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JESUS

When you think about Jesus, what springs to mind most? And if you think again, what is your second thought? Every time I consider the person of Jesus I am in awe of the fact that he fits none of my assumptions or prejudices. I want him to think as I think and to justify my judgments. But he does not do so. He is in his behavior and teaching impossible to categorize. And it is for this reason that we may call him Savior and Lord.

And yet we would be gravely mistaken if we considered him anything less than fully human. He is man in the truest sense. As such he is the Son of Man, what mankind ought to be and would be if not for our Fall into our selves.

Consider him as a youth. We do not have much information at all, only about his visit to the Temple at the age of twelve and his amazing discussion with the learned men of his religion. It was then that Jesus was already about his Father's business, which led him away from the close scrutiny of his parents, to whom afterward he was again most carefully obedient.

It was not until he was thirty that he began his earthly ministry, taking our place in John's baptism of repentance. He had already been shaped and formed in the security of Joseph and Mary, but now, as the dove descended upon him, he was revealed as what he always was, the Son of God.

From that moment onward, we are given to see what Man united to God truly is. And this is at times comforting and at times troubling. Jesus will not let us sink into our selves, he calls from another world which redeems and sets forth for us a new heaven and a new earth.

I suppose most of the time we want Jesus to be the Savior. We look for the mercy of God which comes down on the just and unjust like the heavenly rain. We need to come to him who tells us come - all who travail and are heavy laden - looking for the refreshment only he can give. We desire above all else the love which God has for the world and which moved him to give his only Son that we might believe in him. We listen for the mercy of God and we find all mercy in Jesus.

And yet he proclaims that his kingdom is open only to the "poor in spirit," that the gate is narrow and there are few that find it, that whoever does not love him more than all else is not worthy of him.

While he offers mercy, he offers a cross as well, the command to love so much that we die to ourselves. Few of us take this offer seriously. We prefer to leave it in the realm of metaphor.

And then there are the moments remembered by the gospel writers of how Jesus acted. On the one hand he was quite joyful about life. He was accused of being a glutton and a wine bibber, and severely criticized by the religious leaders of his day for hanging out with sinners, prostitutes and tax gatherers, and for allowing his disciples to eat with unwashed hands. And yet on the other hand, when it came to besetting sins and the possession of devils he claimed that only prayer and fasting could cast them out, he would not allow one to look on another with lust, and he would tell the religious not to neglect the seemingly insignificant matters of the law, such as tithing mint and cumin, while keeping the weightier matters of love and mercy and sacrifice. Jesus was the incarnation of mercy and obedience and did not swap one for the other.

He had a great deal to say about money. He knew that no one could serve two masters and mammon was a master which most choose to serve instead of God. He drew on the order of nature to teach that God had made an environment for man, and that while the lilies of the field and the birds of the air were kept in the providence of God, so we might be too, if we shun the anxiety of a worldview driven by money, and accept our given place in the kingdom of our Creator and spiritual Father.

In many ways Jesus was not reasonable. Foxes had holes and birds their nest, but the Son of Man had no place to lay his head. A more reasonable man set on building a kingdom would have built up capital. In the end, the only thing the money bag was good for was to buy the cross with thirty pieces of silver.

And yet Jesus was comfortable in the midst of the wealthy, those whom he knew were intent on the kingdom of God. He would tell them, when they repented, that their intention had brought them into the kingdom.

But most of all Jesus loved his Father, and he did all that he did on this earth for him. He knew his Father was the archetype and origin of all that Jesus portrayed in the parable of the prodigal son. The father would see the prodigal from afar off, and run to him, and embrace him, and put a robe on him and a ring, and call for a celebration, slaughtering the fatted calf and dancing to joyous music. This was and is the God whom Jesus loved and for whom and to whom he gave his life. He was and is the Good and only he, and Jesus needed and wanted nothing else but him.

It was out of the depths of his love for his Father that Jesus was able to summon such great love for us. That is why we cannot locate our prejudices in him. He had none. This world was for him only the means to know and love God. His mother had taught him this from a very young age. "My soul doth magnify the Lord and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Savior."

In the end all that we know and love amounts to nothing but our assumptions and ignorant will if we do not know the one true God, the only Good, the Creator of all to whom worship is due from all. In the

end what Jesus loved above all else was Love itself, and he knew that all the motives and wishes and desires of this world were mere passing fancy compared to God.

And so there was only one thing to do. If the blood of God might be poured out on all creation, if the humility of God might wash us clean, then we might have the ability to turn from our fallen selves and to look into the face of God. But such an offering only Jesus, the Son of Man, could make. Only he could feel forsaken because only he had been pure in heart. And when he cried, "My God, my God," he drew upon the fathomless depths of faith and love. He offered himself to his Father, "a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction, for the sins of the whole world." Only Jesus is Jesus. Our assumptions and prejudices are our own. And there is no health in us.

TheRev'd. Dr. Michael L. Carreker

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