

“That’s Right, You Don’t know Jesus... Feelin’ Alright?”
Hebrews 7:23-28 and Mark 10:46-52

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It can be a simple matter to find Jesus in church. What I truly enjoy is finding him in the “everyday;” you know, all that employment, child-raising, car-payment, dish-washing stuff we live in each day. Being a musician by skill and passion, I really like finding him in the music of the everyday.

Song: “That Right, You Don’t Know Jesus”

Recently, I watched my next-door neighbor clean his gutters. He’s done it before, I watched him last year. Amazing. I was fifty-years-old before I even knew people cleaned gutters; and I haven’t been able to get around to it once, yet.

I live in awe of people who get those jobs done; the folks who live orderly and presumably guck-free lives. The ones who always know what needs to be done and do it right. I know people who actually balance their checkbook each month. They can find things around the house when they need them and there is order under their sinks. I know that’s hardly credible, but I swear it’s so. As I said, I presume they indulge in this much imposed order to keep their lives guck-free.

How do YOU cope in a world that has “guck” in it? “What’s ‘guck’,” you ask? The short answer is “Guck equals disorder,” but it’s more than that. Guck is that painful, slimy ooze of feeling spiritually imprisoned by life on this fallen planet. The caged-in discomfort caused by experiences like disappointing outcomes and unfair losses. It can similarly be the pain and suffering created by the prisons of our own making; such as: the prison of, “the ways things could have been;” you know, the “if only,” or “would of-should of-could of” stuff. It’s the pain and suffering that pounces on us by forces we can’t control or unfortunate choices we make. Guck in the abrasive, gooey, heart-aching stuff that does it’s disturbing, 24-7, best to make each of us want to stop living life...

Song: “Millworker,” by James Taylor

How, in the face of clumsy economies, professional terrorism, Swine-flu, “road-rage,” and TV-ads for prescription anti-depressants can a person get along, let alone cope in this life!? I can answer that question with a question: **Why else would God come to earth as one of us in Jesus the Christ?**

If guck and its marketing is going to be persistently 24-7, then we who believe in Jesus the Christ need to understand how God’s presence is played out in their lives. Even in the midst of the guck, the grace of God revealed through Christ’s sacrifice is a 24-hour-a-day, 7-day-a-week, 365-day-a-year presence. No timeouts, no vacations. The Grace of God is real and present and with us every moment of everyday of our lives on this fallen planet.

God can be a 24-7 God because Jesus was a 1-time Savior. The sacrifice Jesus made was **once** and **for all**. Jesus came to this earth as one of us, taught us what being a whole human being is living as one of us, and through his **one** act of complete obedience done for all of us, revealed how much we matter to God; he became, as the book of Hebrews tells us, the one intercessory “priest” we need. You have to admit, that’s a lot of intentional work done by God on our behalf just to help us live with guck!

This much 24-7-available, Graceful love sure comes in handy when dealing daily with all the various forms of guck. Have trouble buying into this much available love and coping support in the face of a lay-off, do you? Well, then how about this: in the midst of the cancerous evil that was the Finkenwalde concentration camp, a Christian fellow named Dietrick Bonhoeffer ran a small seminary; a school for pastors. Yeah that’s right, within the boundaries of the obvious pain and suffering of a Nazi concentration camp, Mr. Bonhoeffer was teaching and living Christ! Kind-a makes you think Dietrick believed that the presence of Christ was with him and his fellow inmates in all the guck of that camp.

On the Communion table in the make-shift camp chapel where the faithful worshiped every day, there was engraved a single word: *“hapax,”* meaning, “once.” That single word focused the hearts and minds of those ordinary humans caught in the middle of one of history’s worst nightmares on the very nature of Jesus the Christ; and on the sacrifice that was made to transform all and each of our relationships with God.

Far from being “otherworldly,” the story told in Hebrews of Jesus’ unique identity, his perfect qualifications as our intercessor with our Creator, and his once-and-for-all sacrifice, breathed faith and hope in the misery of the prison camp that was Finkenwalde. For these “prisoners,” Jesus the Christ was present in their rather troubled “everyday.” It still does today for all who find themselves in the guck of prisons imposed upon them by forces beyond control, or, in prisons of their own making; the feeling of being imprisoned by “what could have been.”

There was another engraved “once” testimony to Christ’s constant presence with us. It was found inscribed on the wall of a basement in Colone, Germany where some Jews had been hiding from the Nazi “Final Solution.”

Song: “Inscription of Hope”

The story in Hebrews reveals just how perfect and available God’s presence is now that Jesus has become our “priest,” our intercessor, our connection with God. Jesus’ teaching how to be sinless, that is, how to be un-separated from God, coupled with his once-and-for-all sacrifice, means the healing, redeeming, resurrecting presence and power of God are available at all times and in all places. As our Risen Savior, Jesus is constantly “on call.” Jesus is eternally accessible at a needs notice, 24-7.

The healing story told in Mark’s Gospel demonstrates how Jesus makes on-demand “house calls” at any time, in any place, anywhere. Jesus and his disciples are traveling toward Jerusalem, moving toward the final events that await them there. Suddenly, the cries of a blind beggar named Bartimaeus, we’ll call him, “Bart,” are heard: “Jesus, son of David, have mercy on me!” Despite the attempted shushing of some others dealing in guck, Bart keeps it up: “Son of David, have mercy on me!” By the way, this is all it takes: to realize who Jesus is and believe it, and then to ask him to stop by.

Hearing the blind man’s cries, Jesus stops his journey, “stands still,” as the story goes, and calls Bart to him. Now, you’ve got to understand all the circumstances and consequences of what old Bart did next. Remember Bart begins by believing, that is, trusting, who Jesus is and what Jesus means more than what is guck, is doing to him. Next, as a beggar, he is sitting on his cloak which is spread out around him. He’s blind, so it is this cloak that catches all the coins people throw to him when he begs. Finally he lives-out his trust in Christ by getting up and leaving all the guck you might think he couldn’t live without to go to Jesus!

In response to this humble beggar’s obvious faith and persistence, Jesus publically heals him of his blindness. In other words, through faith and persistence, Jesus frees him from his guck prison.

I chose the story of Bart’s healing because it is the last healing Jesus performs in Mark’s Gospel. Jesus is already on the way to Jerusalem, to the cross, when Bart gets his attention. Despite the direction Jesus’ ministry is taking him, he stops without hesitation to heal an imprisoned captive. Forever “on call,” Jesus could not leave a believer alone in personal pain and darkness. Jesus wants to be who you run to when the night comes.

Jesus does, and I dare say, has come to you when the night comes. Regardless of what belief you think you “should have” in him, Jesus is and has been with you. He may have come by way of someone who asked how you were doing the moment you really wanted someone to know. It could have been anybody: a friend, a relative, a cashier at Wall-Mart; no matter, that was Jesus. The wall of your particular prison may have been closing in when a TV show, or song on your I-Pod, or phrase in an e-mail momentarily reminded you that there’s a lot more to live than guck...that was Jesus. I remember the imprisonment by the guck of my brother taking his own life, and the coincidence of Jesse Ping being at my house with me at that moment. That wasn’t a coincidence, that was a divinely-inspired set-up. As I’m sure Jesus will tell you, it’s good to have friends.

Song: "A Little Help From My Friends"

Speaking of friends, as our always-open, available connection to God's mercy, Jesus the Christ makes it possible for each of one of us to in an immediate, intimate relationship with no less than the God of the cosmos. A distant, unknown and unknowing God who acts as the cosmic creator and judge becomes an image of a very distant past. Jesus' love for us lived out in his teachings, healing, and unconditional sacrifice introduces each one of us to the arms of God's mercy and into the heart of God's love. We have an incarnate God who is involved with us.

The forgiveness Christ obtains for us brings us into our heavenly home as full members of the divine family, where we are cherished, nurtured, and taught in the embrace of our divine parent. It's true, you see, that Jesus did not call God "Father;" no sir, Jesus called God "*Abba*," which means "Daddy."

Anyone who is a parent knows that parenting is a 24-7 profession. It doesn't matter if your child is 6 months, 6 years, 16 years, 36 years, or 60 years...you are forever "on call," and forever "available." You certainly can't live your child's life for him/her and keep him/her from experiencing their guck, but you sure can be available to be there to sit in it with them. Consider then how much the parental care is from God...who not only made each of us, but is not limited by time or space.

As a human parent, I know that there are those times, those experiences which each of us, including my kids, must face as individuals without the support of others. But as long as my kids, and all of us, remember that Christ has opened the way to a personal relationship with God, there is never again any experience in life, or death, or guck that we must face alone. No matter how great the fear, how intense the pain, how prolonged the wait how profound the doubts, the promise of the Gospel is that God is there for us, God is there alongside us, 24-7.

So, friends of Jesus the Christ, just how do we cope with a world with guck in it? By trusting our lives to the educating, sacrificing, risen, redeeming Christ, that's how! "But," you may ask, "what can this trusting, this having faith feel like; what is it to know redeeming energy like this? How does a person move on through live recognizing this life-creating cosmic energy? What is it to FEEL ALRIGHT in the midst of the guck?"

Song: "Feelin' Alright"