

## THE VIRUS

John 17:26

Several years ago a family that was in our church at the time told me about a little incident that had happened in their lives that week. They went to Starbucks one morning. It was crazy busy with a long line. They waited patiently in line with their 4 year old son, John. Suddenly their son blurted out, “Mommy and Daddy, Jesus just came in.” They turned around to see that a man with long hair and a beard had just come into the store. The fellow did indeed look like the typical pictures of Jesus we see. The people standing around them heard what John said. They all got a little chuckle about it but then began talking about what it would be like if the real Jesus actually did show up like that. The whole mood of the place changed as people who didn’t know each other discussed this most interesting question. When my friends got to the counter and ordered their coffees the barista informed them that their drinks were free because they had provided so much entertainment to the waiting customers.

What if Jesus showed up today? I think we would all agree that his presence would have a big effect on people, just as it did in the first century. Some day he will physically return and the impact will be huge and global. But the odds are that isn’t going to happen this week. Yet Jesus still is working to manifest his presence in our world. He is doing it in a way I never would have thought of. It is a way that at times seems more than a little inefficient. Yet his divine plan is ingenious and has the potential to be powerful. I invite you to think about this plan of his with me today as we consider the last few words of Jesus’ Final Briefing. In John 17:26 Jesus prayed to his Father, “I have made you known to them (his disciples), and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them.”

There were some things that according to these words Jesus wanted his work on this earth to accomplish in the lives of his followers. We see two of them here.

### THE FATHER’S LOVE WILL BE IN THEM

We saw in 17:6 that Jesus knew that one of his primary tasks was to reveal the Father. Here in verse 26 we see again that he had done that. He said, “I have made you known” to the disciples. Notice that he didn’t stop doing that once he left this world. He said he “will continue to make you known.” He is still working through the Holy Spirit to reveal what the Father is like.

His work will have an effect. He does his work, “in order that the love you have for me may be in them.” Do you believe that God the Father loves Jesus Christ, his Son? Of course he does. That is obvious for a couple of reasons. The first is that as 1 John 4:8 says, God is love. He is the source of all love. Love is one way of describing the very character of God. It is who he is. Everything he does is motivated by love. Every action that he takes is exactly what love would do. He treats every being with pure love. So

obviously if everything God the Father does is driven by and bathed in love then the way he thinks about and relates to the Son is also driven by and bathed in love.

Then of course we have to think about the fact that Jesus is God's Son. We know that this is an analogy. The Father and the Son exist in a relationship that has no exact human parallel and that is incomprehensible to human understanding. It is a divine mystery. But God wanted us to have some sense of what it is like. So he pictured it as the relationship of a dad and his child. While not exact it is a way of expressing the depth of the love the Father has for Jesus.

I think of how I feel about my children. Laurie and I are going to visit Michael and Carissa this summer. We are going in July because that's the time that fits best with their schedule. Let me repeat that. We are going to visit them *in July*. They live in Mississippi. Do you know what it will be like there in July? The temperature will be in the 90's and the humidity will be 12 million per cent. It will be ghastly. I don't care. I am actually eager to go because they are our kids and we'd do anything for them. That's how a father loves.

Now think about how much difference there is between God and me. How long will my life be? At the very outside I might live as long as 90 years if I'm really lucky. God has lived slightly longer than that. How does 90 years compare to eternity? Take 90 years out of eternity and you have eternity left over. There is no comparison. So in order to get eternity, which is how long God has lived, you would have to multiply my 90 years by...infinity! Let's think about power. At my strongest I could probably bench press 200 pounds. How do you suppose that compares with God's power? What would you have to multiply my power by to equal God's power? The question has no answer, of course, other than infinity. Do you see what I'm driving at? Compare my love for my children with God's love for his Son. The comparison is on the same scale. You would have to multiply my love by that same factor of infinity to arrive at God's love for his Son.

Jesus said he did his work so that the love the Father had for him might also be in us. He made it possible for us to be loved by the Father in the infinite way he loves his own Son. The Father always loves everyone. So in what sense was the work of Jesus necessary for the Father's love to be in us? Obviously since God always loves the problem is not at his end, but at our end.

First of all Jesus had to do his work so that our guilt would not block God's love from flowing into us. Our guilt caused separation between us and God. Something powerful had to be done to bridge that chasm, and God did it when Jesus died on the cross. Second Jesus had to do his work of revealing what the Father is really like so that we could believe and accept his love. In our natural state we will have difficulty accepting that God could actually love us. We have difficulty believing that people will really love us if they

know all the truth about us, so how could God love us when he knows even the things we don't like to admit to ourselves?

Do you remember when you first went out on a date with the girl or that guy that you thought was the person of your dreams? How did you approach that? Didn't you do whatever you could to make yourself look as presentable as possible? And weren't you on your very best behavior? Or to think of it another way, did you just let the real you be seen on that date? I don't even need to ask the question because I know you did everything you could to put your best foot forward. Why did you do that? Because you feared if that person saw the real you they that might well be your last date with that person.

I bring that up because we have a similar problem with God. We have a difficult time believing that if he really knows all about us that he could love us. We don't love what we see in ourselves. One of the things Jesus came to do was to not only teach us but to show us in the way he loved people and ultimately in his death on that cross that God's love is like no love we've ever known. God loves us when we are utterly undeserving of love. We're not used to that. People don't operate that way so it is quite foreign to us.

One of the most difficult things for us is to actually accept that God loves us as we are. But he does love us despite our unworthiness. We can get a glimpse of this in the relationship that God used to depict how he loves us, that of parents to children. Jeannette Clift George, the founder and artistic director of the AD Players, a Christian theater group based in Houston, tells a story of something she saw on a flight to Phoenix. She saw a young woman with her baby, a little girl. Mom and baby were dressed beautifully all in white and were flying home to see the woman's husband, the baby's daddy. They were so lovely. However, the flight was frightfully rough, the turbulence so bad, the flight attendants had to sit down and strap in. It didn't sit well with the baby. Mom had been feeding her to keep her happy, and everything she had fed her came back. Jeannette said that it seemed like everything the mom had *ever* fed her came back. It was an awful mess. It got all over the baby, the mom, the seat, the carpet, and even nearby passengers, including Jeannette. She said she began trying to decide whether she would just cut off the sleeve of her nice suit or burn the whole thing. As they got off the plane she saw the guy who was obviously daddy, all dressed in white, holding flowers. She was sure when mom and baby got close he would keep his distance. She was surprised. The mom didn't throw the baby at him, but not far from it as she ran away to try to get cleaned up. What amazed Jeannette was dad's reaction. He hugged that messy, stinky baby, kissed her, stroked her hair and kept happily saying, "Baby's come home." She watched him all the way to the baggage claim area and he never stopped kissing that stinky baby. She said, "Where did I ever get the idea that my Father God is less loving than a young daddy?" Yes, maybe we're a mess, but the Father loves us.

That one truth is perhaps the most powerful thing we can ever believe. It is the key to peace, to spiritual power, to motivation to live in obedience to God, to loving other people. If we don't grasp that in our heart of hearts, if the love the Father has for the Son is not in us, we will ever be striving and failing, trying to earn something we cannot earn, to prove something that is not really true, and ultimately growing resentful toward God himself. Jesus came so that the love the Father has for the Son might be in us, because it is in that love that we become whole, that we find peace with ourselves, that we can love God and other people.

#### THE SON'S PRESENCE WILL BE IN THEM

The second thing we see in this passage is that Jesus said his work was crucial so that "I myself might be in them." Now that's a really strange thing to say. If you've been a Christian for any time at all you're probably used to the idea that you became a follower of Jesus by asking him into your heart. So you may not be as mystified by this statement as some people.

The idea of one person somehow being in another is pretty bizarre. For most people the idea that someone else could take up residence inside them would make no sense whatsoever. Laurie and I watched a TV show called *Revolution* this year. The premise of the show is what if all the electricity in the world went out, what would happen? It started out quite interesting, but it kind of went off in a bizarre direction and was just recently canceled. So we'll never know where it was going. Part of the bizarre aspect of the show involved little bits of artificial intelligence they called nanos. It's a long story. But these nanos banded together and took over one of the characters in the show. She looked the same, but she wasn't the same. Something was living in her and she started behaving completely different.

Like I said, it was pretty bizarre. But is that any more bizarre than Jesus saying he was going to be *in* his followers? Well maybe he meant that his legacy would live on in them or his ideas, his movement, what he stood for would live on in them. But it doesn't seem that's what he meant. We have already seen that in John 14:17 Jesus, describing his Spirit as the Spirit of truth, said, "You know him, for he lives with you and will be *in* you." He said he was with them for the moment, but would actually live in them!

In Romans 8:10 Paul wrote, "If Christ is in you, your body is dead because of sin, yet your spirit is alive because of righteousness." In 2 Corinthians 13:5 Paul wrote, "Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you?" In Ephesians 3:17 Paul prayed that Christ "may dwell in your hearts through faith."

So does this mean that Jesus' followers are going to be *possessed*? Jesus is going to take over their personalities and they'll become somebody different? They'll become Jesus in different bodies? That can't be right. Consider the group that was in the room when Jesus said those words. They didn't become Jesus in different bodies. Peter is a good example.

In Galatians 2:12 Paul says Peter went to the city of Antioch to see what was happening there. Gentiles were putting their faith in Jesus in droves. While he was there verse 12 tells us, “Before certain men came from James he used to eat with the Gentiles.” This was something Peter would never have done before Jesus changed him. Gentiles were unclean and ate unclean food by Jewish lights, and Peter would have had no part of that. But now he gladly sat and enjoyed meals with them knowing that they were all one in Christ. Read on. “But when they arrived, he began to draw back and separate himself from the Gentiles because he was afraid of those who belonged to the circumcision group.”

Peter was afraid of what some of his Jewish friends would think if they saw him eating with Gentiles so he stopped doing it. Does that sound like Jesus to you? Does that sound like the Jesus who deliberately healed people on the Sabbath in front of Pharisees to provoke them? Does it seem like the Jesus who called hypocritical religious leaders whitewashed tombs and a bunch of snakes? Peter was guilty of cowardice, compromise and hypocrisy in that instance. Clearly Jesus was not controlling him like a puppet.

Jesus did not mean he was going to possess people. He meant he would take up residence in his followers and would begin influencing them, changing them. His character would begin to show up in them in ways it had not before. His thoughts, his values, his love, his goodness would begin shining through, but they would still be the people they always were.

How are we to understand this? I suppose we could envision it being a little bit like a virus. A virus takes up residence in us and begins impacting us. We show symptoms of that virus. So, let me get this straight, Rick. You’re saying Jesus is a virus? You’ve got the Jesus virus? Jesus makes you sick? No, I’m saying that’s a little like how Jesus will affect us. He will begin to manifest himself in us. When you have a virus you’re still the same person, but there will be some evidence of that virus showing up. When you have the Jesus virus you’ll still be you, but there will be evidence of Jesus showing up.

Let’s use Peter as an example again. Do you remember what happened the night Jesus was arrested? A servant girl who said she recognized Peter as one of Jesus’ men. Peter was terrified, sure that they’d arrest him too. So because he was afraid he repeatedly denied he even knew Jesus. That is consistent with what happened later in Antioch when fear of what others would think caused Peter to compromise his convictions. However, not many weeks later the same guy, with Jesus now living in him, is on trial before those very same people he was afraid of earlier. In Acts 4:13 Luke says of the authorities, “When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and took note that these men had been with Jesus.” Peter, the former coward, was looking like Jesus! The authorities threatened the two apostles and told them to shut up about this Jesus stuff. In verses 19-20 Peter and John said, “Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God’s sight to obey you rather than God. For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard.” What courage! Peter

wasn't perfect. It was later that he slipped up in Antioch. But Jesus was showing up in him big time on that occasion.

If Jesus is in us though we will still be recognizable as the people we have always been, the character of Jesus will start having an effect. We will start showing symptoms of Jesus in us. I don't understand how that's possible, but that shouldn't bother me too much. We have been taking care of Doc and Banjo, our "granddogs." Doc has a number of unusual characteristics, but one of the weirdest is a complete mystery to me. When either Laurie or I prepare to take a shower he goes ape. He frantically barks and whines and whirls in a circle like the world is coming to an end. Why does he go ballistic about us taking a shower? I have no idea. If I can't comprehend the behavior of a manic dog should it concern me that I don't completely understand what God does? Clearly not.

Perhaps you, like me, are thinking, I don't see an awful lot of Jesus showing up in my life. It is helpful to think about what sort of symptoms we should look for in a person Jesus lives in. One of the most obvious is a desire to obey the Father. In John 4 Jesus was in a Samaritan town where he was not welcome. The disciples all went in search of a fast food outlet to get some dinner. He struck up a conversation with a woman that ended with her believing in him. When the guys got back with the food he said in verse 32, "I have food to eat that you know nothing about." This was a surprise to them. They ask in verse 33 "Could someone have brought him food?" He said in verse 34, "My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work."

Jesus lived and thrived on doing the Father's will. It was as ever present for him as the need for food is for us. When he had the opportunity to do the work the Father gave him to do, food was of no concern to him. He was totally preoccupied with doing the Father's will. He had already shown that he could go weeks without food, but he could not go even a few seconds without doing the will of the Father. It was his sole passion, the air he breathed.

If Jesus is in us that passion will also show up in us. Sometimes I am afraid I lack the passion I should have. My food is to obey God for sure. I wish. We flew back to Mississippi in December. We had a fairly long flight to Houston where we had a layover. After getting to the airport in the morning, going through security, waiting for the flight, then the long flight all with no food, when we got off that plane in Houston I was hungry. I said to Laurie, "I'm starving, but what I really want is to do the will of the Father. As long as I can do that I could care less about food."

Actually that's not what happened. I wanted something to eat! Was it wrong to be hungry? Of course not. But my point is, food was what I was thinking about. I wasn't obsessed with doing God's will at that moment. This issue of having Jesus' passion for obeying the Father could easily cause us some serious doubt about whether Jesus is actually in us because most of us are pretty spotty when it comes to passion for the

Father's will. What we are utterly dedicated to is taking care of ourselves. My food is food when I'm hungry. I don't get off a long nutritionless flight obsessed with doing God's will. I'm not horrible. I'm not saying that I would run over my own mother to get food when I'm hungry, it just means my passion is meeting my own needs and that's true pretty much all the time.

Ah, but there is hope here. Remember Peter. He did display the passion to do the will of the Father in Acts 4, didn't he? The Father told him to talk about Jesus and he was going to do that no matter what the cost. But later in Antioch his fear got the better of him. His food was to have his Jewish friends think well of him. He wasn't perfect all the time. He occasionally lost track of doing the will of the Father. But that desire was there deep within him. He compromised at times, but the desire never really went away. Jesus was in him producing that desire.

If Jesus is in you somewhere inside is a desire to do God's will. You may compromise it from time to time, but this is what you really want. The last thing you want is to disobey God and it chagrins you when you fail. That's a symptom of Jesus. You are here today because you care, because somewhere inside, you deeply want to do God's will. Most of the time we just need to remind ourselves of that truth. There were moments this week in which I found myself responding to some situations with an attitude that had nothing to do with God's will. I kicked myself. Then I realized that my chagrin over my own fecklessness is evidence that I really do want to do the Father's will. That is my food, unfortunately for a few moments I substituted some junk food.

Another evidence of the presence of Jesus is confidence. By that I don't mean arrogance, cockiness, or certainty about your own competence. What I mean is a sense of security. It is a confidence in God and who you are in Christ that produces a calmness and peace even in the face of disaster. Think of Jesus in the boat on the lake with his disciples when a storm hits. The guys had seen such storms and they were freaking out. They likely knew people who had drowned in similar circumstances. What was Jesus doing? He was asleep. He wasn't threatened. Think of Jesus standing before Pilate and the Roman saying he had the power to set Jesus free or have him executed. Jesus wasn't fazed. He calmly said, "You only have power because the Father has given it to you." Jesus will cause in us that same confidence that God is good, that he is powerful, that he loves us, so none of the world's scary things and no people in this world threaten us.

Jesus said in Matthew 11:29 that he is gentle and humble in heart. You can see in his life how he dealt gently with flawed, broken people like the woman at the well, the adulterous woman, the woman of ill repute in Luke 7, Zaccheus, and even Peter after he had his epic meltdown the night Jesus was arrested. He is gentle, humble with them.

None of us is Jesus and none of us is perfect. This is not about feeling guilty because we don't have enough of these qualities and then gritting our teeth to go out and produce

them. This is about recognizing that these are the kinds of things that Jesus will produce. So how do we respond?

## APPLICATION

### MAKE SURE YOU'RE INFECTED

When I was young and heard sermons like this I typically went straight to the idea that I didn't see much of the symptoms of Jesus in me and therefore he wasn't there. Usually that led to a sort of confused amalgam of trying harder to be serious about my faith and trying again to ask Jesus into my life to make sure it worked.

The point of this exercise is not to get us all to try harder to produce the symptoms of Jesus, because only Jesus can produce those symptoms. Neither is it to say we need to clean up our act to get Jesus to accept us. Jesus said the "work" we need to do to get him into our lives is to believe in him. Accept him as the Lord of our lives. Trust that his work of dying for us was sufficient to make us God's children.

John 1:12 says that those who believe in Jesus name, which means to trust and rely on who he is and what he has done, will be given the privilege of being God's children. That's God's promise to us. God does not lie. He keeps his word. So if we trust in Jesus God keeps that promise. That is true whether we feel like it or not. Living by faith means trusting God to keep his promise.

### CELEBRATE WHAT YOU HAVE

If you have put your faith in Jesus think about what a gift you have. Jesus Christ's Spirit is in you. Do you realize what an amazing thing that is? In Romans 8:10 Paul said, "if Christ is in you, your body is dead because of sin, yet your spirit is alive because of righteousness." Wait, my body isn't dead. If it were dead I couldn't be talking to you. I'd be dead. What does Paul mean? I remember when I was a kid my brother and I were playing catch in the front yard. We were old enough that we needed more space than just our yard to throw because we had such powerful arms. Okay, that's not true, but I was standing in our neighbor's front yard. They had windows that cranked open so that it stood perpendicular to the house. One of us, whose name remains classified to this day, made an errant throw that hit the window and broke it. Do you know what our reaction was? "We are so dead." That's kind of the sense here. Paul said, "Your body because of sin is so dead." It's going to get it. It is going to be condemned, and the penalty is death.

But Paul said because of righteousness, because you have been declared righteous by God through what Jesus has done for you, your spirit is alive. You have life. You are alive to God. You know he is there and you care about what he wants in life. You have hope. You have a whole new perspective on life that is grounded in peace and hope. That has confidence, that is alive to all that is going on in the world around you.

You are never alone. Jesus is in you at every moment of life. When you are confused the one thing you can hang onto is that Jesus is in you. When you are fearful about the future you can rest, because Jesus is in you. You have his power available to do the things that are hard and his mind to direct you. You may think it doesn't feel like Jesus is in you, but he said he would be in you and that he would never leave you. So you only have 3 alternatives. Either he didn't tell the truth, he was wrong, or he has kept the promise and he is in you. If you put your faith in him I submit that he is there and will never abandon you because he doesn't lie and he wasn't wrong.

This is a great thing. When you feel down and discouraged, remember that you have something to rejoice about, even in the worst of times, because Jesus is in you. If you don't know what to do rejoice because he is in you and he is not helpless. He is transforming you. He is making you alive. So give thanks and rejoice in what you have in him. Having Jesus there in you is a huge blessing. I was thinking about a couple of events I am going to have to attend in the near future. I don't really look forward to either one. I am committed to attending because it is the right thing to do, but honestly I'd rather not go. As I think about these events I remind myself that Laurie will be with me. When I remember that I realize I will have a good time because she'll be there and that will make it all right. Then I realize that no matter where I go or what I do, *Jesus* goes with me and *that* will make it all right.

#### COUNT ON WHAT YOU HAVE

We were talking to Carissa about our visit with them next month. She asked if we'd like to try out the simulator for the aircraft Michael tries when we're there. My answer was, "Well duh! Are you kidding?! Of *course!*" I have flown the F18 simulator at Miramar. I did just fine flying the thing when it was cruising. Landing was a disaster. Do the words "crash and burn" mean anything to you?

Imagine if I were trying to pilot an actual airplane. As long as it was just flying straight ahead I would probably do just fine. But if any sort of emergency came up, if there was any trouble, or if I actually had to try to land the thing, disaster would likely ensue. Now let's imagine that my fighter pilot son-in-law Michael were in the plane with me. Would it make any sense for me to say, "I got this," and insist on trying to land the plane? That would be foolish and disastrous. The smart thing to do would be for me to say, "Michael, you got it. You fly the plane."

As we are going through life what we need to do is not say to Jesus, "I got this." We may do all right as long as everything is straight and level, but when it gets challenging, disaster lurks. Jesus is in you. Let him fly the plane. Consciously give him the controls every day. Ask him to manifest himself in you. Recently I had a little example of this. We were considering what we should do in regard to our car. It's quite old now with lots of miles on it. We were debating whether we should make expensive repairs on it and keep it or get a new one. If we got a new one should we lease or buy? We're trying to make a

long term plan for this. I struggle with things like this. I feel like on things like this I usually make the wrong call. I get input from other people and they don't agree. I feel hassled, make a decision and then it goes bad. So I tend to obsess over this kind of thing. I got to where I wanted to just stick my head and the sand. Maybe if I just close my eyes it will all go away. But wait, Jesus is in me. Hey, Jesus, are you stressed about this? You know what? He's not. He doesn't seem the least bit hassled by it. He suggested that the Father has all the money we need and not to fret. Sometimes you hear people say, "God said to me..." Well I can't say for sure that Jesus said this to me, but when I said to Jesus "I know you're in me so you fly the plane," a thought immediately popped into my mind. It was, "Why don't you focus on things that really matter. This doesn't matter, and even if you make the worst decision possible about the car it won't matter." Oh, yeah, that's true. I can trust Jesus with this. Suddenly my stress level dropped to near zero about the thing. What came with that is the freedom to trust whatever happens, it will be fine. We'll be fine. So I can stop worrying and focus on the things that really matter in life.

What do you want most? Down at the very foundation of your being if Jesus is in you, what you want most of all is to be like Jesus. Nothing would be greater than for others to see that you are like Jesus. That desire is there because Jesus is in you. When you are under stress, when you are tempted, when you don't know what to do, remember that Jesus is in you. Say to him, "Lord, you fly the plane. What I want most is for you to manifest your character in me." When you are dealing with that annoying clerk, or with a dishonest contractor who is trying to rip you off and you want give them both barrels instead, say, "Jesus, live through me." At the end of your day the thing that will bring you the most satisfaction and joy no matter what others may do is that Jesus shined through in your life. You will be most able to rejoice in his faithfulness to the Father's will, in his peace and confidence, in his gentleness and love for others, in his goodness appearing in your words and actions.