

Friday Lunch Bunch

Session 2: NT Themes and Events

October 20, 2023 • Rev. Doug Gray
First Congregational Church, Salt Lake City

I. Intros and Prayer

- a. Welcome
- b. The critical century and its issues
- c. Pray

II. Four Key Events of the First Century

- a. After Jesus' death, resurrection and ascension
- b. Council of Jerusalem — 45 AD
 - i. Acts 15
 - ii. Can Gentiles be Christians? The answer: yes!
- c. Nero's Persecution of Christians — 64–67 AD
 - i. Looking for a scapegoat for fires July 19, 64 AD
 - ii. First systematic persecution of Christians — Peter and Paul martyred
 - iii. Horrific events led to many Christians going "underground"—sometimes literally!
 - iv. May have led to Mark's Gospel — Suffering Christ defines God's nature.
- d. Destruction of Jerusalem — 70 AD
 - i. Rebellion of 66 AD
 - ii. Brutal quashing of the rebellion
 - iii. Siege of Jerusalem, then sack and burning — Story of Gamaliel smuggled out in coffin
 - iv. Jesus is the locus of worship —completely unmoored from Jerusalem
 - v. Seen by some as judgment on those who had crucified Jesus
- e. Council of Jamnia — 85–100 AD
 - i. Gathering of Jewish scholars
 - ii. Made Rabbinic/Pharisaic Judaism the primary stream for Judaism
 - iii. Hebrew scriptures would be authoritative (no more Septuagint)
 - iv. Set the OT Canon
 - v. Pronounced curse on Christians (Nazarenes, gnostics, and Jewish Christians)
 - vi. Christians are put out of the synagogues (see John 9)

III. Four Major Themes

- a. Who Is Jesus? Translating experience into theology
 - i. Son of God
 - ii. Incarnation — Fully human, fully divine
 - iii. Philippians 2:5–11, John 1:1–3
- b. What does it mean to be Church? Loving like Jesus would
 - i. One Body despite differences — 1 Corinthians 12:4–6, 12–13
 - ii. Being sensitive to needs of others — Romans 14:1–4, 13–18
- c. What does it mean to live for Jesus in a hostile world?
 - i. Crucifixion and Resurrection define God’s character... — Mark 15:37–39
 - ii. ...And describe our life in Him — Matthew 16:24–25
 - iii. Blessed are those who are persecuted — Matthew 5:11–12
- d. Will the Church be defined by The Great Commission or the Great Commandments
 - i. Great Commission — Matthew 28:16–20
 - ii. Great Commandments — Mark 12:28–34
 - iii. Choose Power over Love? Or Love over Power?
 - iv. Can we share the power of our faith in love?

IV. Conclusions

- a. The key questions of faith in our time are rooted in the key questions of their time
- b. The Jesus we encounter in these early Christian writings is paradigm-shifting, and shatters the cultural, social and psychological bonds of His context
- c. The defining answers of the Early Church resonate with power today
 - i. We live in times of divisions in the Church — LGBTQ and politics
 - ii. We live in times of growing persecution —Christianity thrives under persecution, but we have to get firmer in our faith and clearer in our mission
 - iii. We need to know in our bones that Jesus is not just back then, but with us now, to comfort, strengthen and guide us