

Jesus or God?

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I had a conversation with someone the other day who acknowledged that, in her prayer life, she has always felt close to Jesus but has always "had a hard time with God." In those sorts of conversations, as a priest and/or a spiritual director, I try to hide my instinctive heresy-search-and-destroy reactions, but this one, I could tell, crept out onto my face. Actually, I winced. I didn't say anything at the time. Trust me, this wasn't the right moment to say, "Let me introduce you to the heresy of Arianism." But I'm pretty sure she could tell by my facial expression that she had touched a nerve that had evoked a less-than-pastoral response in my countenance.

It's common, though, isn't it? In today's biblically illiterate, doctrinally vacuous, post-Christian world, there are lots of SBNRs who like the sound of Jesus but don't want anything to do with God. (That wasn't her point, but I'm taking it and running with it.) Jesus is all about loving your enemies, welcoming the stranger, turning the other cheek, eating with sinners, and dying for your friends. As long as he's not asking us to do the same thing (hint: he is), how can anyone be against Jesus? God, on the other hand, is terrible. He's a wrath-flinging, judgment-pronouncing, damn-them-all-to-hell God. In fact, if I didn't know better, I'd suspect that Jesus wasn't a big fan of God, either.

But that's my fault. That's our fault. As church leaders, as Christians, as evangelists, we are all called to share the good news that Jesus Christ shows the whole world that God loves us--the stranger, the outcast, the sinner. Jesus *is* God. Jesus is the fullest revelation of who God is. Unmitigated by human interpretation but fully integrated into humanity itself, the Incarnate Word is God as clear as we will ever get him. Jesus is the lens through which we must understand and interpret everything we have ever thought about God. If you want to know what God is really like, start with Jesus, and make sure everything else falls into place.

On Sunday, [we'll read about the kingship of Christ](#): "My kingdom is not from this world...For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth.

Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice." That's not just Jesus' plan for the world; it's God's plan. Jesus elevates the significance of the moment by harkening back to his birth--his coming into the world. His life, death, and resurrection aren't just a moment in human history; they are a fundamental shift in God's encounter with humanity. And, if we want to know what God is really like and what God's kingdom is all about, we should listen to Jesus' voice and belong to his truth.

God's kingdom is built around not a throne of power but a seat of mercy. God's kingship is adorned with not a crown of gold but a crown of thorns. Jesus isn't an accident. Jesus is the fullness of God. He represents everything that God is. God didn't give us a glimpse of who he is. He gave us the full thing. Gaze upon the crucified one and see your king, God with us.

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