

Seeing Christ in Galilee

Colleagues,

I sometimes think that we who carry on the Crossings project these days lose sight too easily of the aim Bob Bertram and Ed Schroeder had in mind when they launched it a quarter century ago. Their target audience was the laity, and more sharply, John and Jane Christian as we catch them trudging away from their weekly celebrations of Christ's Easter into another week of life and labor in a world that belongs to God without necessarily looking and feeling as though it does. Bob and Ed were looking for a method to help John and Jane take the Word of God along with them in a faithful and useful way, where the Word in its two-fold dimension as Law and Promise might inform their everyday experience and shape it as well. Pushed to its deepest level, their driving question came out like this: "What use is Christ crucified for daily living?"

It struck me this past Easter Sunday that St. Mark was begging us all to press that very question. The begging emerges from the instruction the young man delivers to the women. "Tell his disciples that he's gone ahead of you to Galilee. There you will see him..." (16:7a,b) So what is Galilee, if not the place of everyday living replete with its unclean spirits, unruly winds, diseased sufferers, hungry, milling crowds, etc.? And how will today's disciples, heading into it with their faith-vision goggles strapped on, hook up with the crucified and risen Jesus "just as he [promised] you" (16:7c)?

We're going to probe that latter question over the next few weeks with the help, again, of some of the superb things that some of us got to hear at last January's Fourth International Crossings Conference. We start today with a homily delivered by Steve Albertin of the editorial team. This is the first of a

series he prepared as conference chaplain on texts drawn from the Sermon on the Mount. Early this Easter Week I read it again and was startled both by its timeliness for this current moment in the church year and by its strength in addressing that question posed first by Mark and much, much later by Bob and Ed. May you be startled and strengthened as well.

Peace and Joy,
Jerry Burce, for the editorial team

“WHO DO YOU THINK YOU ARE?”

Matthew 5:1-12

Crossings Conference

Homily 1

January 23, 2012

Morning Prayer

You are patiently waiting in a traffic jam when a car suddenly speeds by on the shoulder passing up all the traffic and cuts in at the last moment just before the lane ends. How can someone be so rude and inconsiderate? All you want to say is “Who do you think you are?”

I am sure that Jesus encountered a similar reaction when he uttered the Beatitudes. He brashly declares that the world is not as it appears to be and that he has the authority to create a new one. Those who heard him must have wondered, **“Who do you think you are?”**

Jesus dares to rearrange the world as we know it. “Blessed are the poor in spirit, those who mourn, the meek, the merciful, the pure in heart...and those who are persecuted, reviled and against whom all kinds of evil is spoken.”

Like some brash heckler in a crowd or some speeding driver who cuts in line, Jesus thumbs his nose at a world that has got it all wrong. No wonder Jesus' critics complained, **"Who do you think you are?"**

It gets worse. Jesus not only defies the social conventions of the world, he dares to contradict God. God gives people what they deserve. God blesses those who follow God's Law and curses those who don't. God loves the righteous and punishes the wicked. BUT Jesus insists that God is partial to those who don't deserve a thing and smiles on those for whom life has gone south.

Those who heard him must have wondered, **"Who do you think you are?"**

And Jesus sighed, "I'm glad you asked. Watch, listen, and you will find out."

Jesus' answers startle and surprise. He dares to call the creator of the universe, "Daddy." As an uppity adolescent in the temple in Jerusalem, he declares that he must be about his "father's business." He wasn't referring to the carpentry business in Nazareth. He audaciously claims that "No one comes to the Father but by me."

Repeatedly Jesus dares to hang out with sinners as if God approves!

Jesus tells stories that portray what God is up to in him. In these odd stories merit does not matter. Here there is no ladder to climb or pecking order to defend.

Laborers in the vineyard are all paid the same whether they worked all day or for only the last five minutes.

A shepherd runs a crazy business by leaving behind 99 sheep

unprotected in the wilderness for the sake of one dopey sheep that got lost.

A father welcomes home a wicked, ungrateful, and undeserving son who had wasted his life in riotous living.

In this new and crazy world God blesses the poor, the hungry, the sorrowful, and the outcast regardless of how undeserving they might be.

“Jesus, **who do you think you are**,...God or something?”

Such an upstart cannot be tolerated! Blasphemy! Jesus must die.

It was people like us who killed Jesus. It was people who wanted to be good, who get out of bed on a Sunday morning to go to church, who go to conferences in the middle of winter, in the cold, who could not tolerate this recklessly generous Jesus.

So they, we, hung Jesus on a cross. They, we, mocked him and demanded that Jesus come down from the cross. When Jesus doesn't come down from the cross and dies, they, we, are relieved.

“See, he was wrong. God only loves those who are worth loving. Jesus was misguided. God will not be mocked. Everyone finally gets what they deserve. Jesus, did you actually think that you could get away with undermining God?”

But because that was not the end of the story, we are here today. When Jesus was raised from the dead, all bets were off. It was a stunning conclusion to Jesus' story, every bit as stunning as it was that day when Jesus uttered these blessings on the mountain. When God raised Jesus from the dead, God vindicated everything that Jesus had said and done. Yes, Jesus got it right! “Blessed are the poor, the hungry, the sorrowful and the outcast!”

Because Jesus Christ is risen from the dead, Jesus truly is what he claimed to be. The reversal he authorized in the Beatitudes was not wishful thinking or the deranged dreams of some fool. It was no pie in the sky sweet by and by. It was “the real world!”

When we believe what Jesus says, we “get to” live our lives differently. We “get to” live with honesty, integrity, doing what is right and not just what is approved by the latest opinion poll. In the midst of an anxiety-ridden world, we like lilies in the field do not need to worry about what to eat or what to wear.

Even when we are at the end of the line, the back of the bus, the rear of the room, the bottom of the list, the last one chosen because no one wants us on their team, or as their pastor, sitting on the bench because the coach won't play us, alone on a Saturday night without a date, even when we wonder if we can make ends meet, if we can survive the terrifying diagnosis, even when tears flow down our cheeks, we can rejoice and be glad, because standing there next to us with his arm around us is Jesus!

We can turn the other cheek and go the extra mile. We can believe that our dreadful past has been forgiven. We no longer need to be ashamed. We can come clean. We can tell the truth, in this brave, new, real world of the Kingdom of God.

So, when someone snidely remarks, “**Who do you think you are?**” we can answer, “Just ask Jesus. He says we're blessed.”

The Divorce of Sex and Marriage: Sain Sex, a new book by Robert Bertram, is now available for a \$10 donation to Crossings. Please include \$3 for shipping and handling, and send your request to clessmann@charter.net.

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