

Madison Heights Christian Church
(Disciples of Christ)
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MADISON HEIGHTS MESSENGER

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Receiving Jesus

Like most of you, and like most all the other Christians, I have struggled with witnessing. It seems I could never get the handle on what to say or how to say it. It is easy for me to preach about it to a cordial audience on Sunday morning. However, I confess that out on the street, face to face with people who do not know Jesus, or do not want to know Jesus, it is much more challenging. A man named Tom Cantor tells the story about when he started dating and he told his new girlfriend that he is Jewish. She responded that she loves Jewish people, her favorite book was written by Jewish people, and her favorite person is Jewish. Then she told him that her favorite book is the Bible and her favorite person is Jesus. She wasn't just someone that called herself a Christian. This was someone that saw herself as a disciple, a person that not only followed Jesus but obeyed his commandments. What attracted him to her was that he noticed a difference in her character. When the world is full of disappointments and setbacks, when other people are down and out, when sadness and depression kicks in, Jesus lifts us up from darkness and despair. Those who have received Jesus are enabled by the Holy Spirit to lift others up from darkness and despair. People who have received Jesus are not exempt from personal attacks, trauma, and heartache. However, when they encounter the setbacks of life, they experience restoration and peace.

In the Old Testament, God rescued the people from being exterminated in Egypt with the blood of the lamb. God's rescue plan is a lamb. There was no other rescue plan and there was no other requirement. All the people had to do was mark their lintels and doorposts with the blood of the lamb. Of course, for this to work they had to believe in the blood of the lamb and that this would save them. In the New Testament John the Baptist sees Jesus and proclaims "Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29 NRSV). Jesus is the Lamb of God; Jesus is the Lamb that is destined to die in order to take away our guilt, shame, and sin. Therefore, his blood had to be spilt because only the blood of the lamb can save us.

Many years ago I was taking a guest minister out on visitation as we were preparing for revival and he asked me if the people that he had just met were Christians. I said, I assume so, they come to church." That was a powerful learning experience for me. I was preaching but I wasn't making disciples. Coming to church doesn't make you a Christian. Many times I talk about the disparity between people who claim to be Christians and those who are actually devoted to following Christ. Tom Cantor tells of the time he was with a group of friends at work who claimed to be Christians but at lunch they were talking about their infidelities. The man told them "You guys really need Jesus." They were insulted and he was no longer welcome in their group. Their reaction means they really don't want Jesus. There is an obvious disparity that exists between those who claim to be Christians and those who actually follow Jesus.

I don't know where you stand with Jesus. I don't know how much of the Bible you know, or try to know, or want to know. So, the real question is, have you received Jesus? I want to make sure you understand what receiving is. If I offer a gift to you, with the gift in my hand I reach out my hand and offer it to you. Offering the gift to you is not the same thing as receiving the gift. Believing that the gift is offered is not the same thing as actually receiving the gift. Do not take that gift for granted. Make an honest effort to receive Jesus. Be thankful for the gift God has given to you. Pray to God on a regular basis. Be sure to worship God. Study the Bible. Believe in what the Bible teaches about Jesus being the Son of God who died on the cross for our sins and was resurrected. Then take a step beyond believing, go through the barriers of resistance that are very common in today's society, open your heart and receive Jesus.

George