

Who Is That with You? St. Matthew 22:34-46

If we had been physically present with Jesus, I wonder if we would have discerned that he was the Son of God incarnate. Would we be spiritually sensitive enough? Would we be wise enough? Is it possible that our hearts and minds would be open enough?

The majority of people around Jesus were not. Even his disciples at times. Especially the religious leaders, the Pharisees, who were fanatics over strict compliance with exacting obedience to religious law. They truly believed that if they could convince people to practice the code correctly, then God would send the Messiah.

Jesus introduced a different way to love and live in God. In many ways, life with Jesus caused anxiety in the Pharisees. He played 'loosey-goosey' with the religious codes. Then when someone was needy, Jesus was not above bending the rules. His friends didn't make the 'A' list, and he never used anti-bacterial gel.

Special interest cliques, with the Pharisees, were thunderstruck that Jesus had healing powers, was able to forgive people their sins, and even raise the dead. Perhaps the most depressing for these leaders was Jesus' popularity.

As we discovered last Sunday, the Pharisees spent much time and effort in attempting to snare Jesus in a trap. One of their attorneys, an expert in the Law, used the famous question: "*What is the greatest commandment?*" Many of the Jewish leaders would say, "*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.*" This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: "*You shall love your neighbor as yourself.*" So Jesus answers, "*On these hang all the law and prophets.*" Yowie! Perhaps Jesus' answer was too simplistic, too frank for these leaders, ya think?

Jesus' desire is always to go deeper with his enemies. He turns the tables on them by examining their concept of the Messiah. As it turns out, the Pharisees could

only respond within their narrow preconceived theological boundaries. They answer Jesus, "*The son of David.*" This was the acceptable answer in the Hebrew belief.

Jesus, however, shared a proposal they couldn't grasp: The Messiah is the Son of God, and I am he! It was almost unbelievable for them and perhaps for us too, that God could be in the flesh among us, who demonstrated self-giving love, who showed what living with God looked like, and who shared God's redeeming love with us.

The mystery of the Gospel is astonishing, indeed! The secret of the Gospel is how does God choose to love, connect, and rescue God's creation as God-in-the-flesh, God here, and there, everywhere, and every way, anyhow.

The Incarnation has throughout the centuries been and is ruminated and discussed. We struggle to balance human and divine without compromising either. Redemption cannot be understood without this. Jesus is not defined by an either-or explanation. Being human asks for holy intervention, and holiness cannot transform us unless it is truly human. With this tension, they become one in Christ Jesus. This is the way we must have him. It is truly a tremendous mystery!

Jesus is the essential sacrament of God. In Jesus, the fullness of God is present. St. Paul proclaims: "*Because all the fullness of God was pleased to live in him, and he reconciled all things to himself through him—whether things on earth or in the heavens. He brought peace through the blood of the cross.*" (Colossians 1:19-20)

We discover ourselves by telling our stories to one another. And we find the Jesus presence when we tell or hear the stories of Jesus. When we gather as God's people to eat the bread of his body, the cup of his blood, as we will do next Sunday, this presence of forgiveness, reconciling, and healing will be present too.

Like some of us, the Pharisees of the first century find themselves ensnared in a narrow perception of reality. How they saw the world did not allow them to believe that Jesus could lead them into a broader view of God. Is it possible that you and I might be this way, too? Even though we have confessed our faith in Jesus, are we too anxious to let Jesus take us deeper with God?

This is the incredibly glorious mystery of Jesus the Son of God who gave himself up for the entire world. This mystery does not stop with you and I. We are made to be God's representatives in our world. We are baptized into a mystical marriage with Jesus Christ. We are to live in Jesus as he lives in us.

All of this begins with our baptism, then our discipleship and our table fellowship, as God works with us in grace until we are made perfect in love, either now or when we enter heaven. We confess all of this in the Eucharistic prayer, "*Pour out your Holy Spirit on us, O God, that we may be for the world the body of Christ, redeemed by his blood. By your Spirit makes us one with Christ, one with each other, and one in ministry to all the world.*"

Remember, Jesus does the redemptive work, not us. It is as St. Paul writes "*Think of us in this way, as servants of Christ and stewards of God's mysteries*" (1 Corinthians 4:1).

When we go into our day-to-day lives as "the body of Christ," and faithfully minister to his redeeming presence, we release him to be in our relationships with all kinds of people. We do not do the redemptive work; Christ does. As St. Paul said of his ministry so it shall be for ours. Alleluia. Amen.