

*I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended to the dead.
On the third day he rose again;
he ascended into heaven,
is seated at the right hand of the Father,
and will come again to judge the living and the dead.*

I feel like breaking a rule tonight. No flash pictures may be taken in worship. That's the rule. Smile. (Takes picture)

When this picture is developed, someone will be sure to say, "That doesn't look like me." You've said it, I've said it. What a ridiculous statement that is. Of course a picture of me looks like me. At the moment of the shutters opening that is how I look.

What we could say is: "That picture doesn't look the way I like to think I look - the way I look when I'm looking at me in a mirror."

It is like my reaction to hearing one of my sermons on tape. "That doesn't sound like me," I tell myself. But it does. It just doesn't sound the way I think I sound.

Think about today: If we could slice today into a thousand moments, in how many of those moments would you be like you? Is losing your temper being like you? Is listening attentively to someone else being like you? Is fooling around in class being like you? Is being ashamed and embarrassed and angry when the teacher corrects you in front of the whole class being like you?

Whether it is a photograph, or the sound of our voice, or a momentary happening, some slices of life seem more like us than others - more like we would like to think we are. But the people who share our life know that all the slices go together to make up the person we really are. Yet even they choose which slices to hold onto - remember - and which to discard. "That wasn't like her," I might say when a friend has hurt another. "That is just like her," I say when one who irritates me is at her worse. I throw away some moments, hang onto others.

"Why do you pray through Mary?" I asked my Roman Catholic friend.

"Mary is more understanding than Jesus," came his response.

Maybe my friend thinks of Jesus and remembers the slice of Jesus' life when Jesus said, "Not everyone who says to me 'Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven. On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many deeds of power in your name? Then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; do away from me you evildoers.'"

Or maybe my friend holds onto the moment when Jesus took a whip into the temple and overthrew the tables and drove out those who exchanged the coins and who sold animals for the sacrifice.

Or maybe he remembers Jesus' words, "Whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and even life itself, cannot be my disciple."

Maybe for my friend the slices of Jesus' life that are harsh and demanding and full of judgment are the real Jesus. So my friend asks the gentle and understanding Mary to speak to God on my friend's behalf.

I wonder at that. For I would choose to hang onto the Jesus who sees the crowd of hungry people and has compassion on them for they were like sheep without a shepherd. And he fed them all with five loaves and two fish.

I would remember the Jesus who said, "Let the children come to me, do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God."

I would remember the Jesus who stood between the woman caught in adultery and the crowd that was ready to stone her to death. "Let the one who is without sin, cast the first stone." "Is there no one left to condemn you," he said to the woman, "Then neither do I condemn you. Go and sin no more."

Which picture is the real Jesus? Demanding, commanding, judging Jesus or feeding and forgiving and receiving Jesus? Both are pictures of Jesus.

In the catechism Luther teaches us to confess: I believe that Jesus Christ, true God, Son of the Father from eternity, and true man, born of the Virgin Mary is my Lord.

Is my Lord: rules me - guides me - directs me. Is your Lord: rules you - guides you - directs you. Every day Jesus is the one you follow, Jesus shapes your life like an artist shapes a piece of clay, so that every slice of your life will look like Jesus.

But which Jesus? The gentle with children, gentle with sinners, feeding the hungry Jesus? Or the holy Jesus, wanting only the pure, the unstained for his own, ready to discard those who do not live according to his word?

In the second article of the creed this one who is your Lord is described.
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who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
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Of all the moments the church might have held onto in Jesus' life, his dying and rising are at the center: not the blessing of the children, not commanding obedience but the cross and the resurrection.

Who is your Lord? He is the one who gave his life for you, and lives for you the life you will one day share.

And this Lord of yours says, "Of all the slices of your own life the one that is most you is this: My love for you.”

“All your words and all your deeds are not you. My love for you is the real you.”

“Look in the mirror,” says Jesus, “see my love for you. You are more precious to me than my own life. I want you to be with me forever.”

“I am your Lord - in every slice of life, and for all eternity. Amen.

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