

Know Jesus, Follow Jesus

John 1: 1-18

Who do you want to be like? A few years ago, everyone wanted to be *like Mike* – meaning Michael Jordan. Who is it that you want to emulate, to be like? Do you want to be like Jesus? Can you describe which attributes of Jesus you'd like to copy in your life? Which actions of Jesus do you want to emulate?

There is a closely related question: “Who is the Jesus for you to follow?” Have you ever done one of those guided meditation in which you picture yourself in a special place, then Jesus comes to you and has a conversation with you? As an aspect of this conversation, you reflect on what you heard and what you said in such a way as to know yourself more clearly. This is also a way to know Jesus, your understanding of Jesus, in a clearer way.

Close your eyes and picture yourself in a comfortable and life-giving space now. Picture how your space looks just as vividly as you can. Relax within this inner space of yours. Then, at your invitation, Jesus comes to join you. Be as honest as you can be with your invitation. If you do not invite Jesus in, be aware of why not. If you decide to enter into conversation with Jesus, be as honest and open as you can possibly be. Take note of what you say – even writing it down, if you wish. Wait to hear Jesus' reply. When you have said what you want to say and heard what Jesus says in response, come back into awareness of those around you and this space, knowing that this inner space is always there – always available to you.

What attributes and actions of Jesus do you want to copy in your life? We may know and follow Jesus as a human being in history and as the icon of a movement. We have this knowledge through the writings of his earliest followers. We may know and worship Jesus as God the Son, the second person of the Trinity, according to our own faith tradition. We also may know Jesus through our own experience of the Spirit in whom each of us lives. Ultimately, in terms of Christian faith, our journey is to know Jesus and to follow Jesus.

To follow Jesus does not mean to parrot him in a kind of karaoke imitation. It does not mean to practice a pious lifestyle that denies the reality of the struggles and the dark sides of life. Author Francis Dewar suggests that following Jesus means, “being as generous with our true selves and as lavish with our inner treasure as he was.” (Dewar, *Invitations*, p. 59) What is that *inner treasure*? It is this: “each of us discovering what we are about and living it with every fiber of our being.” (Dewar, 59)

There is more to our inner treasure, however. It is discovering who we are and living in that fully. It is also a matter of what each of us, and us as a congregation, can do to “be a threat to those who are more concerned with power, or status, or material riches.” (Dewar, 59) It is, in fact, to be like Jesus – on a journey that moves both inward and outward.

You and I follow Jesus by embracing the fullness of our humanity, by being all we can be -- fully human and fully committed to finding our personal calling in life. What is your

unique song, poem, or gift? Then, as you discover what you really want for your life, live it with abandon. Be like Jesus and follow Jesus by becoming more fully yourself and by doing what you feel called to do just as fully as possible.

When Jesus said those things about being the way and that we were to be like him and might even do greater things than he did, he couldn't possibly have been serious, could he? I mean, he was divine and we're just human. [Actually,] it is through the large scale ignoring of Jesus' very real humanity, that we are allowed to worship him in name without the obligation of following in his footsteps."

(Scott Peck, *A Different Drum*)

But Jesus does call us to follow in his footsteps. His life and teachings challenge us to find our calling and to live life generously sharing our inner treasure. To live this way is to discover a fundamental reality -- the truth underlying all life. The universe compels us follow, to live a life of openness, honesty, generosity, and even edginess like Jesus did. We must live this way if we want to experience the abundance life has to offer.

The alternative is to play it safe. It is to collect stuff and to hide within familiar activities and comfortable boundaries. It is to suppress the knowledge we have within us that this way is really not safe at all. Its path grows consistently more narrow and restricted and its end is sure destruction. Following Jesus' way may well put us in danger of losing stuff, losing status, and being punished by the powers that be.

The punishment may include not being popular and not being successful as the world understands popularity. Following Jesus' way, we might even not being liked or well regarded by lots of people. Remember, the one we follow suffered in his passion. The image of the 20th-century violinist Fritz Kreisler in concert, in the throws of intense performance, was captured in a poem:

This player who suffered so beautifully
For each of us upon his instrument.

Then the poet transferred this image to Christ on the cross, to

That one figure,
The hands bleeding,
The mind bruised but calm,
Making music as lives still,
And no one daring to interrupt
Because it was himself that he played
And closer than all of them,
The God listened. (R. S. Thomas, "The Musician," *Collected Poems 1941-1990*)

The journey of faith is a quest to unleash the inner artist in each of us, to find our voice given us by the creator of all of life. The only way to follow Jesus is to find yourself, to be yourself, and to live as yourself to the very limit of your ability. This is what Jesus did and what the Spirit calls us to do. This is the way to wake up to the presence of God who lives within us and to work in full partnership with God. We follow Jesus who was fully human, yet more.

The other side of Jesus is more than just another person. At the very least, “Jesus responded to God’s personal calling to him more fully and completely than anyone.” (Dewar, 59) In Jesus’ life long ago and in his presence with us today, we see the light of the world, the nature of God.

Matthew’s and Luke’s Gospels contain the familiar stories concerning the supernatural events surrounding Jesus’ birth. These accounts are probably not historical. They convey the meaning of his coming more than recalling the events of his birth. And it is so very appropriate and necessary that they do. We don’t really need to know the events of his birth because, as the Apostle Paul wrote, Jesus was “born of a woman.” (Gal. 4: 4) His birth was like ours. We have had that experience. We know what it is like to be born into this world and to grow up – at least so far.

The experience we need to find in Jesus’ story is incarnation – that we embody the Eternal Spirit in our very human bodies – like Jesus did. He teaches us that we share in the divine nature even as God, through Jesus, shared in our human nature.

No one has ever seen God, not so much as a glimpse. This one-of-a-kind God-Expression [Jesus], who exists at the very heart of the Father, has made him plain as day.” (John 1: 18 *The Message*)

The God presence was as plain as day in Jesus. Following Jesus, we can discover that same God presence in each of us. We follow Jesus according to his humanity, but we must first come to know him through his divinity – a divinity we, in many ways, share with him.

Matthew’s Gospel includes the story of three astrologers from the East who came to worship Jesus. On this Epiphany Sunday, we remember their coming by the gifts they gave – gold, frankincense, and myrrh – by the journey they took, following a star, to Bethlehem, and by the way they worshipped Christ. The three magi represent the new revelation in Jesus that God is the God of all people: Jews and Gentiles alike. The kings came from afar – the whole world focusing on the incarnation of God in Jesus.

That incarnation is only half the story. As the world came to Bethlehem at the birth of Jesus, all who follow Jesus go from Bethlehem out into the world. This going is not to spread a new religion, but to spread the news that God is beyond any religion. In Christ, the face of God is revealed – a face that is black, brown, yellow, red, and white. In Christ, the very nature of God is revealed – a nature that is poor and rich, female and male, gay and straight. Your face and mine, your actions and mine, reflect the reality and the richness God. In us, the light of the world that shone in Jesus shines through each of us. It shines through this congregation to a world that still exists so much in darkness.

Through this Advent season at Crossroads Church, we have been blessed and enriched by our study of Native American spirituality. The prayer ribbons we made early in Advent remind us that the God we worship is One – not our possession but the source of our lives. Today, we remember the coming of the world to Bethlehem by sending out the prayers represented by those ribbons. We’ll do this by taking the ribbons outside, at the close of this service, and by burning them, symbolically sending our prayers and the

power of our lives out in service to all people. As Jesus in and through our lives, let us shine in the worlds we touch in Jesus' name.