

# Jesus Is Love In The Flesh

Hey. How's everyone doing? The Vestry is away on retreat with Phil and Liz and we're like the kids that have been left alone in the house with keys to the liquor cabinet.

It's Sunday. We're here.

We are confessing our sins  
receiving the Holy Spirit  
taking Jesus into our bodies  
and being reminded of our role as Christians in the world,  
so...I thought I would bring up the subject of Love.

It seems important somehow.

So, let's do that.

*Lord, I believe. Help my unbelief. Make these words more than words and give us all the Spirit of Jesus.  
Amen.*

If you feel like you've met Jesus  
but Jesus does not love you  
because you are an imperfect creature,  
well, I promise you that whoever it is you think you've met,  
he ain' Jesus.

If you feel like you've met Jesus  
but Jesus' love comes without insisting  
on personal and societal accountability,  
well, I promise you that whoever it is you think you've met,  
he ain' Jesus.

And, if you feel like you've met Jesus  
but Jesus doesn't love the same people you don't love,  
well, I promise you that whoever it is you think you've met,  
he ain' Jesus, either.

Welcome to the Gospel reading from Luke's fourth chapter this morning. Sweet Lord, but this is tough. I make my preaching students read this passage (beginning with what we heard last week) on the first day of class. Then I ask them: You sure you wanna be a preacher?

We are called to preach...all of us are called to proclaim in some fashion. It's right there in the baptismal covenant. So, this cannot be news to y'all, right? Speaking as Jesus spoke or, two thousand years later, speaking about how Jesus spoke is dangerous business.

Turning over tables is also part of the job description. So is telling the Devil to stick it. Reminding your lovely, well-meaning friends that they have no idea what they are talking about is also a possibility. And, if we are to believe Luke's story about Jesus preaching in his parent's synagogue, you will be run out of town by those who claim to love you.

Y'all heard that, right?

How quickly the crowd goes from "Isn't that Mary and Joseph's boy"  
to "Let's throw him off the side of the cliff"?

Yeah. That's love for you.

But let's put ourselves in their place for a second...none of us needs to be too proud about seeing their foolishness.

They don't understand Jesus in this point in the story, not yet. He's just getting started. None of them at this point in the story know anything about him.

Instead, they see someone pure,  
that good boy who used to mow their lawns  
and take care of their cats  
when they were on vacation in Jerusalem.

Or they see someone cool,  
the celebrity preacher who has come  
back home to shake things loose,  
all cigarettes and cynicism.

Have you tried his wine? I have. It's delicious.

Or they see someone who is aloof,  
a great teacher of the esoteric,  
that kid who stayed behind at the Temple  
when he was 12 just to show off.  
All swelled head and no use to anyone.

Of course, what they are seeing in that moment isn't Jesus. Instead they're seeing their own desires and prejudices incarnate. They are seeing themselves in some way. We all do this, I wager. We hope to see someone we recognize, someone who we understand, someone who we can comprehend...

That ain' Jesus.  
And they were as disappointed as you and I are.

They become enraged,  
their hopes dashed and their worst fears realized,  
and they try to kill Mary and Joseph's boy.

Luke was trying to get his readers to understand that Jesus did not come to make anyone comfortable...except for the poor, the blind, those in captivity, and the oppressed. He wanted to see those folx saved in the here and now rather than the hereafter. Just like his mother taught him:

*"God has scattered those who are arrogant in their understanding. He has pulled the mighty from their thrones. He has exalted the lowly. He has filled the hungry with good things. He has sent the rich empty away."*

Tell me, how is this good news for everyone? It's not.

Luke makes it clear at least that he thinks that Jesus came to proclaim good news to the poor, the captive, the blind, the oppressed. He did not come with good news for anyone else.

Or, at least that's what the people gathered there to hear him thought he said. I mean, he said it. That's clear. "I'm not here for you. God's salvation is not just for you. It's for other folk." And like any one who responded to the #MeToo movement with, "But I'm not like those men" taking offense at the critique of American notions masculinity, they lash out. They cannot stand the message. They cannot stand the messenger.

Like many of us, they showed up expecting to hear one thing and instead heard something else.

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They wanted to be told they were loved. They wanted to be told they were going to be okay, that God had not forgotten them and God's promises to them. So, when Jesus said, "God loves those other people," they heard "God doesn't love you."

That's not what he said, but that seems to be what they heard. Tell me this sounds familiar, y'all. Give the former Baptist preacher an "Amen" if you hear me.

So they try to strike him down, a perceived threat, a bearer of ill-will, a false prophet. Then Jesus does what Jesus always does. He refuses to fight back.

*Love is patient; love is kind;*

He leaves them to their rage, to work it out for themselves.

*Love does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful*

Like the Holy Spirit sighing, he walks through the crowd like a ghost.

*Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.  
Love never ends.*

Friends of God, Jesus loves you.

Have no doubt of that. Ever.

No matter what you hear from someone else.

No matter what you tell yourself with that wicked voice that's deep down in your soul that insists you are not lovable. Exorcise that mess. Get it out. Love it until it is silent. Whatever it takes.

Jesus is the very embodiment of God's love for you. Jesus is here for you just as much as he is for anyone else...even if he isn't talking about you and your salvation.

Jesus wants you to grow, mature, stretch, heal, and, above all else, love all of creation as passionately as he does.

This Jesus will call you out when you cannot step up and encourage you to step up anyway. This Jesus will not hesitate to forgive you when you inevitably make a hash of things.

We all make a hash of things. Count on it.

If that isn't the Jesus you've encountered, then you haven't met him yet. Don't worry. You will.

*For we know only in part,  
and we prophesy only in part;  
but when the complete comes,  
the partial will come to an end.*

I dunno, it's hard to say for certain, but I might have met the real Jesus once,

*For now we see in a mirror, dimly,  
but then we will see face to face.*

I'll tell you that story another time. We have things to do here.

It is enough to say that I met him and I am absolute rubbish at living like he wants me to.

I'm rubbish at it on a basic interpersonal level.

I'm rubbish at it at a societal level.

I prefer politeness to vulnerability

and cool, intellectual cynicism

to the courage it takes to change the systems that harm us all

even when Jesus is proclaiming the year of the Jubilee.

Maybe the same could be said for a lot of us. I don't want to presume.

*Now I know only in part;*

*then I will know fully,*

*even as I have been fully known.*

*Now faith, hope, and love abide, these three;*

*and the greatest of these is love.*

Here we are again...

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