Week Two: Christ-Centered
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What is your favorite story about Jesus?

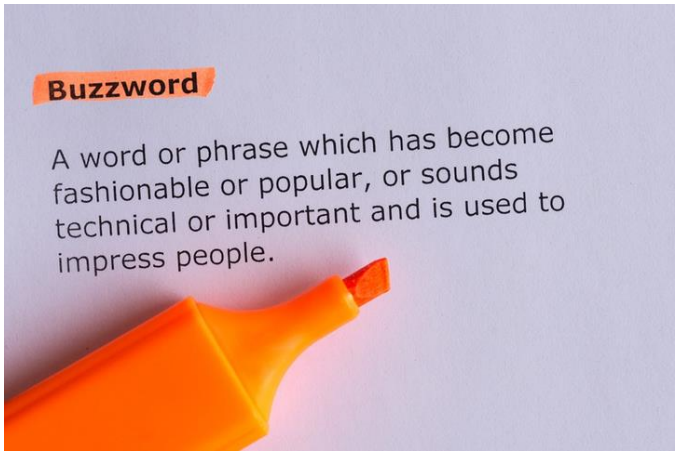
What does that story tell you about who Jesus is?

What does that story tell you about how a Christ-centered life is lived?

While on Instagram a few weeks back I came across an advertisement for new a bracelet. The bracelet had the same look as a WWJD bracelet (what would Jesus do) but this new bracelet had different letters: HWLF. The advertisement was enticing, so I clicked on the image to figure out what it was all about and I came across this story:



*A while ago I was looking at my WWJD (What Would Jesus Do) wristband and I wondered what my answer would be if someone actually asked me that question. "He Would Love First TM" was my immediate thought. Before labeling anyone as an "outsider" or letting what society said change His view of people, Jesus loved fully and unconditionally. With no strings attached He sowed seeds of love. With this simple revelation I began to realize, first, how often I can get things backwards or over complicate them instead of simply walking in love. Secondly, I thought how many people might not know what Jesus is like or "what he would do." Maybe they think he would call them out or list off all the things they're doing wrong. But Jesus is so much deeper than that and we want the world to know what he's really like. So a couple close friends and I created the H.W.L.F. TM wristband! Instead of wondering what Jesus might do let's answer the question so the world can know who He is and what He's like.**



Christ-centered was often a buzzword or popular phrase at Seminary. For those of us who were studying to be pastors or ministry leaders, saying our sermon was Christ-centered or that our catechism lesson was Christ-centered, or even that we were looking to lead Christ-centered ministries meant we didn't have to define what Christ-centered meant. We could just say "Christ-centered," no one would ask what we meant. We all assumed everyone knew what everyone else was talking about. Labeling something Christ-centered was a shortcut and often left undefined. But living Christ-centered lives really doesn't seem like a shortcut to me. Living Christ-centered seems to be the opposite of a shortcut.

An old Lutheran teaching about sermons was taken from Paul's first letter to the Corinthians where Paul states, "*When I came to you, brothers and sisters, I did not come proclaiming the mystery of God to you in lofty words or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and him crucified.*" The teaching emphasized in each sermon, a pastor must preach Christ and Christ crucified. In the same way, on youth mission trips, camps, and in Vacation Bible School curriculum often teaches Jesus crucified on Thursday and resurrected on Friday.

Here at Grace, we describe Christ-centered this way:

> ***In the person of Jesus, God became flesh and lived among us demonstrating the importance of being in relationship with humanity. The cross is central to our identity, where Jesus opened his arms to all, proclaiming: "you are mine, beloved, forgiven and blessed." As God's people, we find unity in our diversity and inspiration to live as people doing the work of God in the world.***

Christ-centered isn't a shortcut. Christ-centered isn't only Christ crucified. Christ-centered is embodying the life and teachings of Jesus. Jesus became God with skin on. Jesus humbled himself and while Jesus walked the earth, Jesus reframed what it meant to love God and love others. Mary proclaimed who Jesus was in the words of her Magnificat (Luke 1:46-56). Simeon proclaims it when as a babe Jesus is presented in the temple (Luke 2:34).

And Jesus preaches it in his first sermon,

> *He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written: 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor,* (Luke 4:18).

What do you like about Grace's definition of Christ-centered? What do you dislike? What is missing?

Are we as a congregation living the value of being Christ-centered? Why or why not?

How can we more fully live into our value of being Christ-centered?

Pray together:

Dear God,

Thank you for your son, Jesus. Thank you for his life. Humble us by letting Christ become central in our lives together. That Jesus' life be our example, showing us how to love you and love others. Help us find unity in our diversity and inspiration to do your work in the world. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

* https://hewouldlovefirst.com/pages/story