



Hitched to Jesus
Galatians 2:20
July 2, 2017

(The ideas for this sermon came from a book called *The Crucifixion of Ministry* by Andrew Pruves.)

Prayer: Stir in us now, Holy Spirit, a willingness to hear, the desire to know the truth and the courage to follow in joyful obedience, that we may be formed by your word into women and men of faith. Amen

Galatians 2:20 (NIV)

I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

Galatians 2:20 (KJV)

I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.

How many of you know the story *The Little Engine That Could*? Or, maybe you read it to your children or grandchildren. It is the story about a little train engine that was dwarfed and intimidated by the larger, shinier, more powerful engines that could pull long lines of railway cars up and down mountains.

The little engine was only used to transfer cars in the railway yard from one track to another. It was a modest, unassuming little engine. Well, one day, one of the great big successful engines was supposed to pull a long train full of toys over the mountain, but it broke down. What a crisis! How were the children to get their toys?

Against all odds, the little engine decided to try and pull the heavy train with the toys over the mountain. It pulled and pulled with all its might, chugging slowly up the

mountain, saying, "I think I can. I think I can. I think I can." By sheer guts and willpower the little-engine-that-could dragged that heavy train up and over the mountain.

What a great story. It's a story about the Protestant work ethic. This is the ideal that urges you to pull yourself up by your bootstraps and be independent, self-supporting, you can do it all.

Sometimes, this is how we do ministry in the church. Let's do this program and this mission and this dinner and this study and this movie; let's be a busy church. The busier, the better, do more things for Jesus!

And through it all, we hope Jesus is blessing all our work and efforts.

Let me give you another way:

Ask for a volunteer (preferably, someone with good balance!) to come up and stand on the platform. Make up a story about this person (let's call him Bob): Bob is new to Valley Presbyterian and is all excited to get involved. He becomes an usher and greeter, helps raise food for the food bank, attends a Bible study, serves food for the fellowship events...and the list goes on.

But as time goes on, Bob is always busy and begins to feel tired all the time. He stops going to the Bible study because he is too busy serving Jesus. That joy of serving is beginning to fade because he is so tired. He starts having conflicts with people and finds himself getting angry at the church. Ministry is not so much fun anymore.

Have Paul come over and give Bob a big shove. Paul stands where Bob was. "Bob, you have just been displaced." Representing Jesus, Paul says, "I, not you, do the ministry that saves and heals, that gives hope and blesses, that forgives and promises new life. I am sending you the Holy Spirit to join you to me and my ministry."

Invite Bob to come behind Paul and place his hands on Paul's shoulders. Paul as Jesus: "I will do the ministry for you. The primary work of ministry is not up to you anymore. In fact, it never was. Hitch yourself to me and enjoy the ride."

(They can sit down)

Not I, but Christ, our passage says.

Sometimes our ministries are in the way. The Apostle Paul says in our passage today that we are crucified with Christ. Of course, this refers to our standing before God. Our old life has been crucified and a new life begins with Christ.

But I want to suggest that perhaps our ministries are included in this crucifixion. We are so busy doing ministry for Jesus that we forget it is not our ministry. It is Jesus' ministry.

So, Jesus come and shoves us out of the way because ministry is what Christ does. It is not Jesus who needs our ministries; it is our ministries that need Jesus Christ.

Remember what Jesus said, "Apart from me you can do nothing" (John 15:5). It is Jesus who carries the load. It is Jesus who saves and heals people.

Not I, but Christ.

In the book of Acts, two of Jesus' disciples, Peter and John, heal a crippled man. Crowds begin to gather, and Peter and John take the opportunity to talk about Jesus. It was Jesus who did the healing, they say. Peter and John are arrested and thrown into jail.

The next morning, they are brought before the Jewish leaders asked this question: "By what power or what name did you do this?"

Not I, but Christ.

So the issue is not "How does Jesus get into our ministries?" or, full speed ahead with our programs and ask God to bless what we are doing. Instead, we ask, "What is Jesus up to, and how do we hitch a ride on whatever Jesus is doing?"

Not I, but Christ.

When you are visiting someone in the hospital, when you are in a committee meeting, when you pick up furniture for the patio sale and sort on Thursdays, when you serve coffee and food after worship on Sunday, when you cook at our fellowship events, when you greet and usher, when you collect food for the food bank, when you work at vacation Bible school, when you serve communion to someone homebound, your question is not "What would Jesus do?" but "What is Jesus Christ already doing here and now, and how can I hitch a ride?"

Not I but Christ.

It is the present, living Christ who makes our ministries possible. As followers of Christ, we allow Christ to be the One who is speaking and behaving. We step aside and let Christ live through us. How do we do this?

Notice I have two versions of our scripture passage. The NIV says in the second sentence: "I live by faith in the Son of God." The emphasis is on our faith in Christ, which is a really good thing.

However, this phrase can be translated another way. It is in the KJV: "I live by faith of the Son of God." The emphasis is now on Christ's faith, not yours.

We aren't just living by our own faith; we're living by Christ's faith as well. This happens because Christ's spirit, the Holy Spirit, dwells within us. The Christian life is not something we try to accomplish in ourselves for Christ. Rather, it is something Christ accomplishes through us because of the indwelling HS.

This means, I hope, that not I but Christ is preaching right now.

So not only do we hitch ourselves to Jesus who makes our ministries possible, but we do them in the faith of Christ.

Let me give you an example. You've noticed that red trailer sitting in our back parking lot. We believe God has dropped this trailer into our laps. For several years, we had been talking about owning a food truck and taking it out into our community.

One day, one of our members passed the Green Valley Shopping Mall, and saw the trailer sitting in the parking lot with for a "For Sale" sign. We knew it was ours. (You know why? Because it is red....my favorite color!) We call it "The Valley Galley." Our motto: We Cook, We Serve, We Care.

As we get the trailer ready and follow all the laws that allow us to serve food to the public, we have been dreaming of all the different ways to use this food trailer to share God's love with our community. Here are some of them:

- A gathering place for walkers and bike riders who come by and through our parking lot.
- Morning services in Madera Canyon
- Outdoor Vacation Bible School in other neighborhoods
- Outdoor community concerts in our parking lot
- Use at the Patio Sale to serve food outside as well as indoors.

- Meals served for Valley Assistance Service, GVR, Presbytery meetings
- Serve food to first responders in crisis situations, such as fires.

As we wait and brainstorm and dream, those of us involved in this ministry have been saying, “Let’s see where God leads us next.” We watch with eager expectation what God will do, and we can’t wait to join in. It’s an exciting way to do ministry. Not I, but Christ.

I encourage you as followers of Jesus Christ, in all that you do, in all your work, ministries, and yes, in your relationships, see where God is already working and join in.

I end with a poem by Ada A. Whiddington. It’s called “Not I But Christ.”

Not I But Christ
By Ada A. Whiddington

Not I, but Christ, be honored, loved, exalted;
Not I, but Christ, be seen, be known, be heard;
 Not I but Christ, in every look and action;
Not I, but Christ, in every thought and word.
Not I, but Christ, to gently soothe in sorrow;
 Not I, but Christ, to wipe the falling tear;
 Not I, but Christ, to lift the weary burden;
 Not I, but Christ, to hush away all fear.
Christ, only Christ, no idle word ever falling;
Christ, only Christ, no needless bustling sound;
Christ, only Christ, no self-important bearing;
Christ, only Christ, no trace of “I” be found.

Amen.

Ask for a volunteer (preferably, someone with good balance!) to come up and stand on the platform. Make up a story about this person (let's call him Bob): Bob has found a new church and is all excited to get involved. He becomes an usher and greeter, helps raise food for the food bank, attends a Bible study, serves food for the fellowship events...and the list goes on.

But as time goes on, Bob is always busy and begins to feel tired all the time. He stops going to the Bible study because he is too busy serving Jesus. That joy of serving is beginning to fade because he is so tired. He starts having conflicts with people and finds himself getting angry at the church. Ministry is not so much fun anymore.

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(Have them sit down.)

Not I , but Christ.