

Against - the - Grain

Following Jesus

Many times, throughout our lives we hear "Go with the flow." We learn that a "good Christian" follows the rules, obeys authorities, and goes along to get along. These can be very helpful and faithful pathways to help us navigate the many responsibilities we juggle. But in history, Scripture, and in our own experiences, we discover that our God is One who surprises us. In the very birth of God in Jesus Christ, we see that God has a different way of encountering his people. In this sermon series after Christmas, we continue to see, through Jesus Christ, the ways that God defies the expectations of his people and "goes against the grain." As followers of Jesus, we are also called, and supported, to grow into a life of faith that is full of challenge, surprise and transformation.

Week 1 • The Messiah is a... Baby?

Matthew 2:2-12; Isaiah 9:2-7

For centuries, the people of Israel waited for their Messiah to come. Many expected, and hoped for, a mighty ruler or prince, or at least a grown man, to come to overtake Rome by storm. They did not expect their king to come as a vulnerable baby born in humble circumstances. No one expected their Messiah to be born in a stable. Jesus' arrival was different. People did not come from all over to pay him homage, except for some magi from the East. They followed the star, but had no idea what or who they would find. In their encounter, they discovered not a great mighty ruler, but a little baby, who was the very Son of God.

Week 2 • It's Not Right This Way!

Matthew 3:13-17; Isaiah 53:1-3

Not much ruffled the feathers of John the Baptist. He lived in the desert. He ate locusts and wild honey and wore animal skins. He was paving the way for the Lord, proclaiming that all should turn and repent. People flocked to hear him, but when Jesus arrives and asks to be baptized by him, John, a man steeped in scripture, refuses saying that Jesus is the one who should baptize him.

Even with his influential cousin, Jesus is going Against the Grain of how his ministry should begin. This reversal shows us that the Kingdom of God is going to be different.

Week 3 • Radical Inclusion

Luke 4:14-30; Isaiah 61:1-3

God forged a nation, his people Israel, through the faith and family of their father Abraham. It was this people, enslaved in Egypt, gifted the Law and promised land, guided by judges, prophets, and finally, kings, who claimed the sole favor of the LORD GOD. Salvation would come through the Jews. The widespread belief took on the additional meaning that salvation would come only to the Jews. Indeed, Jesus, born a Jew, brought salvation to his people, but when he speaks a message that salvation is for the Gentile too, his listeners react in an uproar. As followers of Jesus, we too are called to speak a message of inclusion of the grace of God to all.

Week 4 • Just Say the Word

Matthew 8:5-13; Isaiah 49:5-6

Throughout his ministry, Jesus laid his hands on many to bring healing. With his mere presence and touch, he could restore sight, bring back one's mobility, and even bring someone back to life. Surely his physical presence was needed for any healing to occur. However, at the great proclamation of faith by the centurion, Jesus surprises everybody when he heals his servant with just a word. It is not just mere body that we experience the presence of our Lord, but our Great Physician continues to heal us with his presence.

Week 5 • Are You the One?

Matthew 11:1-6; Isaiah 35:3-6

Week 6 • It Doesn't Add Up

Matthew 20:1-16; Exodus 33:17-33

Week 7 • Can't We Just Stay on the Mountaintop?

Matthew 17:1-13; Deuteronomy 18:15-19



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