

***Changes in Latitude, Changes in Attitude***

**John 20:19-31 Acts 4:32-35 April 8, 2018**

- I. I want to open with a little Parrothead communion song with the elements of a little wine and some honeysuckle vine. And as with our regular communion, your all welcome to join me.

I want to go back to the island  
Where the shrimp boats tie up to the pilin'  
Give me oysters and beer for dinner every day of the year  
And I'll feel fine, I'll feel fine

'Cause I want to be there  
Want to go back down and lie beside the sea there  
With a tin cup for a chalice  
Fill it up with good red wine  
And I'm-a chewin' on a honeysuckle vine

Yeah, now the sun goes slidin' 'cross the water  
Sailboats, they go searchin' for the breeze  
Salt air it ain't thin  
It can stick right to your skin  
And make you feel fine  
It makes you feel fine

'Cause I want to be there  
Wanna go back down and get high by the sea there  
With a tin cup for a chalice  
Fill it up with good red wine  
And I'm-a chewin' on a honeysuckle vine

Yes, and now you heard my strange proposal  
Get that Packard up and let's move  
I wana be there before the day  
Tries to steal away and leave us behind  
I've made up my mind

And I wanna be there  
I want to go back down and lie beside the sea there  
With a tin cup for a chalice  
Fill it up with good red wine  
And I'm-a chewin' on a honeysuckle vine

Yeah, with a tin cup for a chalice  
Fill it up with good red wine  
And I'm-a chewin' on a honeysuckle vine

- II. I have a confession to make.  
I'm a Parrothead.
- A. For those who don't know that reference, I'm a Jimmy Buffet fan, back to *A1A* and *Living and Dying in ¾ Time*, back to when you didn't know where to find his albums because nobody knew what genre to put a beach bum story telling drunken Caribbean rock and roll artist.
  - B. Summer has not officially started until I have engaged in an orgy of Jimmy Buffet music with perhaps a little rum but definitely some oysters and beer or a giant cheeseburger in paradise.
  - C. Jimmy's own description for his music is escapist and I highly recommend escapism on a limited, moderate basis.
  - D. But one place where is escapism does not belong is when it comes to being a follower of Jesus.

- E. There is one song of Jimmy's that I mostly love except for one little line as he sings, "My head hurts, my feet stink and I don't love Jesus."
  - F. Problem being I do love Jesus, and to love Jesus, you can't be escapist.
- III. Quite often religion is used as a way of escaping this world, this reality.
- A. Lots of folks use it to escape.
  - B. But to follow Jesus, you can't escape, instead you have to dive right in and totally immerse yourself in this life, this world.
  - C. Now, I do like to escape.  
I like to escape to the mountains, and the waters, just as Jesus would escape to be alone, but it was always to re-create, re-energize to come back into the world.

- D. Thomas Merton, the Trappist monk who lived cloistered away and with a vow of silence, who taught so many, including myself, the value of contemplative meditation also wrote extensively about the suffering in the world and in opposition to the Vietnam War.
- E. So yes, religion and following Jesus can involve some escapism, but it must always return to the street, to the huddled masses and those yearning to be free.
- F. That's what it means to believe in Jesus.

IV. So how many of you believe in Jesus?

- A. Right. But what exactly is it you believe?
- B. Most any Christian will say they 'believe in Jesus.'

But does it surprise you to find out that those Christians don't all mean the same thing by that proclamation.

C. Some make that proclamation in a manner that is totally *escapist*; while others make that statement in a way that is totally *immersive* into this world.

D. Escapist or immersive?  
What is your belief?

1. To exemplify both of these positions we're going to take a look at the two lectionary readings for today that Corey just read.
2. The escapist belief is exemplified in John.
3. The immersive belief is exemplified in Acts.
4. To be clear about these two forms of belief let me first define them for you.
  - a) The escapist believer believes that to believe in Jesus is to believe something about Jesus, namely that he is the risen Christ.
    - (1) If you believe this, then you get to escape this world and go to heaven.  
**One believes in Jesus so that they can escape to heaven.**
    - (2) Evidence of this belief in Jesus is one's proclamation of belief.

b) The immersive believer believes that to believe in Jesus is to believe in all that Jesus stood for during his life; his teachings, his actions, his love for the outcast and even for his enemies.

(1) **To believe in this Jesus is to immerse oneself into this world** with the purpose of building God's Beloved Community here and now.

(2) Evidence of this belief in Jesus is through following Jesus, and living the life that Jesus taught us and modeled for us.

V. Let's first look at the immersive believer and Acts 4.

A. In acts 4 we find out that the earliest followers of Jesus held everything in common, a commonwealth.

B. God's beloved community, the kingdom of God that earliest followers of Jesus was building was a commonwealth.

C. There we no needy persons among them.

Everyone contributed all they had and in return everyone's needs were met.

- D. Clearly, Luke tell us that these earliest followers of Jesus we totally invested in building God's beloved community here in this world.
  - E. These early followers were called, The Way, because they followed in the way that Jesus had taught them.
  - F. This is not to say that they didn't have any interest in the resurrection and being themselves resurrected to live eternally with God, but they believed that the way to follow Jesus and be obedient to God was by totally investing themselves in building the God's beloved community in this world.
- VI. Let's look at the escapist believer that lifts up the passage from John that we read.
- A. Here it all seems to be about believing.
  - B. If you believe that Jesus was resurrected, well then your ticket to heaven has been punched.

- C. In this passage Jesus tells Thomas, who doubted that Jesus had been resurrected, that he could touch him and that in doing so he would be convinced. “No more disbelief. Believe!” Jesus tells him.
- D. And then John closes by saying, “These things are written so that you will believe that Jesus is the Christ, God’s Son, and that believing, you will have life in his name.
- E. Just proclaim your belief in that and you get in;  
and that’s what it’s all about.
- F. Of course, some might see this escapist faith, the purpose of which is to escape this world and go get your mansion in heaven, as spiritual greed.
1. It’s all about personal salvation.
  2. What do I get out of this?
  3. It’s not about loving others, or building God’s beloved community, it’s only about me getting to heaven and it doesn’t matter how I treat other’s just as long as I proclaim that I believe in Jesus.

- VII. There is a problem however in the escapist believers use of John.
- A. Those who use John for escapism miss his intent.
  - B. To understand John it requires a twostep process for which the escapist believer only takes the first step.
  - C. Just believing that Jesus rose from the dead and is not dead, but lives eternally with God – as the Christ who is one with God;  
that is only step one.
  - D. However, such a belief is not the end point for John.  
One believes such, because it is proof of the validity and purpose of Jesus **life**.
  - E. To believe in Jesus, is not simply to believe something about Jesus, namely that he was resurrected;  
but rather to believe in what he taught, what he did, how he loved even his enemies – those who executed him.

**F. To believe “in” someone, it to trust them and to believe in what they stand for and Jesus stood for the building of God’s beloved community here and now.**

1. He stood for being in the streets with the people.
2. He stood for those who were oppressed.
3. He stood for the poor, the hungry, the homeless.
4. He stood for the sick and the outcast.
5. He stood against greed, and hatred and bigotry.
6. He stood for being totally immersed in this world.

**G. Yes, God so loved the world that God gave us Jesus, so that whoever believes in Jesus, what he taught, how he lived and what he stood for, will begin living an eternal life with God.**

**VIII. I love Jimmy Buffet, because he helps me escape to another life.**

- A. I love the dream of sailing out on the ocean and having oysters and beer every day of the year while I lay back in the salty air and play my six-string.
- B. But you know what?  
The only thing I've ever sailed is a little Sunfish and that's as big as it's ever going to get.  
Oysters and beer I only get once or twice a year and I have no idea what honeysuckle vine tastes like.  
But Jimmy's imaginative world, it's a good place to escape to.
- C. But that ain't real, and I do love Jesus, so I am called back to immerse myself in this world and continue the mission Jesus started;  
that of building God's beloved community here and now.
- D. Because, I believe in Jesus.
- AMEN.