Sunday, December 8, 1985
JESUS: THE HUMAN-DIVINE INTERSECTION (NO. 1 IN A SERIES)
Luke 1:76-79, 4:16-21

We have never seen his face. We have never heard his voice. We do not know what he looked like, although countless pictures of him have been painted from imagination. At his birth, his parents named him “Jesus,” a common name found everywhere. According to the Jewish historian Josephus, author of “Jewish Antiquities,” so many men bore this name that it came to lack all individuality. During his brief span of life, Jesus had nothing in his name or in his looks to distinguish him. He was ordinary, appearing in no way different from the mass of people who had to work for a living in his time.

Yet he was not ordinary. One of my favorite brief descriptions that most of you have probably read or heard before is this one:(The author is unknown)

“He was born in an obscure village, the child of a peasant woman. He grew up in another village not rich in heroic names. He had neither formal learning nor money wealth. He worked in a carpenter’s shop until he as 30, and then for about three years he was an itinerant preacher. He never wrote a book; he never held an office; he never owned a home, he never had a family; he never went to college; he never put his foot inside a big city; he never traveled more than 200 miles from the place where he was born. He led no army. He wrote no music. Zhe historians of his time thought he unworthy of mention. He never did one of the things that usually accompany greatness. He had no credentials, but God in heaven and himself.”

“While he was still a young man, the tide of public opinion turned against him. His friends ran away. His closest followers denies him. He was turned over to his enemies. He went through the mockery of a trial. He was nailed to a cross between two thieves. While he was dying, his executioners gambled for the only piece of property he had on earth and that was his coat. When he was dead, he was laid in a borrowed grave through the pity of a friend. To some he was a fanatic, to others a dreamer of dreams.”

“Nineteen wide centuries have come and gone, and today he is the central figure of the human race and the leader of the column of progress. It is any wonder that our calendar of years begins with his birth; that we identify world events as being before Christ, or after Christ.”

“I am far within the mark when I say that all the armies that ever marched, and all the navies that were ever built, and all the parliaments that ever sat, and all the kings that ever reigned, put together, have not affected the life of this earth as has the one solitary life.”

Wherein lies the uniqueness of this person named Jesus? During the next several Sundays during this Advent season leading up to Christmas Eve, we are going to look once again at Jesus from several different perspectives. We will be re-discovering how he is the same as all of us, and how he is different.

In the New Testament of the Bible, more than 40 different titles and metaphors are used to describe Jesus — here are a few of them as examples: Son of David, Son of God, Son of Man, Messiah, Servant of God, The Good Shepherd, The Divine Physician, Savior, Prophet, King, The Stone, The Bridegroom, The Bread of Life, The Light of The World, The Door, The Vine, The Way, The Truth and The Life, The Lamb, The Bright Morning Star.

This morning we are going to look at one very important aspect of Jesus, and that is his spirituality. More than anyone else, Jesus lived on that mysterious boundary where the human and the Divine intersect. His life, his death and resurrection, all together, brought God and humankind closer together.

He lived the human-Divine intersection. He was the human-Divine intersection.

Let's look at this quality of Jesus more carefully. Jesus was a person who was vividly in touch with the world of the Spirit. Whatever else he was, he was a "holy man," to use a semi-technical term from the history of religions. The word "holy" here is not an adjective pointing to righteousness or purity so much as it is a noun, pointing to the awesome reality and power at the center of existence. A holy man is a person who experiences the holy, vividly and frequently, one who is experientially in contact with the power of another realm that is at the same time present in this realm, the power of the Spirit; one who knows God intimately.

Such persons, known in many cultures, and including both women and men, are individuals who are more sensitive to the power of the Spirit in this world than most of us. As such, they are mediators between the realm of the Spirit and ordinary everyday life in this world. Such individuals are the connectors of the world of the Spirit and our everyday life. We see in them the power of God in a fresh and dynamic way. They are mystics and healers. They know, experience, and teach the inter-relationship, the connectedness of the life of the Spirit and the life in this world.

For the holy person, like Jesus, there is no separation, between the life of the Spirit and everyday life. There is no separation between the spiritual and the material. The spiritual is in the material and the material is in the spiritual — all is one.

Somewhere along the way, and we don't know precisely when, Jesus became aware of his spirituality. He became aware of a unique relationship with

God and became the channel for the expression of power no one had ever before dreamed of.

I can imagine the young boy, Jesus, spending many hours in the hills of Galilee, like any normal young person pondering the wonders of the heavens — the sun, and drifting clouds by day. The moon and stars by night. I can visualize him asking the question posed by the shepherd Psalmist a thousand years before, "What is humankind?"

And then one day it happened. Into the consciousness of this thoughtful young man came an idea so remarkable that he probably didn't realize its full implications at first. It was the consciousness of his unity with God.

According to the gospel accounts in the New Testament, Jesus' ministry began with an experience of "the heavens opening" and the Spirit descending upon him. Later he applied to himself the words, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me," and he spoke of the Spirit as being active through him. He practiced spiritual disciplines common to holy women and men: Fasting, solitude, regular times of prayer. Whatever else he was, Jesus was a holy man.

Now you may well ask, what does this have to do with us in today's world?

Jesus was not a holy man for his own sake, but for our sake — for the sake of everyone in the world, then, now, and in the future. As Jesus said of himself, according to Luke's Gospel read earlier, "The Spirit of God is upon me, because God has anointed me to preach good news to

the poor; God has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind to set at liberty those who are oppressed, and to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord."

In other words, or to paraphrase, Jesus knew that one important part of his ministry was to heighten our awareness of God and to bring about a relationship of trust between God and each one of us, as well as to improve our relationships with each other. In the Gospel of John, Jesus put it this way — "I came that they may have life and have it abundantly."

Jesus knew that each one of us is related to God already. Each one of us has the Spirit of God within us. We are sons and daughters of the Most High, not because of anything we have done, but because of what God has done in creating us. Therefore, an important part of the ministry of Jesus and of the church ever since Jesus is to help people become aware of what already is, rather than having to create a relationship from scratch.

The ministry of Jesus and the ministry of the Christian church is to open blind eyes and unstop deaf ears, that is, to make people aware at deeper and deeper levels of who they really are and who their source in creation truly is, and to get a more vital and personal interaction moving between the Spirit of God and each one of us.

Jesus' goal was to help everyone — you and me — to understand the tremendous potential within each one of us and to help us make the breakthrough for ourselves. Thus he said, according to John's Gospel, "Those who believe in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will they do."

When Jesus said, "Follow me," he is asking us, among other things, to let him lead us to a new and deeper level of spiritual consciousness. Jesus came into the world at a time when the wall of separation between human beings and God was high and wide. Humankind was living in the darkness of spiritual ignorance. Human beings have always had an intuitive feeling about a higher power, a greater life. This feeling has lit the fires on every altar through the ages, built every temple, made every creed articulate, and supported every prayer. But there was always a great void separating human beings and God.

Then came Jesus. To use a metaphor, "Jesus was a door in the wall separating us and God." In one place in the Gospels, Jesus said, "I am the door, those who enter by me will be saved." The door of Jesus makes it possible for us to enter the vast and beautiful spiritual dimension of life. In Jesus, the human and the divine intersect.

And because of Jesus, the human and divine intersect in us as well. All it takes is our openness and willingness to be more and more aware of that intersection and connection.

And there's even more good news! Once you begin to be aware of the God-reality in your life, then it becomes more and more clear that your being born into this world was something infinitely good. And you become more and more aware of God's creation as being good. Again and again, in the Book of Genesis in the Old Testament of the Bible, we hear the refrain, "And God looked on what God had made and behold it was very, very good." I believe that Christian redemption begins when we come to feel about the event of our creation in the same way.

But we always forget about God's goodness and about God's Spirit within us. So it is that Jesus reminds us of that human-divine intersection within each one of us and within the world as a whole. In this sense, Jesus came to redeem us and the world. The word "redeem" literally

means to “buy back,” and that’s what God does in Jesus. In Jesus Christ, God has made manifest in history what a fully functioning human being would be like, and thus in Jesus we see our species brought to its highest expression and know that if God has God’s final way, God will someday make each of us into that kind of perfection.

In this season of Advent and Christmas, we talk a lot about letting Christ be born in us, which is another way of saying that we allow ourselves to recognize the Christ that is already in us. Then we can say what St. Paul said—"It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.”

I often think the crucial issue in life is this: “How much or how little will you settle for?” The great enemy here is not God’s wrath or impatience, but our timidity and fearfulness, our unwillingness to expose ourselves to that tough and tender mercy that has in it the power to bring us to fullness — to our full potential that God meant us to be.

C. S. Lewis used to say that whenever he got a toothache as a child, he was always faced with the painful dilemma of whether or not to tell his mother. On the one hand, if he told her, he knew she would give him an aspirin and thus what he most wanted; namely, temporary relief from his pain. But the problem was that she would not stop there. She would get to the bottom of the toothache, which meant going to the dentist, the drill, and all of that. And all he really wanted was relief in the moment. He did not want to undergo a thorough resolution. And that’s true for many people with religion — they only want from their faith a temporary relief from life’s pain or the problem of the moment — they do not want to undergo a thorough transformation of their lives.

Oftentimes, we human beings are willing to settle for so little; we are tempted to keep one foot on the bottom, to cling to the tiny securities and achievements that we have in hand, rather than casting ourselves into the great sweep of God’s mercies — we seem afraid to trust God completely.

So remember the message of Advent — the message of Jesus — you are being redeemed, but you have a crucial role to play in whether or not the grand design of God finally comes true in your own life. God wants to make you full-grown and complete, but God will not do so without your consent and collaboration.

This Advent and Christmas, awaken again in the reality that surrounds your life. God is! You are! And the two of you are made for each other. Jesus came that you might have life and have it abundantly. The human and the divine intersect in you just as it did in Jesus. Amen.