing these Jesus goggles.

And if the goggles, and he sees me through Jesus, and therefore I'm loved and I'm accepted. He doesn't see me, the sinner. And my thought was, if those goggles ever slip off, I'm done.

[12 : 04] But that's false. That's bad theology. That's not how God feels about you. Ask Jesus to tell you how does he actually feel about you. No goggles involved.

You'll be amazed at how many times in Scripture the Lord answers his disciples' questions. And think about this. If you're a parent, how do you feel when your daughter or your son come to you and says, they want to know how you feel about them.

They want to know if you love them. And how do you feel in that moment? You love to tell them that you love them. And if your mom or your dad didn't seem to delight in telling you how they felt about you, it probably wounded you.

We're wired to hear the Lord tell us how he feels about us. And we're wired to tell people, the ones we love, how we feel about them. And it is your father's delight to do that for you.

So I want to ask you, this is another participation moment. Try something with me. It will take less than a minute. I want you to pray quietly inside.

[13 : 14] And I want you to say, whether you address God as father or Lord, you address God how you do, father or Lord, say this, I accept your love for me. I choose to be the one you love.

I choose to be your precious beloved daughter or son. So close your eyes and try that. Notice again how you felt when you said those things.

Was it hard to say? Did it feel true for you that maybe God could feel this way for you? Did it stir up anything that you want to pray about? The second action point, feed your heart on the scriptural words of your identity.

Meditate on the verses like the ones I read this morning. Ask the Lord to help your heart receive those truths. We've all been wounded in life. Our trust receptors get damaged. Ask the Lord to heal those so that you're able to hear and receive his words of love.

Practice what we did this morning. Read those verses out loud. Say things like, make it a conversation. Thank you, Lord, that I am united with you, one with you in spirit.

[14 : 33] Thank you that you are in me and I am in you. Thank you, Father. I'm a new creation in Christ. Let those scriptures become the start of a conversation you have with the Lord and see where he takes it.

One other thing I've found helpful over the years is to get with people who know Jesus' presence and voice. I remember one time I would volunteer at these healing prayer conferences and I always wanted to be the prayer minister.

I wanted to be the person that prayed with people and I would see God do powerful things. But I kept going to these and I kept getting assigned to be the catcher. So if you've ever gone to these kinds of conferences, this is where, you know, the prayer minister says, anybody who wants prayer, come forward and people line up.

And the prayer minister walks down the line and briefly stops and prays for people. And the catcher is behind the line because when the spirit, if when the spirit falls on that person, the person goes down and the catcher catches.

So I was like, why do I got to be the catcher? Like, I'm like in the back row. I don't want to catch people. And honestly, I was a little conflicted at times, right? Because, you know, I would stand behind somebody and I remember standing behind this really big dude and I was so conflicted.

[15:57] I was like, Lord, I want him to experience your spirit, but I don't want to die in the process. Like, so it's like, do you like just like, like, like middle, like give him like a middle dose or something?

Anyway, so I remember, so I was kind of grumpy, right? And afraid for my life at points. But as I started to, you know, you have to kind of keep pace with the prayer minister and I started to notice something happening.

I would stand behind somebody and I would kind of like, you know, anchor myself and then, and the prayer minister would pause and there's, you know, there's one prayer minister in particular that I was the catcher for a few times and she would pause and listen and, and I would start to get these pictures and I would start to get these thoughts and about things that were going on in the person's life.

And then the prayer minister would start to pray all those same things. And I realized after a while that being the catcher was actually me being schooled by the spirit and how to hear from the Lord.

I didn't know, I didn't recognize what was coming to me in pictures and words until I heard the seasoned prayer minister who I knew could hear from the Lord saying some of the same things.

[17:07] And I started to realize that's how the Lord sounds. This is what it, this is what it's like when you get a picture. So get with people that you know can hear from the Lord and they can help you learn how to hear too.

My last practical point, trim your spiritual sails and expect the Lord to show up. So what do I mean by that? So an analogy I once came across was from sailing.

We are all like, in sailing you have ships that are out on the ocean and when they hit a dead calm there's no wind, there's no waves. The ship just sits there, can't move, can't do anything.

And living by the spirit is being like a sailing ship. We have sails and we want to catch wind. But sometimes we're in a season where there's just no wind at all. So what do you do?

Sailors never quite knew what to do either so they would always keep the sails up ready to catch any wind. They would keep the sails trimmed. And you remember Jesus' analogy about the Holy Spirit from John 3 being like the wind.

[18:10] You never see where the spirit comes from or where it goes. It just comes. So keeping your sails trimmed by the sailors was an act of expectant faith. So how do we keep our sails trimmed?

When I'm in a dead calm, some of the things I turn to are some of the spiritual disciplines. These come from Scripture and the early church. My go-to are prayer, Scripture, Eucharist, fasting, worship.

And these are the things you do to keep your sails trimmed, ready for the Holy Spirit, the wind to blow. So I use the morning office from the Book of Common Prayer. It gives me words to pray in Scriptures.

I fast to cultivate a heart that hungers for the Lord, that's repentant and surrendered. And I worship. One of my favorite people who writes on the spiritual life is a guy named Graham Cook.

And he talks about seasons of manifest and hiddenness. Seasons of manifest is when God shows up all the time. He's active and it's easy to feel his presence and hear his voice.

[19 : 16] And the hidden seasons are the opposite. Prayer is dry. The Eucharist doesn't feel special. The question's not where is God, but what's he doing? And in those seasons of hiddenness, the Spirit does a deep, deep work in us.

And the spiritual disciplines are the ways that I actively seek to align myself with what the Lord is doing deep inside of me even when I can't see it. And it positions myself in expectant faith for when the wind's going to blow.

So I ask you to remember these two keys of intimacy and knowing how Jesus feels about you and how they can unlock together your closeness and your ability to go deep with the Lord.

Remember these practical steps because they'll help you when things feel dry and help you position yourself to have for the Lord when he wants to share his presence with you and speak to you.

And if you want to talk about any of this, of course, I'm always happy to do that. And there's lots of us here who would be happy to pray with you and talk with you about that. So let me pray. Lord Jesus, Lord, as we go into Lent, I ask that you visit us powerfully by your Spirit to speak to us, to show us how to best connect with you, show us what tools, Lord, we can use to position ourselves before you, to make our hearts open before you, Lord, so we can have more of you and your Spirit.

[20 : 54] Lord, so that we are more receptive to you and the deep work of transformation that you want to do in us. Lord, I ask that this season of Lent would be an amazing season for all of us of quiet, deep moments with you, of hearing your voice and knowing your presence in fresh and new ways that we'd never experienced before.

Lord, show us who we are in deeper ways and speak your love to us, to each of us in the depths of our heart so we really, really know how you feel about us. I thank you, Lord.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.