

## Who Are You Jesus?

So, more than once I've heard my children complain about how borrrrrring our liturgy can be.

Maybe yours have said the same from time to time.

Truth be told, I've agreed with that sentiment once in awhile.

Which got me thinking about growing up days and those regular visits with my Mom's elderly aunts, Aunt Jenny and Aunt Harriet, in their old house on a tree shaded lane.

They were probably in their 80s and I have to tell you, for the longest time — every visit there was borrrrrring!

They were very nice ladies who fed us toast and biscuits and we played with their giant poodle Pierre, but, truly, most of the visits were borrrring.

But as time went on, when I sat down with them and started really listening to their stories, well, a funny thing happened, it wasn't boring anymore.

Because their stories were not only fascinating in and of themselves, going back a century or more, as they recalled the stories of their parents and grandparents, but eventually I came to see that their stories were part of the fabric of my life, that I now pass down to my children and grandchildren.

Stories that my children and grandchildren will then take up and pass down themselves, creating connections over the generations — all with an eye on helping us see who we really are; where we've come from, and where we're going.

And when I think about my kids who sometimes find our service boring, when I recall those times when I myself sat in the pew and wondered when it'll all be pau, that's when I remember Aunt Harriet and Aunt Jenny, they remind me that this sacred place of St Elizabeth's, this is where we come to to remember our story, yours and mine, and all the millions who came before us, and the millions who shall come after.

For the last couple of months, our readings take us all the way back to the beginning, when God calls Abram from a small town, promising to take him to places that Abram never dreamed of.

He ends up with a new name, Abraham, and a new child in his old age.

That child, Issac, goes on to become the father of twins; twins who never quite get along, who are sometimes at each other's necks trying to kill one another, sometimes at each others necks in tears of love.

Two sons who give birth to nations.

Then there's Joseph, and the troubles he has with his brothers; yet the most beautiful miracles are born out of these troubles.

And today we meet Moses.

The story is full of ironies— the irony that mere slaves can scare the bejeebers out of the supposedly god-like Pharaoh; the irony that baby Moses is found among reeds, when Pharaoh's army will drown in the Reed Sea many years later, pursuing the slaves Moses has freed.

And while we might brush these stories off as having nothing to do with us, they are in fact our stories too, stories that call us into relationship with the strangest kinds of people.

Folks like St Paul.

The fellow so up tight that, as they say down South, a mule couldn't pull a needle from between the cheeks of his backside!

Paul, holder of coats when St. Stephen is stoned.

Paul, on his way to Damascus, ready to take out another Christian community, when he's knocked on his backside, blinded for a bit, and in his blindness comes to see a different way to be in relationship with his fellow human beings, with God.

That's the transformation of mind that Paul is talking about today.

Up till then, he is like many people: finding some rules to follow, earning God's love, hating the right people, and getting on with making money and having a good time.

But the transformation of mind that Paul endures, that he begs us to endure, allows us to see that we are not atomistic individuals just trying to muddle through until the day we die, but that we are part of a magnificent whole, a glorious living tapestry, with every conceivable color and texture, reflecting the very image and likeness of God.

This "transformation of mind" calls us to see that God's will for us is not that we buckle down and straighten up, but that God's deepest desire for us is that we love each other, and ourselves, and through that love look up and discover the magnificent truth of our situation: that we are, now, today, this moment, playing in the fields of the tender creator, the sustainer of all things; who always and everywhere loves us, who is always and everywhere hoping that we too will choose love.

And all of this comes home in the question Jesus asks of us today: "who do people say I am....who do YOU say I am?"

Who are you Jesus?

Are you a new lawgiver, a new judge, a new taskmaster?

Are you the one whose rules we have to follow or to whom we need to bow down to get that Willy Wonka ticket into heaven?

Or are you the dream of God?

Are you God's plan from the very beginning of creation; the plan that one day the divinity who made creation shall become one with creation, so that one day, all of creation shall become divine?

Perhaps from the very beginning, God's dream is that God will become part of her own good creation.

For way too long, we have taught, unfortunately in my opinion, that Jesus is somehow a cure for Adam's disobedience; that an angry God needs a sacrifice in order to make things right with humanity; or that maybe Jesus has to pay the devil his due.

But that's not what the gospel tells us.

The gospel tells us that Jesus comes not "to change God's mind about us, but to change our minds about God." Rohr, *Eager to Love*, paraphrased, 187.

That "God in Jesus is trying to move us beyond the counting and measuring that our egos demand — into the utterly new world that Jesus offers, where God's abundance makes the temptation to insist

upon "getting what you deserve" or "earning salvation" or "sacrifice" not only unhelpful, but unnecessary." Id. paraphrased.

"Jesus undoes, once and for all, all notions of animal and human sacrifice.

He replaces it all with grace; so that we are all of us saved by the undeserved grace which pours out of God's utter freedom to love; stripping away our tit for tat bargain store thinking that wrongly imposes on God a quid for every quo." Id. paraphrased.

As St Peter comes to see, God has no favorites; not the Jews, not the Evangelicals, not even the Episcopalians! Acts 10:34-5.

And because God has no favorites, God is able to make each and every human person her favorite! Id.

That God's grace is able to break through every shell, to forgive every sin, to redeem the darkest night of the soul, even that kid who plowed into the young woman in Charlottesville, even the young man who drove his truck into the Barcelona crowds.

The truth of our common story is that "God doesn't love us because we are good, God loves us because God is good." Id.

With that, we can exhale.

We can let go, because God has already done everything necessary for a happy ending.

Our common story reminds us that God isn't a series of propositions but a person, that we are here not to learn rules but to meet and get to know the creator who becomes one with her creation, and who does so out of overflowing joy and desire and wonder.

This is our story.

This is what we come to sit with each and every Sunday.

In this story is hope!

In this story is salvation!

In this story is life!

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