



**The Originals of Jesus Christ**  
Celebration of Ministries Sunday, Sep 10th, 2017  
All Saints' Episcopal Church, Atlanta  
Rev. Dr. Simon Mainwaring

# The Originals of Jesus Christ



## **The Collect**

Grant us, O Lord, to trust in you with all our hearts; for, as you always resist the proud who confide in their own strength, so you never forsake those who make their boast of your mercy; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

## **First Reading** *Ezekiel 33:7-11*

You, mortal, I have made a sentinel for the house of Israel; whenever you hear a word from my mouth, you shall give them warning from me. If I say to the wicked, "O wicked ones, you shall surely die," and you do not speak to warn the wicked to turn



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from their ways, the wicked shall die in their iniquity, but their blood I will require at your hand. But if you warn the wicked to turn from their ways, and they do not turn from their ways, the wicked shall die in their iniquity, but you will have saved your life.

Now you, mortal, say to the house of Israel, Thus you have said: "Our transgressions and our sins weigh upon us, and we waste away because of them; how then can we live?" Say to them, As I live, says the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from their ways and live; turn back, turn back from your evil ways; for why will you die, O house of Israel?

### **The Epistle**      *Romans 13:8-14*

Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. The commandments, "You shall not commit adultery; You shall not murder; You shall not steal; You shall not covet"; and any other commandment, are summed up in this word, "Love your neighbor as yourself." Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law.

Besides this, you know what time it is, how it is now the moment for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we became believers; the night is far gone, the day is near. Let us then lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armor of light; let us live honorably as in the day, not in reveling and drunkenness, not in debauchery and licentiousness, not in quarreling and jealousy. Instead, put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.

### **Gospel**      *Matthew 18:15-20*

Jesus said, "If another member of the church sins against you, go and point out the fault when the two of you are alone. If the member listens to you, you have regained that one. But if you are not listened to, take one or two others along with you, so that every word may be confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If the member refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if the offender refuses to listen even to the church, let such a one be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. Again, truly I tell you, if two of you agree on earth about anything you ask, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them."



In the Fall of 2008, a struggling Wharton business school student, whose outgoings easily surpassed his incomings, broke his glasses. With the debt he had incurred to go through school, he could not afford to buy a new frame and lenses and so kept his glasses together with some scotch tape and a paper clip. Whether his three close friends at school got tired of watching his glasses slide down the bridge of his nose one too many times, or whether they felt inspired by the Holy Spirit, remains a mystery; either way, it was at that point in time that the four of them had an idea to change the eyeglasses world, forever.

A few years before, a company called *Zappos* had broken into the footwear market with a business model based on lots of choice and easy returns, by mailing shoes to people's homes to try on there rather than have them head out to the shoe store. Neil Blumenthal, Andrew Hunt, David Gilboa, and Jeffrey Raider believed that the same concept of home delivery and return could be applied to glasses. People who heard their concept thought they were crazy. Nobody was going to buy glasses online. Who does that? 'Everyone will',



they replied, 'it's just a question of getting people to see reality differently to what they think it should be.'

When the four business school students shared the idea with Adam Grant, who was a professor at Wharton at the time, not only did he feel that the concept was a stretch in a market dominated by traditional retail, their methods in starting the business were far from what he would consider promising. When they launched the company, they were still in school. Upon graduating, rather than throw themselves into their grand new venture, they hedged their bets and took up other full-time jobs and internships, working on the new project in their spare time. It took them six months just to agree on a name for the company and even longer to launch a website.

Adding all of this together, Adam Grant declined the opportunity to invest in the start-up. For him, Neil, Andrew, David, and Jeffrey's dorm-room vision and methodology was just too far off the reservation. Adam now regrets that decision. Starting with a \$2,500 seed investment grant, the four friends founded their company, called it *Warby Parker*,



and did indeed change the eyeglasses world forever. From their humble beginning, seven years later in 2015, *Warby Parker* was valued at \$1.2 billion, and was rated that same year as the world's most innovative company. Suffice to say, Mrs. Grant has not let Adam make an investment decision since.

Since Dr. Grant had failed to invest in such an incredible market success, he was no longer able to take early retirement as a college professor, so instead he decided to write a book, about *Warby Parker* and other such ventures out there which he names the 'originals'. It's worth a read, for nothing else than the realization that we have seen the *Warby Parker* story all around us for some time. *Netflix, Apple, Wikipedia, Facebook, Twitter*, and many more like them; entities founded by people who had that knack of being presented with the same reality all of us are faced with, yet who are able to see that reality in a whole new way.



Now 2000 years may have tamed it, and our fine Sunday clothes can make it *look* respectable, but you and I are sitting right now, smack, dab in the middle of one the greatest works of originality the world has ever known. The company founder was from Nazareth and his business partners are sitting among you today. Yet, if we are honest about it, the vision of reality that Jesus had for you and I can sound at times a little too original for comfort: if your enemy strikes you on one cheek, don't strike him back, give him the other one. If someone hates you, offer them your love, and love them like they were your neighbor; love them like they were yourself. Don't exploit the weak, support them. Don't just honor those of high status, honor everyone. Share all that you have in common, and make sure the least among you have the most of what they need.

If that wasn't enough to be going on with, this morning we heard from Matthew's gospel another portion of the original, Jesus' vision of the kingdom of God, in this instance as a 1st century version of conflict resolution: if you don't like what someone else has done to you, go and tell them; if that fails, bring some friends with you so that you can tell



them at least three times over; and failing that, call the whole church to a meeting and air your dirty laundry out in the open. If nothing else, it would certainly make for a fascinating coffee hour after church.

Fascinating and true to form, for these are the hallmarks of the Body of Christ, the ways of being for followers of Jesus as we live into the radical honesty, extravagant hospitality, spendthrift generosity, of the tireless mercy-giving, love-extending, grace-filled way of the divine life walking among us, begun in Christ Jesus and culminating in lives as seemingly unoriginal and yours and mine. This is the way of our faith, and this morning we are once more going to embody this wild and free vision of society and human flourishing, loud and proud under the guise of our parish's celebration of ministry Sunday. It will look harmless enough, but perhaps ahead of time we should heed this warning from Annie Dillard, from her book 'Teaching a Stone to Talk', about what all this ministry might really be doing to us. She writes:



*"On the whole, I do not find Christians, outside of the catacombs, sufficiently sensible of conditions. Does anyone have the foggiest idea what sort of power we so blithely invoke? Or, as I suspect, does no one believe a word of it? The churches are children playing on the floor with their chemistry sets, mixing up a batch of TNT to kill a Sunday morning. It is madness to wear ladies'...velvet hats to church; we should all be wearing crash helmets. Ushers should issue life preservers and signal flares; they should lash us to our pews. For the sleeping god may wake someday and take offense, or the waking god may draw us out to where we can never return."*

Here, then, is your ecclesiastical disclaimer. When you see those beautiful banners spread along the courtyard out there, don't be fooled. And when Lauri Begley flashes you a smile and beckons you over to sign up for something or other, or Ellen Hayes starts to talk to you about generosity, or Ray Chenault tells you that you have a future in the world of church music, take note of when they slip that batch of





TNT into your bag or your coat pocket. For this, dear Saints of God, already is a church of originals, and Jesus is walking among us, primed and ready to shake things up, to blow apart the world's assumptions of what counts as valuable and lovable and good and free.

You are God's originals and God knows the world needs some originals right now; those who have chosen to put on the armor of light, and who have committed to love their neighbors especially when they don't love them back, and who are practicing here on this block what it means to see and to live differently so that they might also take that light out into the world to whomever they might meet. Truth is, in terms of HR, this Jesus enterprise doesn't need a lot, just two or three gathered in his name and the Alpha and the Omega of all that there is, the Prince of Peace and Lord of Life will walk with us. So why not let this year be the one where you make your investment in that vagabond from Nazareth and join the Saints in helping others see the common bushes of this world aflame with the glory of God.

Amen.