

This week, we are talking about the second 'L' in BELLS, "Learn Christ." We are going to consider what it means to learn Christ, why it is missional to learn Christ, what the Gospel really is, and ask ourselves "Do we really know Christ?" I'm going to mix things up a little bit and give you your homework for the week first. This week, on top of Blessing, and Eating, and Listening for the Spirit, you are to take time to learn Christ. You could do this in a number of ways. Read through one of the Gospels, read through the Sermon on the Mount several times, read through some news articles that look at our modern understanding of Jesus, or watch a movie about Jesus. Most importantly, spend time praying to better know Jesus.

What does it mean to 'Learn Jesus?'

Let's first think about, what it means to "know something." Merriam-Webster Dictionary online breaks the definition down into two parts; to "know" could mean to "have information" about something, or it could mean to understand something. ***I would suggest that there is a significant difference between knowing 'about' my***

spouse, my parents, my children, my friends and really understanding them. And I would ask if you only know ABOUT another person, but you don't really KNOW them can you truly love them? In the same way, if we only know ABOUT Jesus, could we say we have a real relationship with Him?

What do we KNOW ABOUT Jesus? We know that he is the Son of God, born to the Virgin Mary, that he had disciples and apostles, taught, performed miracles and healings, was crucified, died, resurrected, and is supposed to come again. We also KNOW ABOUT what Jesus tells us that we are supposed to do to follow after Him by living a life like He did and inviting others to do the same. We KNOW ABOUT these things because we read them in the Bible, and we've heard about them in church.

We may also make the claim, as Christians, that we follow Jesus Christ, that Jesus is our LORD and SAVIOR. We call Jesus our Lord because he is the primary director of our lives, and we pledge our full and ultimate allegiance to Him. And we call him savior because through his death and resurrection

he FORGAVE us of our sins and FREED us from the consequences of them.

We KNOW ABOUT Jesus and ABOUT what the Christian life is supposed to look like, and we MAKE CLAIMS based on what we know, but do we truly UNDERSTAND who it is that we are following? Do we UNDERSTAND in our hearts who Jesus is, what His message is, and the implications that it has on our lives? And as our Lord and Savior how much time do we spend with Him?

Transition: So, if we want to *know* Jesus more than just *know about* Jesus, and be in a real relationship with Him, where do we start?

GOSPEL:

The first place that you would start with is the Gospel “good news” message, as stated most basically in **John 3:16-18:**

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¹⁶ “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not

perish but may have eternal life. ¹⁷ “Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. ¹⁸ Those who believe in him are not condemned; but those who do not believe are condemned already, because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God.

What does Jesus tell us about the Gospel in this passage?

- a. God loves us. And in spite of everything and anything we might do to turn away from Him, he continues to pursue us.
- b. Because God loves us, He sent Jesus into the world to save us.
- c. Jesus came so that the world would not die, but instead live forever with Him.
- d. We can receive that gift when we believe in the name of Jesus, God’s son.
- e. Those who do not believe in Jesus’ name cannot receive eternal life.
- f. *God’s goal was not to condemn us for our sins, but rather it was to save anyone who would be willing to turn away from that sin and turn towards God.*

It's that last part that I want to take some time to focus on this morning. God did not send Jesus in order to condemn the world. His mission through Christ is to take away that condemnation.

According to the dictionary, when you condemn something or someone, you are expressing *complete disapproval* of them, usually in a public way. When a house or structure is condemned, it is declared unsafe to be in, and its only future is to be torn down or left to rot.

The Gospel message of Jesus is that even though we have 'all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God' according to **Romans 3:23**, and "the wages of sin is death" according to **Romans 6:23**, "but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." In Jesus Christ, we will never be declared disapproved, unsafe, and worthy only to rot or be torn down. He took on the ugliness of our sin and transforms us into something beautiful. Paul writes in **2 Corinthians 5:21** "For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might

become the righteousness of God.” In a paradoxical move, God takes his perfect Son Jesus who never sinned, and puts on Him the sins of the world in order that we could be declared RIGHTEOUS, not CONDEMNED.

This is seen most perfectly in our Scripture passage for today, **Luke 7:36-50**. In this passage, Jesus is invited to eat at the house of a Pharisee named Simon. A Pharisee is a Jewish religious leader who not only followed and taught the law but also enforced the law. They would have been seen as incredibly righteous people. During the meal, a ‘sinful woman’ enters the house weeping. She then uses her tears to wash Jesus’ feet, uses her hair to dry his tear stained feet, and anoints them with a very expensive bottle of perfume.

Imagine the scene for a moment. This woman, who for whatever reason is known around town as being ‘sinful’ walks into a house that isn’t hers and interrupts a meal of important religious people that she wasn’t invited to because she knew that Jesus had something amazing to offer her. Again, we

don't know exactly what this woman had done, but whatever it was she was notorious for it. Could you imagine walking into a room and everyone there knows you by the worst thing that you've ever done? How would that feel?

Then, in v. 39 the Gospel writer notes that the Pharisee, upon seeing what the woman was doing, said to himself, ***“If this man were a prophet, he would know who is touching him and what kind of woman she is—that she is a sinner.”*** My guess is that these words were said pretty loudly; loud enough certainly for Jesus and this ‘sinful’ woman to hear what was being said. **This is condemnation;** Simon expressed complete disapproval of the woman's actions because of who she was. In his eyes, her sin made her so toxic that to even be touched by her would somehow spread her dirtiness to others. And so Jesus responds in typical Jesus fashion by saying that in her washing and anointing of his feet, this woman was treating him

better than Simon had as the host. And her love for Him was so great because she who recognized her own sins knew how great God's forgiveness was.

I would suggest that most of us, if we were to place ourselves in this story, would be like Simon the Pharisee. Undoubtedly he had sins, but he managed to hide them under the mask of religiosity. Most of us manage to keep our sins hidden, if not from our own families than at least from the public and our church family. Most of us don't have the experience of walking into a room and having everyone know what we are most ashamed of. And not only know what we are most ashamed of, but to say out loud exactly what they think about us so that everyone can hear. But if we wore our sins on the outside in the same way that this woman did, our ugliness would probably be the same as hers.

The beauty of knowing Jesus, as we learn from this story, is that if we let Him, He will take away the

shame of our sins whether we wear them on the outside like the woman in this story, or keep them hidden in our hearts like Simon the Pharisee.

When I was a junior in college, I took a class on church leadership. It had the usual reading assignments to go with every class session. The teacher simply wanted us to have read the material as background for our classroom discussions, so rather than quiz us on what we read or have us write brief reflections, he just passed around a piece of paper every week for us to write down the percentage of the assignment that we had read. We would then have to sign the paper, to verify that what we had written was true. It was an honor system. I thought that this was great. I was excited not to have any extra busy work with having to write reading reflections, and I was also excited that we weren't going to be quizzed over the reading, just in case I hadn't been able to finish up for the week. My immediate plan was that I would read as much as I could, sign every week with 100% regardless of whether I had finished the reading or not, and then make sure that I had caught up on all

the reading by the end of the semester so that I wasn't 'technically' lying and it gave me some wiggle room in case I got behind.

I'm pretty sure I didn't even finish the first week's reading. And I only got more behind after that. Eventually I decided that I was never going to catch up, so I wouldn't even try. There were other classes that made me prove I did the work by turning in papers or taking tests, and since this was just a signature 'on my honor' and nobody could know that I hadn't done it, I was just going to let this one go.

Really, I thought my plan was pretty genius. I was going to get an 'A' for this assignment without actually doing any work, and I could use that time I would've spent reading for doing other things like homework. Or watching TV, or hanging out with my friends, or whatever I wanted. I was so surprised, then, to find out that my friends were actually doing the reading and not also following my genius plan. It made so much sense to me, why didn't they get it? Why would they want to do the work when they

didn't have to, and there was no way that they were going to get caught?

Up until this point I was able to keep quiet the little voice of conscience telling me that what I was doing was unethical and sinful with the thought that my good intentions would make everything okay. But the conscious decision to not do my homework and then lie about it, coupled with the realization that others around me weren't doing the same thing, planted and watered seeds of doubt, and I started to feel very guilty about this. Guilty and ashamed. Really, I wanted to be a person of integrity, but here I was at a Bible College in a class on church leadership lying week after week.

After some soul searching, I made the gut-wrenching decision that I was going to come clean with the professor about what I had done. Even though I could've gotten away with all of it, I needed to make amends and my soul needed healing. So I told Dr. Gupton what I had been lying about my reading progress and I apologized. To my surprise, he was very gracious about all of it, and I

think I finally ended up with a C in the class, which is pretty generous, all things considered.

Shame is an evil, insidious force. It tears down our sense of self and erodes our souls. I am still not proud of that part of my life. I am very guilty of cheating, and it's not something I like to talk about. But the beautiful thing is those decisions don't mark me as a liar and cheater for life. In Jesus Christ, the shame of my sins has been taken away. I absolutely needed to face the consequences of my actions, and I did. But I don't have to live with the shame about them permanently. What I've learned about Jesus is that shame has no place in your life when you give it over to Him.

I had a chance to redeem myself a few years later when I was in grad school. I had a summer week-long course on pastoral counseling. During that week, we had sections of reading that we were supposed to complete each day, and at the end of the week we were going to sign a paper with the percentage of reading that we had completed. Déjà vu. The book we were to read is just under a

thousand pages, and I had made the mistake of not reading ahead of the week. But I wasn't going to make the mistake again of lying. So, every day of that week I would go to class from 8-4 and then I would go back to the apartment I was staying in and read. And read. And read. I would read until my eyes would cross and I couldn't hardly think anymore. But at the end of the week I could say with confidence that I had completed the assignments. I was proud of what I had done and that I didn't compromise my integrity again.

We all have things that we are ashamed of. Sins confessed and unconfessed, things we've done or said or thought, things from last night, last week, and years and years ago. But fortunately, we serve a God who does not want us to live in shame. And we have a savior who gave everything so that our shame can be erased.

The story of Jesus, the sinful woman, and Simon concludes in vv. 48-50: ⁴⁸ Then Jesus said to her, "Your sins are forgiven." ⁴⁹ The other guests began to say among themselves, "Who is this who

even forgives sins?”⁵⁰ Jesus said to the woman, “Your faith has saved you; go in peace.”

When we have faith in Jesus our sins are forgiven, our shame is taken away, and we can live in peace. Peace of mind and heart that we don't have to live in the shame of our sins forever. And even though we are going to sin again and again, He will continue to forgive and release us as long as we turn to Him.

Paul writes in **Romans 8:1-4**:

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.² For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death.

In Jesus Christ, we cannot be condemned and we have been set free.

MISSIONAL: You might be wondering, **what is missional about learning Christ?** What does this have to do with Blessing, with Eating, and with Listening to the Spirit? Remember, the reason that

we Bless and Eat with is because we want to share the Gospel of forgiveness and freedom with our neighbors. *We cannot share a Gospel that we don't know, and we can't share forgiveness if we haven't experienced it ourselves.*

Do you really know the Good News of Jesus Christ? Have you made Him your Lord and Savior? Do you believe that He can forgive you and take away your sins and shame? And if so, are you living in freedom and peace? If not, then what are you waiting for?

You can receive this freedom today, this very morning, if you are willing to give your life over to Christ, to believe that He is the Son of God who was sent to save you, to make him your savior and Lord over your life. And if you've already done this, but are still shackled by the chains of sin, you can let those go and experience that in Jesus there is no condemnation or shame. This morning we are going to have an opportunity for you to respond. If you are feeling a nudge by the Holy Spirit to answer Jesus' calling either for the very first time or to renew your commitment to Christ, or to let go of

your shame and give it over to Him, then during this response song you can come forward to this front row of seats and pray with either myself or one of the elders. There is absolutely no pressure; if you want to make a commitment or recommitment in your seat that is fine too. But if the Spirit so moves, we will be up here to pray with you, and the music will play as long as there are people up front.