

Foreword

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My friend Jamie says that most people don't actually know what they believe but it is easy to tell; simply watch how a person lives their life. How easy is it to get lost in our own rhetoric and begin to believe that what we say is truly what we believe. Another friend, Baxter, calls this 'self-referential incoherence.' Do you want to know what you believe? Ask those closest to you; your kids, your spouse, your co-workers, your employees, your neighbors, your enemies. Perhaps it is time to stop talking and learn to listen and love. Words, as they say, are cheap, but love costs. Fyodor Dostoyevsky said that hell is simply the refusal to love.

Sadly, there is often a gaping emptiness between our cosmetic identification with Jesus and the penetration of our words into our daily life. Will word ever become flesh? How easy to spout religious platitudes and cliché, convincing ourselves that we really mean what we say.

By your fruit, by your fruit, by your fruit!!!!

When others look at how we treat people, how we respond to those around and in front of us, what do they see?

Don't be looking for your culture to change when you won't. Stop whining about how the world is going to hell in a handbasket and you refuse to love your enemy, let alone your neighbor, let alone your spouse. Perhaps it is time for each of us to enter a post-Christian reformation in which we embrace and trust the person of Jesus rather than Christianity, rather than Moses, rather than civil religion. Please stop telling me about your commitment to Jesus and then also pledge allegiance to the violence of the law of Moses. Please don't tell me about your love for Jesus and the way of Jesus and then harangue 'those people' with holy prophetic tones and self-righteous indignation.

When Moses and Elijah slipped through the thin veil from the invisible reality into our earthly realm to visit with Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration (remember this is not a parable, but a fact), Peter the disciple immediately wanted to start three churches. Three distinct

denominations based on the Law, the Prophets and Jesus. God silences Peter by stating clearly, “This is my son (Jesus)! Hear Him!” Jesus the

Messiah, the Christ, and His way, transcend all the Law, all the Prophets, all of Christianity and all of any other religious, political or economic way.

It is the Human Way, for Jesus is the complete human being. As a child, I thought, no assumed, that we were all human beings. Then I was told (or discovered) that human beings could be separated into colors, a vast array of colors. And as beautiful a spectrum as this was, it became evident that it was also useful. Suddenly, my white became smaller but rather than allowing it to blend into the joyful kaleidoscope of humanity, some thought it should stand out. By observing the world, I was educated that there is a hierarchy of value based on color and in my world the best color was White. It was the most valuable, most important. And so was Male, and so was American (or Canadian, or European). It became clear that almost everyone did this, categorizing value based on presentation. It didn’t matter that I had no choice in picking my color, or gender, or social status. One buys a ticket for the lottery and some benefit and some don’t. White became ‘us’ and everyone else on the spectrum of color was ‘them,’ and then even whites who thought different, acted different or lived different than our White became suspect, another box marked ‘those people.’ Over time, my White became even smaller as we continued to break down the unity of humanity into tinier and tinier bite-sized bits. Gender, ethnicity, social class and status, religious affiliation or not, job description, notoriety, . . . hundreds of categories that could each again be divided into sub-categories. How foolish to believe that color or gender or social standing or political affiliation or nation-state membership or class or vocation is that from which we derive our identity, rather than our simple but magnificent humanity.

It is the hunt for isolation, fueled by shame and fear, pushing us to climb into the highest turret we can find in order to get away from ‘them.’ And sitting in our high tower ‘we’ look down and judge ‘them’—even if ‘we’ is just ‘me.’ When you sit alone, you have no need to deal with your own issues.

And then I stumbled into the Kingdom of God, Jesus and his *Way*, in which none of this mattered. Oh, our judgments are something to be

acutely aware of, a contagion that can infect the mind, ravage the soul and break the heart, especially as it tends to shatter relationships. But the Kingdom of God is not a system or an enterprise. It is certainly not Christianity or any other humanly constructed system. It is a Person. It is Jesus, the Messiah, the Christ. To begin to be free from the destructive need to divide and conquer is to finally become a child again, or perhaps for the first time.

Paul the Apostle, in that clarion cry as he wrote a letter to the Galatians, "There is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28, NASB).

It should come as no surprise that in the New Testament, the Greek word for Accuser (as in the great satan, the accuser of God and humanity) is *katagoro*. We derive our English word 'category' or 'categorize' from this word. To put someone or a group of persons in a box and label that box is to participate in evil, in accusation, in dehumanization.

Recently, I was speaking at St. Henry's Catholic Church in Nashville, a wonderful community intent on the Jesus Way. Most of us carry, as part of our baggage, the need to categorize and dehumanize. It gives us self-justification and comfort for our judgments. Shortly after I began, a friend handed me a phone and I held it up to the microphone so everyone there could engage in my conversation. It was Terry King, who has been on Unit 2 (death row) for thirty-five years after killing another young man when he was eighteen.

For half an hour, Terry shared about his journey, about the Jesus Way, and about the painful confrontation between him and God over exactly this same issue. Although he had confessed it, Terry never truly faced what he had done until he realized that even he sat in the seat of judgment. He had created a box and labeled it 'pedophiles on death row' and judged that at least he was better than them.

As I listened to Terry, I watched the room and could see boxes begin to disintegrate. "Killer on Death Row." A real conversation humanized not only Terry, but others including the pedophiles on death row.

One day, I was listening to four of our grandchildren talking. They were trying to figure out who got which part of their looks from which parent or grandparent.

“I think Elle got her nose from mom. Houston, you got your ears from Grandpa and Ivy, your mouth came from Dad. And Maisy, your eyes . . . you got them from Grandma.” At its core, it was a conversation about belonging, about the connection of our common humanity. Everyone belonged, if you looked. It didn’t occur to any of the children that just because Maisy was adopted from Uganda, she wasn’t part of us. Just look at her eyes, beautiful and brown, just like Grandma.

The book you hold in your hands, or are listening to, is not an invitation to become a Christian. It is not trying to get you to join a team in some cosmic contest. If you already identify as a Christian, it is a summons to transcend your religious indoctrination and enter the Kingdom of Jesus, into Jesus Himself and His Way. This is the Way of someone who is fully human and fully alive. At the deepest and most sacred place of my longings, this is what I want. I want this Way to flow like a living river from within me and into all my relationships and encounters. I want people to watch my life and say, “He doesn’t have to say a word. He is one of those *Jesus Way* people.”