

“What Would Jesus Say about Me?”

Matthew 2:1-12

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Well, here we are in 2003. The bells have tolled. The balls have dropped and the calendars have turned us toward new responsibilities. Before we get bogged down with the hopes and fears of a brand new year, let us take a few moments on our way to Holy Communion to ponder the deeper meanings of life. Who am I? What do I want? Where am I going?

Are not these the essential questions of human existence? While we ask them for a lifetime, Jesus gave answers to them for all time. So let us hear today what Jesus has to say about you and me.

Concerning the question, “Who Am I?” Jesus answers, ‘You are a divinely designed child of God.’ In the midst of current clamor over human cloning and the constant reminders of bodily toning, maybe it is time to hear another voice, the voice of scripture.

The Bible says, “God created human beings in his own image, in the image of God He created them.” We are spiritual beings. We are God-made. We were created by God and we bear a resemblance to God.

Russell Kefler put it this way:

You are who you are for a reason,

You are part of an intricate plan

You are a precious and perfect unique design

Called God’s special woman or man.

You are who you are for a reason

You’ve been formed by the Master’s rod.

You are who you are, beloved,
Because there is a God.

Our problem is that sin clutters our thinking, evil works on our mind. Poor choices make us slaves to secondary causes. In our desire to find the image of God, we try to become gods. In so doing, we miss the mystery and meaning of what it is to be a human being.

Like God, we have the ability to reason, think, solve problems, but fear drives us to use our intellect for selfish gain. Like God, we were made for relationships and designed to live in pure unbounded love, but love gets distorted into promiscuous sex, pornography, and power plays between people. Like God, we were made to be free moral agents, with the innate ability to distinguish right from wrong, truth from falsehood, temporal from the eternal, but choosing vice over virtue, freedom gives way to slavery.

Though we err and stray from God's ways like lost sheep, and follow too much the devices and desires of our own heart, we are really not very happy with it and fail to find satisfaction in it.

Steven Spielberg's zestful, lighthearted movie, Catch Me If You Can is now playing in the theaters. The film is based on the true story of a 17 year-old boy, played by Leonardo DiCaprio, who passes himself off as an airline pilot, a physician and a lawyer as he cashes millions of dollars in bogus checks. As I watched the movie the other night, I thought how the kid was brilliant but troubled. Living a lie was not a happy life even though it was financially rewarding. What the boy really wanted was a father, a mother, a wife. Instead, he lives on the run for his life until he finally uses his talent for good instead of evil.

Even the best of sinners are not very good at it because deep within each of us marred by sin, there remains the image of God. Jesus came to restore us to our true identity. Christ is light shining in our darkness. He is love softening our

hatred. He came as a guide showing us the way to live. He was full of grace and truth which helps us find our way home. In Jesus we can rediscover the lost “image of God” within. Who am I? Jesus would say, ‘You are endowed and designed as a child of God.’

What do I want? Jesus says you are created with spiritual desires. When Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea during the time of King Herod, Magi came from the east and asked, “Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews?” Who were these strange visitors from Iraq or Iran? Why would they travel 500-1000 miles to worship a Jewish child? O’er field and fountain, moor and mountain they followed a star. In the heat of the day and chill of the night, they traveled on. With saddle-chaffed legs, sun-burned skin, and dust-caked eyes, they came seeking a Jewish Messiah. No, they didn’t know the Torah. They couldn’t recite the Ten Commandments; they knew nothing about Jewish prophecy. They are just tired, old, sinners hungry for their dinners and longing somehow in the depths of their heart to find the meaning of life.

What do you want? Not what do you wish for, fantasize about, or add to your shopping list; that’s not the real question. The real question is what do you long for? What is your deepest heart’s desire?

Our deepest desire is to know God and to enjoy him forever. The philosopher, Pascal, said: “At the core of our human identity there is a God-shaped vacuum.” W.E. Sangster said: “Right at the core of our being there is a hunger for something hard to define and almost embarrassing to confess, but which still remains when this world has given us its finest things and every tangible fear has been driven away.” We want God!

I know it is hard to express it, isn’t it? Like children standing at a refrigerator when coming home from school, we want something, but we are not sure what we want. So we find ourselves trying to satisfy this inner hunger. We try things and go places, earn advancements, move to new houses, divorce and remarry, take up

a hobby, try to do good deeds, all the while thirsty for God to fill our cup and make us whole.

Ex-Beatle, George Harrison, in an interview shortly before his death said, "Everything else in life can wait, but the search for God cannot wait." Larry King said, "I have a lot of respect for true people of faith, I have always searched. I envy people who have it. I just can't make the leap." It was no quick or easy trip for the Magi to find the Christ Child. Maybe it never is easy but don't settle for anything less. Jesus said, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness for they shall be satisfied." Don't settle for anything less this year than an authentic, living, vital relationship with God. You will be glad you did.

WHERE AM I GOING? Jesus said, "You have an eternal destiny."

And they returned to their country by another route! There is more to that statement than the avoidance of Herod the Great. I have just celebrated the most meaningful Christmas of my entire life. I could not have planned it. It was a gift of God. As many of you know, my father is terminally ill living out his last days in a nursing home. All of us wanted to share one last Christmas with him at the table. So thanks to an understanding staff, we converted a physical therapy room at the nursing home into a family dining room and had Christmas dinner. When dinner was over, I slipped into the other room and got his old Bible and laid it in front of him and I said, "Dad, would you read the Christmas story to us?" as he always does at Christmas. Then, like a preacher with one last message to deliver, he launched into a 30 minute sermon affirming his faith, appreciating his life, and letting all of us know he was ready to move on.

"I don't know what heaven is like," he said, "but I intend to find out soon. Preachers are always telling me that Christ is coming again," he continued, "but I don't have time to wait for His return." To be 88 years-old, diagnosed with terminal cancer, and still know who you are, what you want, and where you are going. What more could anybody want for Christmas?

Jesus said, "I am going to prepare a place for you. That where I am there you may be also. And you know the way where I am going."

Like Thomas, we may need it explained over and over. The Lord will be patient with us. Like Phillip we may need to be shown again and again. Just keep coming back until assurance arrives.

Hang in there until you can say with W.I. Thompson:

Lead me gently home, Father
Lead me gently home.
Keep my feet from wandering
Lest from thee I roam.
Lest I fall upon the wayside
Lead me gently home.

So we start a new year at the table of our Lord.

By God's grace let us become all we are made to be.
By God's grace let us search until we find peace with thee. By God's
grace, let us find our way gently home.

Amen.