

Who Are You Jesus?

It's a shame that today's gospel lesson only gets our attention every 6 years or so, because it really sets the stage for who Jesus is — and what a strange stage it is.

Imagine the scene.

Jesus is being mobbed by the disabled, by soldiers with much of their bodies burned from a firefight in Afghanistan, he's surrounded by legless Palestinian children and men reeking of cigarettes from a just finished AA meeting. Feasting on the Word, V.B3, 119.

There's a lesbian holding her child on her hip, and some out of work miners singing old folk tunes, and a teenager who ran away from too many beatings at home, not to mention the 30 year old mother of three who's trying her best to kick a heroin addiction. Id. paraphrased.

And into this scene come the religious know-it-alls and the immediate family of Jesus.

The know-it-alls are convinced that Jesus is like that gal from the Exorcist, that he's possessed.

His family doesn't think he's possessed, they think he's crazy!

And Jesus says to the know-it-alls that they are in deep trouble, because what they are calling evil is the very Spirit of God, set loose in this broken world; and Jesus tells his relatives that the water of the Spirit is thicker than blood, that the ties that bind are not formed by who's your mamma, but by whom we love.

No wonder we try so hard to tame, to domesticate Jesus; because the places he wants to take us to are strange, sometimes scary, always way out of our comfort zone.

So we try to shave off his sharp elbows and resist his insistence that to be with him means being with the unwashed, the smelly, those the world calls losers.

Instead of taking the plunge with this strange Messiah, we feel much more at ease dressing Jesus up as a smooth talking televangelist who deserves a \$54 million private jet.

Or we paint him as an apologist for the rich and powerful, who point to their riches and power as proof of God's blessing.

We make him into a "name it and claim it" candyman who doles out cars and vacations and the like to those who make such demands on God.

Or we put him into the tiny box of personal savior, with the rest of the world be damned — literally.

But mostly, we prefer to think of Jesus as simply a good man, a wise teacher, who, like any quotable guy, can provide us some inspiration to make it through the day.

Who are you Jesus?

CS Lewis wrestled with this question, and came to conclude that:

"A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher.

He would either be a lunatic — on a level with a man who says he's a poached egg — or else he would be the Devil of Hell.

You must make your choice.

Either this man was, and is, the Son of God, or else a madman or something worse.

You can shut him up for a fool, or you can spit at him and kill him as a demon, or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God.

But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher.

He has not left that open to us.

He did not intend to." *Mere Christianity*, 52-3.

Who are you Jesus?

In her short story called *A Good Man is Hard to Find*, Flannery O'Connor tells of a family trip gone awry when their car breaks down in an out of the way wooded area.

Looking for help, the family stumbles upon some newly escaped cons, who capture the family, and one by one, shoots them dead.

The grandma is the last one alive.

She pleads with the main bad guy, a fellow named Misfit, pleading with him finally in the name of Jesus.

And the Misfit replies:

"Jesus was the only one that ever raised the dead.

And he shouldn't a done it.

He thrown everything off balance.

If he did what he said, then it's nothing for you to do but throw away everything and follow him, and if he didn't, then it's nothing for you to do but enjoy the few minutes you got left the best way you can — by

killing somebody or burning down his house, or doing some other meanness to him.

No pleasure but meanness,' he said, his voice had become almost a snarl."
O'Connor, *The Complete Stories*, 132.

Jesus meets us at the fork in the road.

To the right is religion as usual.

It is marked by ritual, and it is highly segregated by class, race and nationality.

It's concerns are following the rules well enough to earn a harp and wings so that one might spend a never ending amount of time strumming said harp on a cloud.

To the left is Jesus.

This path is marked by the power of sacrificial love: a love that turns the other cheek; that gives coat and shirt; that walks the extra mile; that loves the enemy and has mercy on the broken; it is the love that dies rather than kills.

It is a path overgrown with the upside down power of this God who comes to us in gentle nudges and quiet whispers; a God who, when we find ourselves on the cross -- comes and hangs with us.

The path of Jesus joins with our presiding bishop and religious leaders across the country who recently issued this statement to Christians throughout the country:

"When politics undermines our theology, we must examine that politics.

The church's role is to change the world through the life and love of Jesus Christ.

The government's role is to serve the common good by protecting justice and peace, rewarding good behavior while restraining bad behavior (Romans 13).

When that role is undermined by political leadership, faith leaders must stand up and speak out.

Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. said, "The church must be reminded that it is not the master or the servant of the state, but rather the conscience of the state."

It is often the duty of Christian leaders, especially elders, to speak the truth in love to our churches and to name and warn against temptations, racial and cultural captivities, false doctrines, and political idolatries — and even our complicity in them.

We do so here with humility, prayer, and a deep dependency on the grace and Holy Spirit of God, as we insist that each human being is made in God's image and likeness, that racial bigotry is a brutal denial of the image of God, and therefore we reject the resurgence of white nationalism and racism in our nation, including the highest levels of political leadership.

We believe we are one body so that in Christ, there is to be no oppression based on race, gender, identity, or class, and therefore we reject misogyny, the mistreatment, violent abuse, sexual harassment, and assault of women that has been further revealed in our culture and politics, including our churches, and the oppression of any other child of God.

We believe how we treat the hungry, the thirsty, the naked, the stranger, the sick, and the prisoner is how we treat Christ himself, and therefore, we reject the language and policies of political leaders who would debase and abandon the most vulnerable children of God.

We believe that Christ's way of leadership is servanthood, not domination, and we reject any moves toward autocratic political leadership and authoritarian rule, therefore we reject "America first" as a theological heresy for followers of Christ." Reclaiming Jesus.

Who are you Jesus?

You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God!

Help us to be faithful to your often strange, sometimes frightening, yet always breathtaking, path.

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