

"A Different Kind of Jesus"
Revelation 1:12-18

April 28,2019

2nd Sunday of Easter

We seem to be a people who are in love with that which is "cute". For example, kittens and puppies are cute. Therefore, pictures and videos of kittens and puppies will bring forth responses of "Oooohh" and "Ahhh." Full-grown cats and dogs may still be liked, but they are no longer cute. Therefore, pictures and videos of full-grown cats and dogs don't bring forth the same kind of sentimental response. This love affair with cuteness is demonstrated in our celebration of Easter. Baby bunnies and little yellow chicks are cute and therefore are given as gifts by some for Easter. I highly doubt whether old rabbits and full-grown chickens would have the same attraction.

Why is this? Why this difference in reaction to that which is cute from that which is not? In addition to being more aesthetically pleasing, cute things, usually because of their small size, can be more easily tolerated and controlled. Kittens and puppies, bunnies and chicks, can all be more easily held and controlled than full-grown cats and dogs, rabbits and chickens. Things can really change when you go from the young and the cute to the old and not so cute.

Things have really changed around here, too. Last Sunday, we had a great celebration of the resurrection of Jesus Christ which was attended by many people, certainly more than on a normal Sunday. Yet, in our church and in churches throughout the land, things will change after Easter. Attendance goes down. Interest in Bible Class and events such as Family Night wanes. The excitement and thrill of what we have celebrated at Easter goes down. Is this only because the weather has finally gotten better and people want to spend more time outside? Possibly. Or, does the "cuteness" factor play a role in all of this?

Why do I say that? Maybe "cute" is not the right word. Perhaps "desirability" is a better word. We like the cute Jesus. Jesus as a baby in a manger is a popular perception of Him. After all, who doesn't like babies? Who doesn't find babies to be cute?

Another example of this is the image of Jesus as the Good Shepherd. Jesus as a kind Shepherd who cuddles with his sheep is a popular perception of Him. Who doesn't like cuddling? And, despite what the Bible says about sheep, who doesn't think that sheep are cute?

Even the story of Lent and Easter combined to give us the image of a man, Jesus, who gets a raw deal, suffers tremendously, dies on the cross, and then rises from death to life again. We may not consider this Jesus to be "cute", but we view Him with pity. This is the "poor Jesus" who was raised from the dead to make everything right again for Him.

We like these images of Jesus because they are cute and desirable images of him. They are also images of Jesus which do not threaten us and which we feel we may be able to manage. We may feel stronger than a baby, more authoritative than a meek Shepherd, or stronger than a crucified criminal, even if he did rise again from the dead.

The story is in these images make us feel good and happy. Thus, they are very popular. It is why we have so called “Christmas/Easter Christians” (those people who attend church only on Christmas and Easter) rather than Advent and Lent Christians. Christmas and Easter are happy. Advent and Lent are more somber.

However, starting today, there appears a new kind of Jesus. This Jesus (of whom we read in our epistle lesson for today) is much different than the one we are used to. He is not cute, nor does he make us feel good. Maybe attendance goes down after Easter because this Jesus is not quite as appealing as the one I described before. There is nothing non-threatening about this Jesus. In fact, it is just the opposite. This Jesus inspires fear and threatens judgment, as apostle John experienced when he first saw Him.

John had been given a revelation by God of that which was about to come. His encounter with Jesus is anything but cute and desirable. John describes the context of Jesus’ appearance and John’s initial response to Jesus’ voice,

I, John, your brother and partner in the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance that are in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. I was in the Spirit on the Lord’s day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet saying, “Write what you see in a book and send it to the seven churches, to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea.”

As far as John knew, he was alone in exile on Patmos. When he heard a voice address him, it must have frightened John extremely and shocked him greatly. However, that was nothing compared to what John felt when he saw who it was speaking to him. He says,

Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me, and on turning I saw seven golden lampstands, and in the midst of the lampstands one like a son of man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash around his chest. The hairs of his head were white, like white wool, like snow. His eyes were like a flame of fire, his feet were like burnished bronze, refined in a furnace, and his voice was like the roar of many waters. In his right hand he held seven stars, from his mouth came a sharp two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining in full strength. When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead.

This was Jesus, but not Jesus in any way that we have ever seen him. The Jesus we meet after the resurrection and ascension is not cute; not a Jesus meek and mild; not a Jesus whom we can feel comfortable with like on Christmas; not a Jesus with whom we can pat on the head as on Easter until we see him at the next feel good holiday on Christmas. This is entirely different.

Really stop and consider in your minds the appearance of Jesus here. This Jesus is clothed in a long flowing robe with a golden sash, the garments of the great high priest. His physical appearance is threatening. His hair is bright white like wool or

snow. His eyes shined like flames of fire. His feet glowed like brass being refined in a furnace. His voice was very loud like the rushing of great waters. In his hand, He held seven stars and out of his mouth came a sharp two-edged sword. His face was bright like the sun shining at full strength. This is someone you don't want to mess with. This is not Jesus, the baby; not Jesus, the meek and mild Good Shepherd; nor Jesus, the suffering Savior. This is Jesus, mighty God and coming Judge.

John had seen this before – on the Mount of Transfiguration – and was terrified there as well. Although John had seen Jesus reveal only a glimpse of his eternal glory there, he was now seeing the full load of the Divine Majesty. As a sinful human being, John realized that he could not stand before this holy and righteous God. So, he fell at his feet in terror as if he were a dead man. He was that afraid.

This Jesus would frighten us as much as he frightened John, if not more so. His appearance is imposing and is not the cute appearance with which we traditionally think of Jesus. He is not visually appealing. He would not make a good illustration for the cover of a children's bulletin.

This Jesus exudes power and glory. He is not the weak and humble baby of Bethlehem; not the meek and mild good Shepherd; not the suffering and dying Savior on the cross. Although we might claim a desire to see God in his power and glory, we don't know what we are asking for. This Jesus is not someone who can be controlled and manipulated, paid attention to only on Christmas and Easter, but ignored the rest of the year.

This Jesus is no longer the world's Savior, but it's Judge. He shall condemn sin, not save it. He will punish sin, not forgive it. He will damn people to hell, not save them for heaven. As the King of the universe, he will bring all evil to an end.

This forces us to confront our sin and God's judgment upon that sin. This is neither popular nor pleasant. Since there is no baby Jesus, no good Shepherd Jesus, and not even the weak Jesus who came back to life, but only this great and mighty Lord, it is no wonder that, after the story has been told up to Easter, that people disappear because they've heard all of the cute and sweet story. They don't want any part of this Jesus who judges their sin, condemns their sin, and threatens punishment for their sin.

Yet, when John falls at His feet as though he were dead, Jesus lays His right hand on him, saying, "Fear not." Although everything points toward fear, Jesus says, "Fear not!" This "new" and "different" Jesus is, in reality, the same Jesus as before. He is the baby from Bethlehem. He is the Good Shepherd. He is the suffering Savior who died the cross. But the game has changed. How Jesus operates is different.

You may remember learning in catechism class about Jesus' "State of Humiliation." (I know our class remembers because we just studied it a couple months ago.) Jesus was never really the cute, meek and mild, weak person that we thought him to be. He was, is, and always shall be the Almighty God. However, according to His State of Humiliation, Jesus did not always or fully use His divine powers. Had he not done this, He would never been able to save us for no person could ever arrest, torture or kill the Son of God. Rather, out of His great love for you and me, Jesus voluntarily chose not to use the full extent of His power to rescue or save Himself. He

allowed himself to be humble; to take on the form of the servant; be obedient to His Father's will; and to suffer death, even death on a cross, in order to forgive your sin and win for you everlasting life. He only looked weak and lowly.

But now all things have changed. According to His State of Exultation, from now on, Jesus will always and fully use His Divine Power. Although Jesus' appearance may be different and possibly more frightening, His love for you hasn't changed nor has His work to save you changed. What has changed is how Jesus will accomplish this. It will be by power, not weakness. As His appearance on earth reflected His State of Humiliation, so now His appearance reflects His State of Exultation. And this is good for us."

Jesus calms John's' fear and ours by saying, "Fear not, I am the first and last, and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of of Death and Hades." We do not fear our relationship with God, that it will end or somehow be destroyed. He assures you and me that, not only is His creation eternal and endless, but so is His relationship with His people in the Church. Because of Jesus' death on the cross and resurrection from the empty tomb, nothing will change between God and us. We are His children now and forever. We have His love and support now and forever.

We do not fear the threat of any power, philosophy, or false God which could do us harm. He assures you and me that he is "the Living One." This is a title used in the Old Testament to contrast the true God with all idols, which are dead, lifeless, and thus have no existence. Jesus is the one and only true God. He has no rivals. We have no fears.

We do not fear death itself for it cannot harm us, nor hold us. Jesus assures us that, not only did He die and become alive forever more, but He is in charge of life and death. He holds the keys of Death and Hades. He decides who shall die the eternal death and who shall escape Death and Hades to live forever in heaven. Since He has already declared us to be justified by grace through faith in Him and because He has the keys, we are assured that Death and Hades cannot hurt us or hold us, but we shall live forever with Him in Paradise.

Perhaps our greatest mistake in our celebration of Easter is that we tend to view Easter as the end of something. It is the end of Lent. It is the end of our special celebration. It has taken on the perception of the end of church for the summer. But Easter is not the end. Easter is but the beginning. It is the beginning of Christ's reign over the universe with all power as King and Lord. It is the beginning of our joy and confidence in our powerful Lord faith to control our future for our good. There is nothing wrong cute. However, cuteness may not be the most important characteristic to have as a Savior and a Son of God. It is certainly a trait which Jesus no longer has. There is a different kind of Jesus now. He is strong, not weak. He is in control, and not being controlled. He is living, not dead. He shall reign for ever and ever and we, with Him, will, too! Amen