

He comes

Luke 13:31-35

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What do you think? What do you think of a Jesus with long flowing black hair? What do you think of a Jesus with long slender fingers and smooth ochre skin? What do you think of a Jesus with ankle bracelets and arm bracelets and a golden necklace? What do you think of an energetic, elegant, enchanting, dancing Jesus?

What do you think of a dancing Jesus? Isn't it great?

One of the regrets of my life is that I never learned to dance. Dancing was frowned upon in the household in which I was raised, so I never went to junior high dances or high school dances or college dances and there was no dancing at our wedding. I never learned to dance.

But I love music. I love the magic of music, the deep magic of music that touches my soul in ways nothing else can, the deep magic of music that communicates something -- not really an idea and not even a feeling -- but something real, something elemental, something deep, something about the essence of being alive itself in this world of beauty and mystery. We know things, we feel things, we are things through music, things that we would not otherwise know or feel or be.

Dance is embodied music! Music that stirs not just your ears and mind and soul, but your whole body, your whole self. When we dance, we are the music. We embody the magic!

What is the magic? And where does it come from? Don't you know? It comes from God! It has to, because it is hardwired into who we are. The song is built into our being. We are born with God's song already planted in us. We are born with a song. We are brought into being by a song.

I love the image in C. S. Lewis' "The Magician's Nephew," of a world not spoken into existence, but sung into existence. The Creator begins singing and as the song fills the sky, stars appear and take up the song. And as the song goes on, land and sea and plants and creatures spring to life and take up the song, too. To live is to sing and to live well is to sing in tune with God's song, to dance in time with God's dance.

Jesus is the word by which God spoke the worlds into existence. Jesus is the song by which God sung the worlds into existence. Jesus is the dance by which God gave life to everything that lives and moves.

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

And what happens when he comes? Look!



Light happens! Light everywhere. Light bright and warm and shimmering, pushing back the shadows and everything that lurks in the shadows, every dark and toothy beast!

Go and tell that fox (Jesus meant Herod) ... Go and tell that fox: "I am driving out demons and performing cures today and tomorrow [and then, and then, I will finish my work and be on my way]."

The artist is Nyoman Darsane, from Bali, himself an artist, a musician and a dancer, and a Christian. He was raised Hindu, but became a Christian at age seventeen and, because of that, was shunned by his family and his community.

But he did not turn his back on them or on the culture that forged his identity. He liked to say of himself, "Bali is my body; Christ is my life." And so, to quote one of his commentators:

Jesus Christ is his all, but can he not pray to and worship and express his love for Jesus Christ in a Balinese fashion? And can he not picture Jesus as a fellow Balinese, incarnate in the skin tone and dress and dance poses of his people?

This is Jesus, isn't it? Nyoman Darsane makes a powerful witness, an authentic witness, to the one who comes to us and shares our common lot. And his unwavering loyalty to the artistic and worship traditions of his people made an impression on them. They saw that his love for Jesus did not mean that he no longer loved them or their ways, and their hearts were changed and they let him back in. He showed them a Jesus who was not a stranger, an intruder, an imperial invader bent on subverting their culture, but one of them.

What can we learn from Nyoman Darsane about the ways we proclaim the gospel? And what can we learn from him about the content of the gospel itself?

We are not Balinese, but his image of a Balinese Jesus, a vibrant Jesus, a dancing Jesus, tells us something important about the Jesus who comes to us. Jesus comes to us bringing light, bringing life, casting aside our demons, getting us moving, getting us dancing.

We can be rather staid and earnest and serious about our faith sometimes, all about doing the right thing and performing good deeds and making a difference, which is OK, to a point, but sometimes it's just about the dancing. Sometimes it's just about the joy. Sometimes it's just about grace!

Jesus doesn't ask us to come to him. He comes to us, dancing. But not everybody wants to dance. It baffles me! Why not? Why wouldn't we all want to sing the song and join the dance? Why wouldn't we want to dance together, instead of fighting amongst each other? Why wouldn't we want to dance together, instead of marching up that hill, carrying that heavy load, all alone? Why wouldn't we want to dance, with Jesus, instead of slouching in our chairs filled with self-pity?

But not everybody wants to dance. Jesus' own people, the people of Jerusalem, refused to dance. How much he wanted to put his arms around them, to hold them and protect them and give them life, but they would not let him.

And sometimes we refuse to dance. Sometimes we refuse to be held. Sometimes we'd rather fight or march or slouch. Sometimes we'd rather do it ourselves, without your help, Jesus, without you, thank you!

And so Jesus says: "Your Temple will be abandoned." There will be no dancing. The place of dancing, the place of music, the place of joy, the place of worship, the place of grace will stand empty and useless. And you, Jesus says, "You will not see me." You will not see the dancing one anymore.

Until ...

Until the time comes when you say, "God bless him who comes in the name of the Lord!"

He comes! He comes in the name of the Lord! In Jesus Christ, you, Lord, come to us and share our common lot.

When? Then. And again. And again and again and again!

He comes and he doesn't stop coming! He won't stop coming. If you reject him, he will come again. If you refuse to dance, he will come again. He won't stop coming until you are dancing, too! He won't stop coming until everybody is dancing!



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