

SERMON NOTES — December 22, 2024

Question of the Day: How can Jesus be considered God's son *and* God incarnate at the same time?

The answer once again confronts us with the shortcomings of how we have been taught to articulate the Gospel. I think our answers to this question have confused people more than help us to understand. A revitalization of the Gospel begins by grounding our 21st Century answers more in terms of the experience of the First Century apostles.

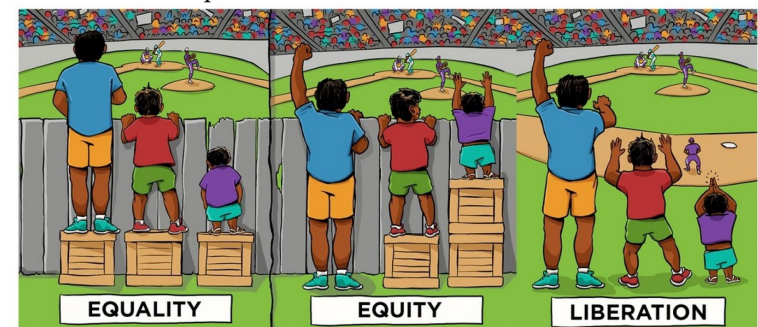
Number one: we have to understand that before the apostles could solve the 'Christmas problem,' they had to solve the 'Easter problem': a problem of what the Jewish Messiah represents. Why would God raise from the dead a crucified Jew from backwater Nazareth. His followers had hoped he was the Messiah, but being *crucified* by the Romans had killed that idea. Messiahs don't *get* crucified; they crucify. But what about those who experienced Jesus as risen from the dead? Does Easter mean we have to somehow rethink what happened on Good Friday? Did this mean, for example, that we had *wrong* the whole idea of what it means to be the Messiah? In other words, did this mean that we had wrong our whole politics of God's coming kingdom? And did this mean that we also had wrong who God *is*? That God isn't simply the strongest version of a *human* emperor ruling over the world? So that what God reigning in the world means brings about a wholly different experience of who God *is* and what God's reign might be about?

Number two: this once again brings us to the matter of politics. Understanding the Gospel means to understand the fundamental differences between typical human politics and God's politics: If human politics typically resort to hideous violence like crucifying people on crosses, then God's reign is decidedly *not* about that. In fact, this names the crucial difference. Human reigns, human politics, fundamentally believe in violence to maintain order and peace. God's reign, God's politics, fundamentally *disavows* all violence in order to reign through the power of love, the power of creation itself.

Number three: this brings us to an understanding of "son of God" in light of politics. When people of the First Century heard the term "son of God," what did they hear? You might be surprised to hear that the first

thing they heard was their emperor Caesar. All the Caesars proclaimed themselves to be "son of a god," who proclaimed themselves to be bringers of peace and salvation to the Roman people, and therefore to the world. And what did they use to achieve such peace? The most powerful army in the world. So the only religious conclusion that any rational person must reach is that the gods had set the Caesars and their armies in place to rule the world and bring peace through superior firepower, peace through carrying out crucifixion against any and all who would dare challenge such power.

So, as the apostles in the First Century first began to work out their Easter problem, they eventually got around to puzzling through a Christmas problem. Caesar isn't "Lord." Jesus is. Caesar isn't a "son" of any true God. Jesus is. True politics isn't about the gods empowering Caesars to violently and oppressively rule over others. Politics is about what Jesus shows us: how to be children of our heavenly Parent such that we come to see each other as equally loved and equally deserving of lives that flourish. It is about a lowly woman like Mary being lifted up to serve God and her fellow children of God. Like we talked about a couple weeks ago, politics should be about a making even, a lifting up of the valleys and a lowering of the mountains. It is about a true equity on the way to liberation, where everyone has the opportunity to live lives that flourish. Like in this picture:



So the term "son of God" is not meant to have us try to think through puzzles like, how can a human being born of simple peasant woman in the First Century also be God? It should lead us to think about our politics. When we celebrate Christmas as the birth of the true son of God we are essentially getting behind a politics of nonviolently standing against all politics of violence. And in favor of a politics of true equity, where all of God's children, all of humanity, comes under God's unconditional love that brings the power of flourishing life.