

Jesus, the Truth of God

From the series: Remembering Jesus, Experiencing God

Text: John 14:1-14

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Spring Lake, Michigan
Lent, March 7, 2004

Transcription of the spoken sermon

For a Lesson From the Present, I want to read a paragraph from Walter Wink's book, *The Human Being: Jesus and the Enigma of the Son of the Man*, which is the book, the reason, why I wanted him here in our midst in the first place, a very, very interesting study. In the course of his discussion, he writes:

If God is in some sense true humanness, then divinity inverts itself. Divinity is not a qualitatively different reality. Quite the reverse. Divinity is fully realized humanity.

Well, that's only about 180 degrees from anything you've ever heard in church. I'll read it again.

Quite the reverse. Divinity is fully realized humanity. Only God is, as it were, human. The goal of life, then, is not to become something we are not, divine, but to become what we truly are, human. We are not required to become divine, flawless, perfect, without blemish. We are invited simply to become human which means growing through our sins and mistakes, learning by trial and error, being redeemed over and over from compulsive behavior, becoming ourselves, scars and all,. It means embracing and transforming those elements in us that we find unacceptable. It means giving up pretending to be good and instead becoming real. Jesus incarnated God in his own person in order to show all of us how to incarnate God, and to incarnate God is what it means to be fully human.

That, too, is the word of God.

The season of Lent invites us to remember Jesus, because in remembering Jesus we experience God. That is our story. That's what has been the mark of the Christian tradition. We find our window to God in Jesus, so our identity statement claims, and that has been the central thrust of our understanding and our community experience together. Probably almost every one of us was born into and nurtured in the Christian tradition. Almost the whole human family that

is religious continues in that religious tradition into which they were born. And so, when we claim Jesus as our window to God we are not claiming an exclusivism. We are simply claiming that's our story, and that's the story that we celebrate together, and the Lenten season is an invitation to remember Jesus in order that we might again in a fresh way have the experience of that holy Mystery that we call God.

And so, this Second Sunday in Lent, I am suggesting to you that Jesus is the truth of God. Not the truth of God in propositional terms, the kind of factual data like $2 + 2 = 4$, or that this congregation was founded in 1870 or anything like that, but rather, that Jesus is the truth of God in the sense that there in the embodiment, in that incarnation we say God. That that person, that consciousness, that human being is for us who continue in that flow of Christian tradition, that is the clue as to the Mystery of the Divine.

I suppose that there is no text that has been quoted to me or quoted against me more than John 14:6, "Jesus says I am the way, the truth and the life." And nobody quotes that to me or against me because he said *that*, it is what he said after that - "No one comes to the father but by me." Therefore, the claim is that John, the Bible in general, is clearly a book that portrays an exclusive salvation through Jesus Christ alone. I'm not sure that Jesus said it anyway, but I wish that John hadn't said he said it. It would have made things a lot easier. But, as a matter of fact, I'm not sure that John intended - I'm sure he did not intend - that that statement would be used in a battle of exclusivism over against a broader understanding of the grace of God. What he was intending is quite clear in the context, and certainly something that I would want to affirm.

He was affirming that in Jesus there is the way of life, the truth of life, the way to God; this is that which is embodied in Jesus is the way and the truth and the life, and as a matter of fact, it would be impossible to know God or to experience God apart from that way that Jesus was embodying. I think that that broader interpretation of that particular statement is clarified in the subsequent discussion with Phillip. Jesus said "I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the father but by me," but now you know the father as you know me. You have seen the father, and so forth. Phillip says, "What? Show us the father and we will be satisfied. Come on, Jesus, just open up the abyss of the mystery of reality and we will be satisfied."

Jesus said, "You don't get it, do you, Phillip?"

"Well,. What do you mean I don't get it?"

"I've been with you so long and you still don't get it. Look at me. You're looking at God."

Well, that doesn't sound so radical to us because we know that's true, don't we? After all, this Jew Jesus who was running with Phillip and Thomas and Peter and James and John, gathering around campfires and getting their feet dusty in sandals, eating together and dialoguing together, and I hope joking together, this Jew Jesus, well, we know, don't we? This is no ordinary human being. Why, this was the second person of the Trinity, the pre-existing one who came down from another realm, donned human garments, stood in our midst. So, of course, Phillip, how come you don't get it? Jesus, God.

We who stand 2000 years later who have had the blessing or the plague of all of those Christological creeds that have elevated Jesus from that Jewish, rather charismatic leader, an extraordinary human being, no doubt, but nonetheless, still a human being, we hear that statement to Phillip and it doesn't shock us because we think, "Why couldn't Phillip see," because we know this was odd.

Well, of course Phillip didn't get it because Phillip didn't know this was God. Phillip thought it was his Jewish brother leader, and if we could go back there and whisper in Phillip's ear what we know about Jesus, he'd say "What? I've been with the guy." And if we take Jesus aside and say, "You know what they're saying about you?" he'd say, "About me?"

Jesus would not recognize our exalted Son of God. And so, the radicality of what he said to Phillip comes back. Phillip is to look into the face of another human being, Jesus by name, who is saying to him, "Look at me and see me, you see God." Now that was a radical claim. We say it theologically and philosophically, "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us," "No one has ever seen God, the only begotten son in the bosom of the father, he has made God known." The first epistle of John, the fourth chapter, "No one has ever seen God. The one who dwells in love dwells in God and God dwells in that one."

It's all pretty simple. Except that the radicality of the claim was that the human being was saved. To look into my human visage is to look into the face of God, because, as a matter of fact, God has emerged in the human.

That is what the Gospel claims.

References:

Walter Wink. *The Human Being: Jesus and the Enigma of the Son of the Man*. Augsburg Fortress, 2002.