

and shared our common lot

Matthew 25:31-46

April 2, 2017

Where was Jesus? Eighty-some generations ago, when Jesus lived and worked in Palestine, where would you find him?

You would find him sitting by a well, starting up a conversation with a woman, a Samaritan woman, crossing ethnic and gender boundaries to ask from her a drink of water, and to offer her a drink of living water.

You would find him on a hillside, in the desert, standing among a crowd of thousands of hungry men and women and children, giving them something to eat.

You would find him met by a raging madman running naked out from the caves where he lived among long-buried bodies, looking him in the eye, asking him his name, setting him free from the demons that tormented him.

You would find him healing the daughter of a foreigner, a Canaanite, and praising her for her great faith.

You would find him touching the body of an untouchable, a man with a ravaging skin disease, healing him.

You would find him arrested as a common criminal, imprisoned as a common criminal, condemned as a common criminal, executed as a common criminal.

This is where Jesus was: among hungry people and thirsty people, among foreigners and the sick, alongside people in prison and people left naked, sharing our common lot.

In Jesus Christ, the man of Nazareth, you have come to us and shared our common lot.

Who has come to us? You, the great God of earth and heaven! You have come to us and shared our common lot. The king of heaven and earth has come to us. The king is one of us. This is the astonishing and wonderful mystery of our faith.

Suppose a king loved a humble maiden. That's the way Soren Kierkegaard posed the question one hundred and seventy-three years ago as he grappled with this mystery. Suppose a king loved a humble maiden: what can he do? He could show himself to her and profess his love, but he will always wonder, does she really love him? Or is she merely awed by his majesty and power? Does she humbly accept his offer of love, because she feels it a duty, a duty to say "yes" to the king? Will they ever truly be "together?" Can she ever love him as he loves her, love him as a man and not as the king, as his wife, not as a humble maiden?

Kierkegaard writes:

The king might have shown himself to the humble maiden in all the pomp of his power, causing the sun of his presence to rise over her cottage, shedding a glory over the scene, and making her forget herself in worshipful admiration. Alas, and this might have satisfied the maiden, but it could not satisfy the king, who desired not his own glorification but hers.

Because? Because he loves her!

He must come to her instead as a servant,

but this servant-form is no mere outer garment, like the king's beggar-cloak, which therefore flutters loosely about him and betrays the king ... It is his true form and figure. For this is the unfathomable nature of love, that it desires equality with the beloved.

And so

the servant-form is no mere outer garment, and therefore God must suffer all things, endure all things, make experience of all things. [God] must suffer hunger in the desert, [God] must thirst in the time of his agony, [God] must be forsaken in death, absolutely like the humblest.

And then he can ask,

Do you now really love me?

In Jesus Christ, the man of Nazareth, you have come to us and shared our common lot. Shared our common lot! One of us! Not merely like us, but one of us. Not disguised as one of us, but one of us. Not temporarily talking on our form and likeness, but one of us.

Jesus is the king. Jesus is king now, but not because his disguise has been removed, but because it hasn't! Because it isn't a disguise. Jesus can save us, Jesus can love us and can win our love, because he is one of us. Jesus is one of us.

Where is Jesus? Where is Jesus now? He told you ...

In Somalia, "a mother is walking with her three starving children to a refugee camp ... She carries two and one walks beside her. When the one beside her collapses, she makes the agonizing decision to leave him propped against a tree and she continues on with the other two." (Minnesota Star Tribune, <http://tinyurl.com/n3q9kq4>) Jesus is that child. "I was hungry and you fed me."

Right now, right now, in Somalia, South Sudan, and Yemen, twenty million people are at risk of death from severe famine. Twenty-million starving people. That's the entire population of Iowa and Wisconsin and Minnesota and Missouri combined. Where is Jesus? You know where Jesus is!

Jesus lives in a hut in rural Haiti, where only half the people have access to an improved water source, which means water that is free from contamination. (Charity:water, <http://tinyurl.com/levqgfk>) “I was thirsty and you gave me a drink.” Where is Jesus? You know where Jesus is!

Jesus sleeps in a tent in Jordan, one of five million Syrian refugees. (The Guardian, <http://tinyurl.com/lvw7rpx>) Five million people. That’s nearly one-quarter of the country’s population displaced, homeless, helpless, desperate to find some way just to survive. “I was a stranger and you welcomed me into your home.” Where is Jesus? You know where Jesus is!

Jesus is huddled, shivering on a Delhi street, one of many migrants coming to the city looking for work, dressed only in tatters. (The New York Times, <http://tinyurl.com/lzxp99t>) An Indian journalist writes: “In earthquakes, the shake kills people; in a tsunami, the water kills people; but in winter, the cold does not kill people. It’s the lack of proper clothing. Why don’t we consider lack of clothing a disaster?” “I was naked and you clothed me.” Where is Jesus? You know where Jesus is!

Jesus is lying in bed, resting, recovering from surgery, a double mastectomy. “I was sick and you took care of me.” Where is Jesus? You know where Jesus is!

Jesus is in Anamosa, Clarinda, Fort Dodge, Mitchellville, one of the hundreds of inmates housed in Iowa correctional facilities. Jesus is sitting in a cell on death row in Arkansas, where eight men are now scheduled to be executed over a period of eleven days in April, the first two to be put to death by lethal injection on Monday, the day after Easter. “I was in prison and you visited me.” Where is Jesus? You know where Jesus is!

Where is Jesus? He is here. Here in the broken bread. Here in the poured out wine. With us in our brokenness and with us in our being poured out.

“In Jesus Christ, the man of Nazareth, our crucified and risen Savior, you have come to us and shared our common lot ... conquering sin and death.” Conquering sin and death! Jesus comes to us and shares our common lot, not to commiserate, but to deliver.

*Lamb of God,
who takes away the sins of the world,
grant us rest,
let the light of your love shine on us. (From Agnus Dei -- Fauré, Requiem)*