

Title: “Are You Offended By Me?”

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Matthew 11:2-6

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Service Readings: Isaiah 35:3-6a, Matthew 11:2-6, John 10:22-30, 40-42

“And blessed is the one who is not offended by me.” This is what Jesus taught, but what did it mean to the people of his time and what does it mean to us, today?

Message:

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

Tomorrow is Thanksgiving and we will gather around a table and share a meal with friends and family – most of them we *want* to be associated with, but probably a few that we don't. But for those that we *do*, it is because of who they are and what they represent to us. They are parents who have cared for us since birth, or siblings that, although were occasionally annoying, have always supported and been there during those hard times in your life. They are the friends that you have grown up with, snuck out of the house with, and learned all of life's lessons with. All of these people have brought something into your life, and you wouldn't be who you are, or *where you are*, without them. They are your family. They are your friends. And you couldn't be more joyful to be connected to them.

I mention this because of how our passage from Matthew ends. I am going to read it again and invite you to open your bulletin to it and follow along with me because it all sounds positive until that final verse.

²Now when John heard in prison about the deeds of the Christ, he sent word by his disciples ³and said to him, “Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?” ⁴And Jesus answered them, “Go and tell John what you hear and see: ⁵the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them. ⁶And blessed is the one who is not offended by me.”

Now, place yourself in the sandals of those who heard Jesus speak. Hear these words as they would. Imagine that you were *witness* to the deeds by this man who claimed to be God in the flesh. How could you even begin to think that association with him would be offensive? Quite the contrary! He can heal the sick. He can raise the dead. He sounds like a person that *everyone* would want to know! Think back to your those around your Thanksgiving table. Could you even imagine being offended by any of them who had been so impactful in your life?

And yet, that's not how it plays out. Sure, he has his disciples who are happy to know and even follow him, but even *they* will flee when it seems Jesus isn't who he claims to be. When Peter denies three times that he knows Jesus, do you think he first reflects on all that he has witnessed over these prior three years? Does he even consider that just days ago he was witness to the resurrection of a dead man, Lazarus? It doesn't seem so. Instead, it seems that Peter becomes

offended to know him and even *disassociates* himself with Jesus – as if he no longer wants to follow a man who isn't living up to his expectations.

And what about the church leaders? They never associated themselves with him. They were clearly offended by him. But why? You see, they were waiting for the fulfillment of the signs from their Scripture, we call the Old Testament. They were expecting God to return. They were waiting for a biblical super hero –one that could restore their nation to greatness. They *wanted* an association with God, but on their own terms. So when Jesus came and ate with sinners, when he spoke to those of non-Jewish faith, and when he forgave the sins of those who asked, they saw an underdog, not a super hero. This is not the God that they were waiting for. And because they were *sure* that God would *never* present himself as a servant they closed their eyes to his miracles, and closed their ears to his teachings, and didn't even bother to consider his prophetic fulfillments.

You see, they were confident that *this humble, servant of a man*, could never be God. And as long as they were right, they could continue to wait for the promised messiah. But I think what they feared the most, what may have caused them the most anxiety and fed their appetite to send him to his death, was that they might be wrong. For if this man *truly was the son of God*, what would that mean for them? This reality would shake the entire foundation of their faith. For one thing, it would mean that the messiah they were waiting for was not planning on freeing them from Roman rule and not planning on making their people great above all others.

It would mean that they would be worshipping a messiah that didn't *conquer* others but *served* others, instead! And the thought of a God that focused on the sinful – the prostitutes, the adulterers, the tax collectors, and the non-jews.... Well that was repulsive! This is not what their God should look like, this is not how their God should act! That kind of God is a God worthy of offence, worthy of embarrassment.

This coming Sunday we will observe the first week of Advent. And that Wednesday we will begin our mid-week worship services in the morning and evening. This year we are going to explore the Old Testament scriptures that foretell the birth of Jesus. We'll discover through these passages the kind of messiah that God's nation had been waiting for and begin to understand how their expectations of him were formed. The series is called "Symbols of Salvation: Foretelling Christ's Birth." And as a side note there is a bible study that follows along with these messages.

But as we explore the Old Testament and discover Jesus foretold, and as we consider it through the eyes of the Jewish community, we are faced with the same question that those leaders were faced with: will we be offended to associate ourselves with him?

Now, for those sitting in church or watching from home, the answer may seem obvious. But it probably seemed obvious to Peter and the other disciples as well. So this season of Advent is a great time to set your initial answer aside and to really explore the question and its implications in more detail. What does it mean *for you* to recognize Jesus for who he truly is, for what he has done, and for what he now calls you to do? Do you truly want to be associated with him or does he cause you offence? And tonight is a great opportunity to contemplate this question because it is not as simple as imagining him sitting at your Thanksgiving table with the family. Being associated with him is more than just knowing him, or loving him, or even praying to him.

You see, when you associate yourself with him, you associate yourself with someone that, to the outside world, doesn't make a whole lot of sense. You attach yourself to a life of service to the least of these in the world. You feed the hungry, clothe the naked, house the homeless, and you do it all while proclaiming Jesus Christ. And you show the world that you do it, not out of obligation but out of love. You serve those in need because you love those in need; you love those in need because you recognize that Jesus first loved you. Serving becomes *a response* to how Jesus has served you. What other activity can expose your true heart to this world than loving the poor, the sinful, and the needy? What other activity can open you up to the criticisms of the world?

But association doesn't just stop with serving. It also means understanding that Jesus suffered for the sake of others and we should welcome the same thing. Not only did he take upon himself the punishment and the suffering for our sins, but he continues to share in our sufferings, even today. He *wants* to suffer alongside us; he *wants* us to be intimately involved in all that we are going through. And he wants us to do the same for those around us. And this is easy to do when those who suffer are those we already love, but what of those who would work against us, those who would wish us harm? He wants us to share in their suffering as well. He wants us to set aside all that we hold against them – their beliefs and their actions, and reach out to them wholeheartedly, in love and bring to them the message of Jesus. It is the only way that we will get through to them – we must first forgive them just as Christ has first forgiven us.

But being associated with Jesus means much more than *doing*. It also means trusting, completely in the work that he did on the cross. It means believing, really believing that when he willingly traveled to the cross, he carried with him your sins and mine and that when he suffered, both physically and spiritually, the wrath of God that was poured on him was the wrath that should have been poured out onto us. It means knowing that when Jesus said that it was finished, it truly was finished: he paid the price for our sins, he satisfied the wrath of God, and he won a victory of forgiveness for us.

Being associated with him means knowing this, trusting this, and placing our entire hope in this truth because we know that there is no other way to life with God apart from Jesus.

You see, being associated with him means all of this, and much more. It means being unashamed to call him our Lord and our Savior. It means more than just offering him a Thanksgiving plate of turkey and potatoes. It means living a life that is upside down to the way that the world would expect us to live. It means understanding that through our association with him we will receive everlasting life. And there is nothing offensive about that.

Please pray with me.

Lord, you are not ashamed or offended to call us your brothers and sisters, and you even came down from heaven and subjected yourself to humiliation by bearing our burdens on the cross. Lord, how can we ever be ashamed or offended by you? Fill us with strength to live a life that reflects your love towards us and that through our actions we can share your message of love with the rest of the world.

Amen.