

Looking for Jesus
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Jesus' message was considered by many to be very radical, outside the box, so unlike the norm that whenever and wherever Jesus appeared, people wanted to see and hear this Jesus person.

Because of Jesus' interpretation of the scripture, he spoke and taught as if it was something the people had never heard before. I do not believe Jesus was a literalist, rather he interpreted the scripture from his perspective and because of it he actually had a cult like following AND in a few days we will see how this new approach to scripture that Jesus lived and taught started to get him in trouble.

Each year at this time we participate in one of the longest, not the oldest, but longest traditions of the faith community and that is preparing to tell of the betrayal, the trial, the execution and burial of Jesus. For no one else do we give such an extended remembrance and I would suggest that we do it precisely because we have been touched by the radical, out of the box, unlike the norm teachings of Jesus.

So what was so radical – well let's do a quick review or highlight from John that gets us to our passage reading today. First off, John takes us behind the scenes of Jesus' ministry – John is our Anderson Cooper; John writes as if he is a bystander, a reporter of the events of Jesus life. So, John, written between 90 & 100, does not start off with the birth of Jesus, he apparently couldn't be bothered with that story (or maybe he didn't know of any such story); rather John starts off by proclaiming Jesus as the Logos or Word of God.

After he baptized, Jesus calls his first disciple, he then moves on to perform the miracle of turning water to wine in Cana. Then we see where Jesus acted up when he cleansed the temple by tossing out the money changers.

Later, Jesus explains to Nicodemus what it means to live an enlightened life. He says, "God so loved the world that God gave..." God is generous. God loves. God gives. We respond to this God with joy, not fear, because this God so loves the whole world that this God gives grace to the whole world.

We go on to find Jesus with the Samaritan woman at the well asking for a drink of water, then we move to where Jesus heals the son of a nobleman, then we watch Jesus at the pool of Bethesda healing a man who had been infirm for many years.

John then takes us on journey to a mountain side in Galilee by the sea of Tiberias, with Jesus where 5,000 are fed. Just as God gives out of love, we see Jesus teaching us to give out of love. Give food. Give resources. Give help. Give healing. Give hope. God loves. God gives. And we are children of God; we are meant to love; to give.

John paints a picture of Jesus walking on water, ending up in Capernaum teaching; in between all of this Jesus continues to teach wherever he goes. He stands up for a woman accused of being an adulterous. Because he is so giving, forgiving, generous, kind, compassionate, accessible... John describes him as the light of the world! As light, he restores sight to vision impaired man; the miracle story serving as a metaphor for how the light of love helps us to see our innate goodness and divine potential.

John then has Jesus pronouncing himself as the Good Shepherd. A shepherd cares for sheep, keeps them safe. Keeps them alive by not allowing them to wander off to get hurt or attacked by wolves...then we see the good shepherd raising Lazarus back to life...perhaps this is a literary device to show that like a shepherd, Jesus is always trying to help us live as abundantly as possible. He raises Lazarus to life and we are, as we hear the story, meant to find ourselves being raised to new experiences of hope and joy.

Finally, we find ourselves hearing Jesus say today, "but I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself."

So what does that mean? I do not believe that Jesus was speaking literally of lifting his body up on the executioner's cross; he was not glorifying an instrument of torture nor the horrendous violence of crucifixion. John is speaking metaphorically, not literally...when Jesus' body was literally raised on a cross, people ran away in fear and disgust and anguish and grief. His torture didn't bring people to him; it caused people to flee. They ran because they couldn't stand to see him suffer; they ran because they didn't want to be next. We tend to glorify Jesus' pain in a way that no one who witnessed it ever could.

But, John does want Jesus lifted up BEYOND the cross. The cross that killed him didn't limit him; didn't rob him of his dignity, couldn't keep him from living in our hearts. We lift up Jesus' memory! We lift up Jesus' teachings! We lift up Jesus' example. And as we come together to lift up Jesus, we are brought together, together as a community of love and hope and in our community Jesus still lives and the cross is defeated and is put behind us. Jesus lives in us as we lift up his compassion, his courage, and his call to serve God by serving our neighbors.

We can describe Jesus' time on earth as someone with a magnetic attraction but with his execution, his magnetic pull increased dramatically because people realized that the divine life that expressed through Jesus wasn't limited to his body! And as we embrace divine life and allow it to express through us, WE are the body of Christ today! As we lift up the teacher and live out his teachings, he is with us still, and we continue to do his good work.

Jesus' teachings, his example, his life of love and encouragement all proved to be the water that never runs dry, the best wine at the feast, the healing touch that restores vitality, the light that brings new ways of seeing, the food that nourishes both mind and spirit.

When we see Jesus as the great Example rather than as the great Exception, then we are lifting up his example so that we can follow it and others can follow it into the light of hope and empowerment as well. We lift us Jesus by loving as he loved, by caring as he cared, by standing up to injustice, by resisting war, by speaking truth to power, by caring for the poor, by offering

compassion to the sick, the fearful, the lonely, and forgotten. And we so lift us Jesus, all people are drawn together in the glory of divine light because when we love as Jesus loved, we know we are all one, and in that divine unity all are drawn together.

We lift up Jesus not by giving him lip service, but by giving real service to our world in his name. And lifting up Jesus in this way draws all people together, and together we are sharing the light with the world.

Amen.