

Imagining Christ (Psalm 46; Colossians 1:11-20; Luke 23:33-43)

We may see him as fully human. Scripture resounds with his cosmic nature.

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November 18, 2022

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What's the first image of Jesus that comes to mind for you?

My daughter was 11 when I moved from my first ministry call to an interim position. The first time she saw the new church's sanctuary, she turned to me, puzzled. "Who is that?" she asked.

We stood and looked together at the stained glass image of Christ above the altar, crowned and holding an orb and scepter, his feet on a tiny flower-shaped cloud, implying an existence beyond this world. Coming from a church where one stained glass window portrayed Jesus holding a lamb while the other pictured him sitting on a rock surrounded by little children, she held a more down-to-earth view. He seemed to her like a kind teacher, a good shepherd, someone less shiny and more accessible than a king above the world.

My image of him has shifted over time, from a childhood full of pale Victorian Jesus ready to knock at the door to frustrated brown Jesus wrangling not just with Pharisees but also with his own disciples. I picture dusty feet and worn sandals. I read good humor where it is not explicit. I see him gentle at bedsides, irritated on the road, and resolute at trial.

I see him fully human.

Yet scripture resounds with his cosmic nature. He is there from before the beginning, woven into and through all that we can see and touch and know. And while the imperial remove that informs gold crowns, scepters, and orbs comes from our problematic human history, we work with the metaphors we have available to us, trying to make the mystery of Christ concrete.

My mother, when she was dying, took comfort from listening to a tape of songs recorded at Taizé. Her favorites included “Jesus, remember me.” She was not with him, not yet, but hope of something else to come sustained her. She lay quietly in a hospital bed set up in the dining room and lived this plea in the last days of her life: “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.”

The word *king* had as much baggage in Jesus’ time as any lightning-rod word has in our discourse today. We call him king although most of us have never had one rule over us. They called him king to torment him, to show what a fool they thought he was. Their own king was put in place by an occupying force.

The church reclaimed the word and built another set of images in art and song, crowning him with many crowns. Yet I find it hard to imagine him embracing the role of monarch.

My mother told me she did not feel sure what heaven would be like; she felt no reliance on the notion of banquet tables and eternal reunions. “If it is only a warm pool where I float peacefully, that would be enough.”

This shouldn’t have surprised me. While I dreamed of Jesus in all his relational incarnation, my mother had always yearned for stillness to know God. The Christ of her imagining rules a different kind of kingdom. As I approach the age when she died, I have begun to seek that peace, too.

Be still and know; hold still and get quiet. Find him in that slipstream of the tangible and the intangible we cannot control. He is neither visible nor invisible, and he is both. In him, all things hold together.