

Luke 21:37-22:13: Why Jesus?

Rev. Heather Carlson, November 16, 2025

When Rev. Dr. Ross Lockhart was with our leadership team 2 weeks ago he asked us: Why Jesus? As the church looks at its identity and the mission given by God in this time and place: Why Jesus? Why Church? Why this church?

Foundation is “Why Jesus?”

1. Philosophical
2. Theological
3. Personal

Philosophical

It made me think of a book by Canadian scholar from McGill School of Theology: Douglas John Hall, who died just a few months ago at the age of 97. Some years ago Hall wrote a book called “Why Christian” as an amalgamation of so many conversations he was having with university students at the time. As this fabricated student questions Hall after a lecture, the student asks:

“So, what I want to know is, Why Jesus? In the first place, I’m not convinced even believing in God is possible today. Why make it even more complicated by asking people to believe in Jesus? By throwing ‘the Trinity’ at them...And the Virgin birth. And the resurrection from the dead. Does God really need all that? Do we? Besides, isn’t it rather strange associating God...with a person who not only lived so long ago but for all intents and purposes was a loser? Dead at thirty-something? Rejected by nearly everybody, even his own followers? Crying out in pain and loneliness from his cross? Isn’t that a contradiction of everything we’ve been taught to think about God?” (Why Christian, D. Hall, 17)

Hall begins his response by drawing the necessary connections between the universal through the particular.

- Childhood - won’t meet childhood on the street, but you will meet particular children. Those children provide childhood with specific significance for you. Your connection to particular children will give you a frame of reference for human development, child poverty or abuse. You won’t know all the children, but you will know the universal through the particular.
- Love - learned by being loved and loving others. Through particular relationships you begin to understand and experience the universal concept of love.

Divine, higher power, deity, worship & religion nearly universal. But the particular question: not whether God exists, but who God is. What sort of a deity is believed in?

- Waco, TX, Jonestown
- Gods that sanction racism, sexism and holy war
- Gods that denounce neighbours, empathy and compassion
- Gods that fixate on heaven so that they do not care about the earth
- Gods that serve self-interest, consumption, and acquisition

All beliefs associate the concept of God with a particular revelation or example of God. Whether ultimate associated with the Buddha, Allah with Koran, Judaism with Moses and the prophets, or Jesus. Something more definitive than an abstract notion of a supreme being. To claim Jesus is to say God is

like, or revealed, in Jesus. Without particulars the universals remain unknown, vague and lacking significance. Jesus isn't complicating God, but making God knowable.

Theological

Theology: study of divine things or religious truth

What does Jesus reveal to us? Why does Jesus matter to the world? How is God at work in the church?

Central story of the Bible. Why we gather around the Biblical text. In scripture we "discover enough about the identity, character, intentions, and destiny of Jesus to understand who God, according to this faith tradition, is not." (Hall 26)

Passage today: Teacher - of all the people - common and scholarly. Are we arising early to learn from Jesus everyday?

Pray-er - that's what going to the Mount of Olives indicates. A place of rest and prayer. And Jesus reveals a life connected to the love and will of the Father. A way of life that is rooted in God's power and grace. And an intermediary - praying for others. Long before he takes his final breath on the cross, Jesus is bridging heaven and earth.

Discover that Jesus is a threat to systems of worldly power and status - leaders who purport to speak for God are so angered by Jesus life and message that they plot his execution. How do we act like Judas, seeking to bury Jesus?

Foreshadow of the Passover meal - the particular story of God rescuing the Hebrew people from slavery. The continuing God of the covenants with Abraham, Moses and David, who offers himself as the sacrificial Lamb.

It may be that we wish the New Testament told us more. But we learn "enough about Jesus from the Bible to know enough about the God he reveals to enable us to trust what comes to us from less 'objective' sources - tradition, church and the Holy Spirit. (Hall, 26)

Living Faith

3.2.1 God became [hu]man and dwelt among us.

In silence we ponder, in awe we confess this amazing truth...

3.2.2 To see Jesus is to see God incarnate.

To know the Son is to know the Father.

3.2.3 God's nature is expressed in Jesus, the very Word of God.

3.4.3 God's reconciling act in Jesus Christ is a mystery

Which the Scriptures describe as

The sacrifice of a lamb

A shepherd's life given for his sheep

Atonement by a priest

It is also the innocent dying for the guilty,

The ransom of a slave,

Payment of a debt

And victory over the powers of evil.
Such expressions interpret the love of God
Revealing the gravity, cost, and sure achievement of our Lord's work...

9.3 ...Many find it hard to believe in a loving God

In a world where so many suffer.
Unbelief threatens many with despair,
The feeling that nothing really matters
And that beyond this world is emptiness.
The bible witnesses to God in Christ
Entering deeply into human suffering.
As we behold our Saviour on the cross,
We are convinced of God's love for us.
Faced with the pain and agony of the world,
Only a suffering God can help.
God is with us in our anguish....

10.1...Our hope is for a renewed world
And for fullness of life in the age to come.
As Jesus taught us, we pray:
"Thy kingdom come."

Personal

"Without some "spiritual" experience of Jesus Christ as one present and among us, our knowledge of Jesus would be only historical knowledge, not knowledge of him as person. And historical knowledge would not be enough to create faith (trust) in us, nor would it be sufficient to bring into being a whole community of such trust - the church." (Hall 27)

Why Jesus? What difference does knowing, loving, serving, and following Jesus make in your life and the lives of those in the congregation?

- Newcomers talk about when God was warm.

Raking leaves for the burning pile: It's like God. You can feel him, but you can't see him.

- Taught to put skin on God by learning about Jesus

Grade six: back home in MB after 18 months in Medicine Hat.

- Moved from top of social caste to much, much lower
- Poured out my hurt and confusion to Jesus, I remembered Stephen, who was the bottom of the social order. Never picked for recess play. Disheveled. Endanger your social status from the class bullies - guilt by association. If I was lonely, he was probably miserable too. Help me not hate him. Felt so close to Jesus; warm.
- Returned to class and realized I'd struck up a conversation with him in the pencil sharpening line.
- Brings people into my life I wouldn't otherwise see

Leadership Wood Buffalo: late 30's

- 8 month practical skills: project management, team leadership, media scrums, deep dive into the complexities of the social, economic, and political challenges
- Wide swath of industry: health, oil, recreation, municipal government, banking, etc. Companies paid the tuition and paid the 10 days of classtime.
- One activity was to bring \$5 for charity. We would be working through group decision making process.
- Outcry from enough students they cancelled it. Woman a handful of years younger than me was offended. How dare they require \$5 of her money - "I've never given a single dollar away in my life."
- Jesus had shaped and continues to shape my relationship with money. Discipline of my youth/church to give, and conversations with mentors through lean and plenty
 - Gratitude for provisions - not take for granted I have not earned my life in NA
 - Process of budgeting together at church
 - Joy of discovering the difference donations have made
 - Care of donations that have carried me
 - Holding loosely to "mine"

Gathering re: vulnerable downtown population with the ear of the 2 local MLA's. Sought advice from some elders and went ready to speak or be silent. Disproportionate focus and blame toward newcomers, immigrants and refugees.

- All of us in the room were immigrants. When and how we arrived, makes us neighbours today. Focus on the areas of provincial responsibility where we can make a difference in preventative measures

Trust loving neighbour as myself means risking social and political status when vulnerable are targeted. Who among you is not an immigrant?

Why Jesus? Answer that a lot of different ways. Recognize in him God revealing himself to the world, a God who has acted to save and redeem us, and a God calling me, calling us, into his story of mercy and justice. Here I am, Lord.