

## **“Behold, the man”**

Pilate mockingly presenting Jesus who is wearing his purple kingly robes to the crowd  
-as described in John’s passion narrative

*A sermon preached by Joe Kolanko  
July 8, 2006 (5<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost, Year B)  
2 Cor 12:2-10, Mark 6, 1-6*

Too often Jesus is depicted as only the divine self of his orthodox, church-defined, two-fold persona; his human nature usually thought of as secondary, if thought of at all.

Today’s gospel contains a nugget of that real person, the human Jesus, when it’s reported that Jesus cannot “work a miracle in Nazareth”, his home town. We see bits of other human traits in him throughout the gospels, most famously when he displays violent anger in his “temple tantrum” with the money changers which leads eventually to his true “agony in the garden” while contemplating his upcoming fate.

Ironically, some of the other miracle stories too attest to this humanity. Once he feels his powers being drained by a woman’s touch to his garments while on his way to cure a sick man. Another time, his first attempt at curing a blind man, using a mixture of mud and spit fails, as the victim mistakes people for trees upon opening his partially healed eyes.

In other gospel stories Jesus is even criticized by the religious authorities for enjoying the finer fruits of life, “wine, women and song” if you will, when they claim “Look, (he’s) a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners”. John reports that he is scorned by one of his own disciples, Judas of all people, for enjoying the exotic fragrance scent that filled the room after having his feet washed in expensive perfume by Mary, sister of Martha, later portrayed in some circles of Christian folklore, as a prostitute.

Human Jesus, not necessarily the person who was eventually elevated to the Christ, was an extraordinary live and real person who preached a beautiful message that so few of us mere mortals can live up to. No wonder he is thought of as God’s incarnation here on earth!

I recently saw Bill Moyer’s interviewing an author on the topic of “Faith versus Reason”. His guest captured the appeal of Christianity to the world; God sending a human being, a person we could all relate to, to bridge the gap between heaven and earth.

Indeed, such concepts are not new, as prior to Judaism, in Greek, Egyptian and other pagan cultures, god-men were worshipped, in part as a means for humanity to achieve everlasting life with the gods.

Now back to today’s lessons. Although surely not intended in this bundling of readings for the Fifth Sunday of Pentecost, Paul’s satirical and scathing letter to the Corinthian Church in part had a bit to do with the man/god portrayal of Jesus.

Here's my Bible Study-plug again: it is fascinating to understand the rich, complex and diverse nature of Judaism's beliefs and interpretations of religion during this period of time in history.

In the earliest Corinthian letters, Paul writes to the church he founded there (a group associated with the local synagogue), "...some have informed me that there are quarrels among you...One of you says 'I follow Paul'; another, 'I follow Apollos'; another, 'I follow Cephas'; still another, 'I follow Christ'."

Think hard about the groups just named here.

Most important to me involves understanding Jesus, i.e. Joshua as he was called by his family. Professor of History Donald Hiram Akenson writes, "(Yeshua/Joshua's) mother was Miriam, his brothers were Yakov, Yosef, Yudah and Shimon, names deeply anchored in the Hebrew scriptures."

This man Joshua was a Jew. He preached to the House of Israel. His most ardent supporters after his death were his family! His mother Miriam knelt at the foot of the cross. His brother led the Joshua movement in Jerusalem after his death. This doesn't sound like the other part of today's gospel where Mark lambastes Jesus' family for doubt and disbelief, does it? Guess what? Paul was fighting with the Jesus family throughout his missionary journeys as he sought to be the light to the nations, bypassing the Jewish legal requirements for new members to join the church.

But in the end, Paul never succeeded in unifying the Jews and Gentiles. Indeed, Paul's Gentile mission won the day. Do we males need to be circumcised to first join the synagogue, to then in turn join the Joshua movement? Do we Christians need to follow the Torah's Law to have communion with God through Joshua? No. Paul won and Gentiles, i.e., non-Jews were given the right to be called Chosen as well (predestined in some sects, if so lucky).

Thus, the chosen Canon, i.e. the collection of Books that the Orthodox Church picked to best represent the beliefs of the winning side became our New Testament. Many "heretical" books were burned and destroyed. The chosen books, like Mark's, discredited Jesus' own family, as we see here today. And I thought Mary knew she was the mother of God with Gabriel's annunciation and her Immaculate Conception?

Now let's go back to Paul. In the Corinthian church (and there could be many sermons on their sordid stories), one sect, followers of Joshua and his family, later called Ebionites knew him as a man. They grew up with him their whole lives in Nazareth. They believed the Messiah (which means Christ in Greek) descended into Jesus' human nature at baptism (remember the dove and the opening of the sky?). Furthermore, they surmised that at the exact time of his death on the cross the Christ spirit left him, as they believed only the body dies, and the spirit lives on. Thus we have written in Matthew's version, "But Jesus, again crying out in a loud voice, yielded up his spirit".

When Paul's contingent argued to the contrary; their interpretation being that in his death and subsequent resurrection he became divine, chaos ensued. And those were only two groups of the nearly half-dozen sects that formed the Corinthian community that Paul mentioned earlier.

Who had authority? Who was right? To add to the confusion, at the pre-Sabbath gatherings of these early Christians, where oftentimes not so much bread and too much wine were consumed, participants started "feeling the spirit stir within them", engaging in charismatic rituals, including speaking in tongues and describing heavenly visions.

In one of the most shocking revelations, Ebionite sect members, to illustrate in the most dramatic fashion possible that Jesus was human and only Christ divine, actually cursed Jesus the man in their charismatic trances!

Paul sarcastically presents his view on such visions as we heard today, discrediting theirs, as he writes, "(I) was caught up in Paradise (i.e., heaven) and heard words (so superior) that cannot and may not be spoken by any human beings". According to Paul, his revelation was obviously better.

Jesus the man, Jesus the human being is an incredible role model for us in our daily lives. He ate like us, he wept like us and he felt tired like us.

When I behold the man, when I behold that man, Jesus, I can relate to Paul's thorn and certainly not get above myself.

The moral demands and social responsibilities that Jesus espoused as a man are truly Godlike.

When we recognize what this human being did, let us be astonished as were his disciples and family and follow his path directly to God.