

SPG#175, Pentecost 8A, Proper 9

July 6, 2008

Genesis 24:34-38, 42-49, 58-67 Romans 7:15-25a Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30

As I look back over my life of faith, I can say with some degree of certainty that the most challenging of spiritual challenges has been to accommodate my human heart and mind to the person of Jesus Christ. And yet, having said that, I would also add that at times it has been the easiest of all spiritual challenges. I remember as a child when we sang the song "Jesus Loves Me," how easily my child's heart grasped that assurance. And yet, as an adult, I have wrestled with the Son of God in many and various ways.

I remember as a teenager, sitting in a class in church, listening to the teacher speak of the "word become flesh." In those years I was particularly proud of myself for having a sense of the loving Jesus. I had basked in the glow of the Baby Jesus, and I resonated with the words that Jesus was my friend. And so as the teacher spoke of the word becoming flesh, I nodded wisely as I figured I should. Because I did have a warm sense of Jesus. And I figured such spiritually warmed people should nod their heads wisely when Jesus was mentioned. But inside I wondered, "What in the world is she talking about?"

Having an appreciation for the multi-dimensional personality of Jesus Christ is good preparation for reading today's gospel. And the reading truly is an exercise in knowing Jesus in ambiguity and in paradox.

The reading opens with Jesus talking to a crowd. He reflects on how John the Baptizer was received, and on how he, Jesus, has been received. Then, he speaks to God the Father, as the crowd listens in: **I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent, and have revealed them to infants; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will.**

Then Jesus turns from speaking to God and speaks to the crowd again. I think it is assumed that the generic crowd here includes the reader of this account. He says:

All things have been handed over to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

And then, continuing to speak to all of us, he says, **Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon me, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.**

The conversation with God the Father in the middle verses of today's gospel could be called a conversation for the reader's benefit. For it is expected that the reader, or the crowd, is listening in as Jesus speaks or prays with the Father. In the conversation there is an implicit expectation of the reader. And that is that the reader will know that Jesus cannot be "figured out." In other words, we would not be able to construct a logical proof or demonstration of who Jesus is. For then we would be trying to state a divine mystery in human terms. Rather the nature of God and the nature of Jesus Christ are better appreciated from a position of acceptance and trust.

Such a position is a position a child would take in trusting and knowing. For years I tried to comprehend the word becomes flesh. And I was not able to. But appreciation and understanding came later in my acceptance of who God is and who Jesus is. And finally the word become flesh for me is something to be felt, someone to know, as opposed to something that is figured out.

The next part of the reading is Jesus' comments to his followers on his relation to the Father. And he in essence says to us, it is a mystery. No one knows the Father except the Son. No one knows the Son except the Father and those whom the Son chooses to reveal him. And the real truth of Christian learning is accepting what God reveals to us in our lives. Does this mean that we are called to passivity, to becoming the empty vessel that God fills with truth? For certain we are called to wait on God, to prepare ourselves to receive God's revelations. But paradoxically and for certain we are called to search, to understand, to be curious, and to speculate. So, it is not one or the other. It is both. No one knows the Father except the Son. No one knows the Son except the Father.

We are called to accept this. But we are also called to the magnificent adventure of inquiry and questions. So it will be noticed in this regard that Jesus, true to himself, never portrayed himself as just a mystery or just human, but both. And it is the vocation of humanity to accept and seek after this. It falls to the reader to expand the heart and mind to accept this ambiguity. It falls to the reader to accept and to seek.

The real danger in the life in Christ is not that we would be confused. For confusion is part of learning. The real danger is that we would make the truth of Christ less than it really is. The real danger is that we would strive to see Jesus Christ as just a sentimental figure, or that we would strive to see him as some unreachable, unknowable divine mystery. The real danger is reductionism.

Finally, in the third section, as Jesus invites us to an expansive and spiritual call, he speaks of taking upon a yoke or a burden. In his use of those two metaphors, yoke and burden, he communicates a depth of his sensitivity of what it means to be human. He realizes that the expansive call is a difficult one, particularly at first. He realizes it is work. He realizes it is a burden. And true to his nature, he calls us to what seems impossible or inexplicable. But, in his invitation, beyond just calling us to the adventure, beyond just understanding how difficult it is, he loves and cares for us.

Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

Someone might say, "Well, it would be nice if I had time to get a graduate degree in Jesus Christ. Then I could understand some of this ambiguous stuff." But the truth is there are as many simple and childlike ways to know Jesus as there are people. And there are as many entry points into the truth of Christ as there are people. And all of us in Christ will be at different points comforted, and at different points troubled.

Your way of knowing Christ is shaped by the form and ingredients of your life. For in your life God has called you to go on a journey that no one else could go on. God has called you to know Christ as no one else can. And so it is different for all of us. And yet it is the same. And it is marvelously difficult and wonderfully childlike. And on the journey God will fill us with wonderful and explosive truth. And on the journey we can sit on the lap of Jesus and be held. **Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.** Amen.