

“Are you Saved? Does it Matter?”

Philippians 2: 1-13

John 14: 6-7

“Salvation” excerpted from *Beyond Words* by Frederick Buechner

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June 13, 2010

Have you ever been asked by a friend, a family member, or maybe even a stranger, “Are you saved?” Most Presbyterians are not exactly sure how to answer that. If we say, “Yes,” the person might follow up wondering about the exact date when we got saved. If you cannot produce a date you automatically become suspect. And, if you hem and haw, you leave the door wide open to an invitation to accept Jesus as your personal savior right there on the spot.

A few years ago there was a bumper sticker battle going on around this same issue. Some had bumper stickers that asked, “Are you saved?” to which some clever person created a bumper sticker that replied, “I didn’t know I was lost?” In the movie *Forrest Gump*, Lieutenant Taylor asked Gump, “Have you found Jesus yet?” to which Forrest Gump replied, “I didn’t know I supposed to be looking for him, sir.”

Today’s dialogue sermon is specifically on the doctrine of salvation. It is in response to two different requests from you. The first which simply asked, “*What is salvation?*” and the second of which said, “*The most troubling passage to me is the one that says the only way to get to heaven is through Jesus Christ.*” Let me say first that even if we don’t litter our sentences with the word salvation as Presbyterians it is a central concept of our faith. Remember that when one becomes a member of a Presbyterian church we are asked, “*Who is your Lord and Savior?*” to which we are asked to reply, “Jesus Christ is my Lord and Savior.” Calling Jesus “our Savior” assumes that he is saving us from something. It assumes that we are in need of salvation and he is our ticket to that very salvation.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

If we are saved by Jesus, then what are we being saved from?

What exactly is salvation?

Has your concept of salvation changed in your lifetime?

Philippians says to “work out your own salvation.” How does the context of this passage inform your understanding of what salvation is?

How does this inform this passage in John 14 where Jesus says, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”

What do you think of Buechner’s line, “You do not love God and live for him so you will go to heaven. Whichever side of the grave you happen to be talking about, to love God and live for him is heaven.”

I would like to close with what I consider to be the best treatment of salvation I have ever seen in our contemporary culture. It is the movie *The Return of the Jedi* which is the sixth and final episode of the *Star Wars* double trilogy. In the scene Darth Vader, the evil Sith Lord, is in a penultimate battle to the death with Luke Skywalker, the Jedi knight and Darth’s Vader’s son. In the series we discover that Darth Vader is actually the warped and lost Anakin Skywalker, a former Jedi knight who had turned to the Dark Side. It’s the classic story of good versus evil except in *Star Wars* George Lucas, the director, also plays with how both Anakin Skywalker and Luke Skywalker battle the forces of good and evil in their own soul.

In this final scene Darth is taunting Luke to go to battle with him and to give in to the power of hate and evil. Luke repeatedly tells his lost father, "I won't fight you, father. I can still feel the good in you" to which Darth Vader replies, "It is too late my son. Now accept your own fate and turn to the Dark Side or die." Luke is finally drawn into defending himself and as the younger Jedi knight he finally bests his father. But, he refuses to kill him. Darth Vader, however, is seriously injured and Luke begins to drag his father to his ship where he could be cared for and saved. Then there is this scene that should be in every Bible concordance explaining salvation.

Both lying exhausted below the ship, Vader says in a whisper, "Luke help me take this mask off." And Luke replies, "But, you'll die." Vader responds, "Nothing can stop that now. Just for once...let me look on you with my own eyes." Luke removes the mask and Anakin, his face misshapen, but soft smiles on his son and says, "Now...go my son. Leave me." Luke cries out, "No. You're coming with me. I've can't leave you here. I've got to save you." Anakin replies, "You already have, Luke. You were right. You were right about me. Tell your sister...you were right."

What was Luke right about? That deep down the mask and the armor that Darth Vader wore was never his true identity. His true identity was as a Jedi knight, a defender of peace and justice in the Galaxy. His true identity was as Luke's father.