

## TO BE CHRIST

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I'm often asked where in the world do my sermons come from? I'd like to say from prayer or spiritual inspiration but this is rarely the case. This sermon, for example, was inspired by an annoying experience I recently had. I was driving behind a very cautious elderly gentleman going 20 mph in a 45 mph zone. You can always recognize these geezers. Their ears have grown long down around their chin and they usually have some dumpy hat on their heads. I was so close to this guy I could read his bumper sticker. It said "What Would Jesus Do?" All I could think was, he'd at least do the speed limit. Of course in the not too distant future I will be that geezer, excuse me, elderly gentleman.

What would Jesus do? It got me thinking...For centuries the Church has espoused the idea of "Imitatio Christi." The faithful have been urged to imitate the life of Christ, to live as Jesus would. It is true. Your story and Christ's can, in the end, be similar. We have it in us to be Christs to each other.

If Jesus were not 100% human, if he were maybe superhuman or half god; trying to imitate him would be ridiculous. But he was completely human and you and I are on that same plane, that same level playing field. We're made of the same stuff, the same DNA. We have the same resources as Jesus. We have it in us to be Christs to one another. Now before you say, "Ray are you crazy?" listen a minute.

What is it Jesus did?

He worked miracles of love.

He healed.

He blessed people.

He forgave, especially his enemies.

He grieved at other people's pain.

He rejoiced at other people's joy.

He welcomed children.

He empowered people.

And....he rose from the dead!

Can you and I not do these things? Have you not had times when love works a miracle in your life, or at least seen the possibility of a miracle even if you pulled back from making it happen? Have you not experienced the healing process in yourself or helped another person to better health? Have you not blessed your children, your friends, or your lover, and I mean a whole lot more than just when they sneeze? Have you not been able to forgive, even those who don't like you? Have you not grieved at another's pain, especially if you caused it? Have you not rejoiced with another in their great joy, especially if you caused it? Have you not done something good for some child that helped them grow and build trust? Have you not helped another person feel better about themselves and move on to better things? And do those answers not lead you to believe that death is not the end, but merely the extinguishing of a candle because the dawn has arrived?

If you think hard enough you can probably say yes to all these questions, but how does this connect us to Jesus? Does it not seem to you that those moments might have happened because Jesus was active in your life; at least in your heart and mind, if not in your hands. Simple cause and effect, although quite mysterious to be sure. After all haven't you at times asked yourself, "Where did I find the strength? How in the world did I do that? Where did I get the patience? How did I manage to forgive? What in the world came over me? How am I managing to stay this calm? How'd I manage to be that good? Where did this kindness in me come from?"

I want to try something. I'm going to say two phrases and I'd like to know which one turns your crank most. Here's the first: "May the Lord be with you." And the second: "May the Force be with you." Probably the second, right? Because Star Wars encourages us to wake up and do the impossible. You remember in the film when young Luke Skywalker is learning to be a Jedi knight. The gnarly dwarf Yoda is teaching Luke to use skills he doesn't know he has. Yoda wants him to raise his starship out of the swamp, an obviously impossible task. To Luke, the odd looking Yoda is an absurd creature; who, unknown to Luke, can stop the planets in their tracks. Luke believes what Yoda asks is foolish and impossible and therefore he can't do it. Yoda must get him to feel powers that lie dormant in him; to tap into powers he doesn't yet now he has, to imagine and believe he can. Yoda says, "Either do or don't, there is no try,"

Is it not so with us? Being like Christ is unimaginable, too much, way beyond us. Why bother, it's not going to get me anywhere. I can't do those things anyway. It's not me, not who I am. Be like Jesus?—who are you kidding?

I know I don't have the courage, as Jesus did, to die for God or even to live for him very well either; but perhaps in spite of my doubts I can live

out, bear witness to, live toward and live by the holy story of Jesus. And at times, oh those treasured times, when my story connects, overlaps, mingles with Jesus' story, gratitude and blessings abound.

The question isn't what would Jesus do. That's usually easy to figure out. The question is, "will I be Christ to another?" In the words of Yoda, "Either do or don't. There is no try. Feel the force."

Now suppose instead of saying "Feel the force"; I said to you "Have faith in God." Which would turn your crank more? Maybe they're talking about the same thing. Be Christ to one another.