

I was talking to a person in my neighborhood and I asked if she was a runner, because of her slender build. She wasn't. A tall person is supposed to play basketball. A youth who speaks well in church should be a pastor. We quickly draw conclusions from one event or one aspect of person.) People draw their own conclusions about Jesus. Some reject Jesus because he is not one they can comprehend or follow. Others reject him, by making him into what they want him to be, who they want to follow. In our scripture, the crowd is about to make Jesus king by force – They have discovered their Savior. He heals; he fed 5,000 people; he stands up to the religious leaders. They know what he is about. Jesus will make their lives better. Jesus has to run the government.

Actually, Jesus has to run away. Jesus went away by himself, without his disciples. Probably, they wanted to make him king too! Skeptics and disciples alike need to continually examine their response to Jesus - we have misconceptions about Jesus. We may have rejected him in some way. We may want to make him king as we define him. One who feeds, guarantees security, basically who makes our life comfortable/easier.

Jesus is not who we want him to be. Jesus is a king only in the sense that all his actions and his person define what king is. [Illustrate] Do we say a person named Derek should be like this (a fast runner), and a person named Sarah should be like that (good artist)? No, we let for good or bad that person, Derek, reveal who Derek is, Sarah reveals who Sarah is?

Jesus' withdrawal leaves the crowd and the disciples in the dark (figuratively and literally.) The people are left without the king they want. There is no visible goal for their enthusiasm. The disciples are left without their leader. There is no known direction for what they should do next. What will they do?

(1 Kings) Elijah is sent by God to make a difficult pronouncement to an evil king. There will be drought and famine because the king is evil. He knows that by communicating this message he will have to go into hiding. God provides for him. He drinks from wadi, fed by ravens. But the water dries up. Where is God now?

Everything goes fine until God does not follow our plan. We experience God withdrawing from us. God is not bound by our idea of what he should do. Jesus is not bound by our idea of who he should be. God may be preparing to show his love and care for us in a new way. Jesus may be showing us who he is in a way that we have not seen or recognized before. What do we do when we are unable to see Jesus [when Jesus does not do what we think he should do]? Will we search for him? Or are we content to be in the dark?

When evening came the disciples went down to the sea got into a boat. It was now dark and Jesus had not yet come to them. The disciples didn't know where Jesus was. They head home without him. The sea is rough and windy. The disciples work hard but end up terrified as they see Jesus walking on the sea and coming near the boat. Jesus said to them, 'it is I; do not be afraid.'

We can see that it is not only a question of where Jesus is, but who Jesus is. We think that we figure him out, but then he seems to disappear. Then he is right with us communicating who he really is. He reveals he is God. Jesus literally claims the name of God, 'I am'.

Are we looking for Jesus or just hoping for a comfortable life free of suffering? It can be easier in difficulty, in suffering to see Jesus for who he really is, God. We can see Jesus in the dark. It is in distress that the disciples see who Jesus is. Jesus tells the disciples and us not to be afraid. Don't let your fears define your understanding of me. Don't let your fears define your understanding of the situation.

Rob Weingartner, executive director of the Outreach Foundation, traveled to Congo. After a long day of travel, he arrived at mission outpost. He was tired and went to lie down in a cabin. He was alone. It was pitch dark. As he tried to go to sleep he heard rustling and a quiet voice speaking in another language outside the cabin. He thought he might be attacked. He imagined dying miles from home. A telephone was miles away. He didn't know where to go anyway. His anxiety spiked. Finally he decided to trust God and he went to sleep. He discovered in the morning that the noise was made by a man who was guarding him all night to keep him safe.

The disciples saw Jesus walking on the water. They were terrified. This was the last place they expected to see him. The disciples heard Jesus is God. This didn't fit with their current understanding of him. Still, they received him into the boat.

Often we live and work without looking for Jesus. The Jesus we have rejected as not worth following comes towards us on the water. The Jesus we rejected by trying to make him be who we wanted him to be stands next to our boat saying he is the Lord.

Let's come out of darkness and listen to the declaration of Jesus' identity and invitation to reject fear...then receive him into our life. Receive him even though it may be terrifying to take God into the boat. Receive him even when we can't pin down who he is or explain scientifically how he walks on water or how he captures our life or why he calls us to follow.

May we recognize salvation and spiritual guidance when it enters our lives. For in the words of poet Elizabeth Barrett Browning,

“Earth's crammed with heaven,

And every common bush afire with God;
And only he who sees takes off his shoes –
The rest sit round it and pluck blackberries”ⁱ

Look for Jesus because he enables us to have hope not despair; to have faith that can live with doubt, to have courage to live in the face of death; to have love that is bigger than our desires; to have peace that passes all understanding. Don't stop searching for Jesus.

ⁱ Elisabeth Barrett Browning, Aurora Leigh, bk. VII line 820 quoted in Feasting on the Word: year B, vol. 3, p. 288