

Jesus Christ, a Man for Others and With Others

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This article focuses on an important aspect of the Son of God and redeemer of humanity, who became man in the incarnation. The study delves into the human dimension of Jesus Christ as a man *for* others and *with* others. His closeness to fellow men and women is striking. This closeness is accomplished through his pedagogical method by means of the stories (parables) he vividly narrated, as well as through the miracles he astonishingly carried out to help or heal others. Both parables and miracles lie at the basis of his proclamation of the Kingdom of God. Jesus was particularly close to those who were at the fringes of society. Jesus' social behaviour is also highlighted, with special reference to his especially unique style of table fellowship, going counter to the strict norms of his people. The climax of his being *for* others and *with* others is reached in his paschal mystery, namely his total self-offering in his passion, death and resurrection from the dead.

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Jesus' Closeness to All

One of the most striking aspects of the life and mission of Jesus Christ is that he was a man *for* others and *with* others. Walter Kasper (1933-) affirms that "it is his nature to exist for others; it is self-surrender, self-abandonment, he is one who steps aside, who stands up for others and identifies with others" (Kasper, 1976, p. 217). This is evident throughout his life, particularly in what we learn about him in the Gospels. The Synoptic authors highlight Jesus' lifestyle and way of being, both during his public ministry and continuing during his paschal mystery.

Evidence that Jesus was a man with others is seen at the very beginning of John's Gospel where it is recorded that Jesus, the divine Word "became flesh and made his dwelling among us" (John 1:14). The Greek original text literally means that he "pitched his tent among our tents", thus highlighting the extent to which he became a man, and indeed one of us. The infancy narratives in the Gospel of Luke describe the coming of the Son of God on earth, not in pomp and glory as a king, but as a child born within the context of an ordinary family in a rural area. The fact that Jesus was a man with others, and indeed with us human beings is seen in that he lived a simple life, usually in poverty. His family context was one of poverty. In fact, the offering made in the Temple 40 days after his birth consisted in doves or pigeons, the offering made by poor persons.

The Pedagogy of Jesus

Throughout his public life, Jesus was a travelling teacher and did not possess any fixed abode. He became "an itinerant teacher traversing both Galilee and Judea" (Meier, 1991, p. 255). Jack Dominian (1929-2014), in a

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psychological study upon Jesus, states that Jesus was a man with others, even to the extent of embracing all aspects of human life, including poverty and temptation. Indeed, “he was totally human except that he did not sin” (1998, p. 96). Kasper writes: “by his birth Christ enters into the continuity of our human race ... [He is] one who has wholly become our brother” (1976, p. 217).

Throughout his public ministry, Jesus often taught in parables. Brad H. Young (1955-) records how Jesus was a master storyteller reaching out to everyone who hears the parables. Jesus used parables describing everyday life, for example, a son leaving home, a farmer planting seed, a man content with a plentiful harvest, a traveller assisting a man who has been attacked by bandits. Through these stories it is evident that he was able to engage with people who were astonished with his way of conveying a powerful message. Jesus used parables to transmit the important truth about the Kingdom of God to the people. He showed concern for the people and was aware that they needed to know about the Kingdom which is nothing but God’s loving sovereignty upon human hearts and actions which, in the long run, transform social love on the basis of just relations. This is the reason why he used parables so that the people could understand the message he was trying to get across and also relate it to their own lives. He preached the message of the Kingdom of God as a reality which is dynamically present and active, and revealed the character of God the Father. Jesus also used paradox, and often when the concealed message was misunderstood, “he had infinite patience with his apostles ... His capacity to be loving knew no bounds” (Dominian, 1998, p. 96). His infinite love for others is evident in his preaching.

The Kingdom of God is a gift from God, undeserved by man, but available through grace to all humanity. A personal urgent response is required, with emphasis on the role of humans as active agents of the Kingdom, as for example, in Matthew 25:14-30 narrating the parable of the talents. Parables such as those on the prodigal son and the merciful Samaritan illustrate Jesus’ and ultimately God’s great love and compassion for others. Crowds were often drawn to hear his unique teaching. Indeed, Ian Howard Marshall (1934-2015) notes that “one of the functions of the Servant of the Lord was to teach the people” (1969, p. 25). The extent of his life for others and with others is evident in his role as a teacher. His message was one of universal salvation: “For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost” (Luke 19:9).

The Miracles of Jesus

A key dimension of Jesus’ closeness to women and men of his time lies in his miracles, emphasising that the Kingdom of God is at hand. As with parables, miracles also illustrate that Jesus was a man for others and with others. Miracles such as the feeding of the five thousand show his compassion as a man with and for others, as he understands and shares human feelings, emotions, and needs. In this miracle he is aware of the needs of the crowd, and thus provides the people with food to satisfy their hunger. The centrality of the miracles is seen in the important part they occupy in all the four Gospels. Other miracles are therapeutic or liberating. Healing lepers, the blind and deaf, as well as exorcisms, all occupy pride of place in the gospel accounts. Howard Marshall notes that “the presence of Jesus brought health and cleansing to the needy” (1969, p. 34). Many of the healing miracles call for an act of faith from the recipient, although in the case of the possessed such an act of faith is not possible because the person is alienated and unable to make a free act of faith. Again, as with parables, miracles illustrate Jesus’ love and compassion for others, a man both with others and for others. His followers and those whom he helped were his fellow citizens, a people to whom he belonged as one of them, yet also lived and died for them. Compassion is easily appreciated in those stories where Jesus brings a person back to life, that is, his previous earthly life. Luke records the raising of the widow’s son to his previous life as an act of compassion: “When the

Lord saw her, his heart went out to her and he said: ‘Do not cry’” (Luke 7:13). The miracles were a powerful and striking sign of the compassionate love he had for others. Dominian describes Jesus’ use of miracles, saying “his mission was to inaugurate love, not shock the people into submission” (1998, p. 97). Jesus’ miracles support his teaching on the Kingdom of God, and are true signs which support the kerygma of the Kingdom.

Reaching out to the Peripheries and to the Vulnerable

The presence of Jesus brought health and cleansing to those on the very fringes of society. He was aware of individual needs, and his actions reflected that he was deeply interested in them. Behind every miraculous action that Jesus performed one is able to sense profound love in a tangible way. In the Gospel, we read that “news about him spread all over Syria and people brought to him all who were ill with various diseases, those suffering severe pain, the demon-possessed, those having seizures and the paralysed and he healed them” (Matthew 4:24). People came to know Jesus as the one who could make them better again, no matter what their illness was. Jesus was the man who was there for them and with them in their time of need when they were most vulnerable.

Jesus’ Table Fellowship

Jesus’ social behaviour and table fellowship are a further indication of his life for and with others. During the time of Jesus there were many social barriers present between different groups of people. It was then that “the laws on ritual purity had become the litmus test of covenant loyalty” (Fuellenbach, 1993, p. 157). The notion of ritual cleanliness was very strong among the Jews and therefore they refused to dine with people who were regarded as “unclean”. As a result, certain groups of people were outcasts in Jewish society, for example, the tax collectors, prostitutes, lepers, the sick, the poor, and the Gentiles. However, Jesus’ message was that God’s grace and salvation were offered to all people regardless of their social status. In this regard, Jesus lived amongst ordinary people, associating himself and dining with everyone, particularly the marginalised, even those considered “sinners” by the stringently observant Pharisees. John P. Meier (1942-2022) notes that according to the Pharisees’ standards, Jesus would have been in a constant state of ritual impurity. It goes without saying that Jesus did not share the zeal of the Pharisees for their countless laws and their minutiae. His mercy extended to all individuals; this was illustrated in his befriending of the those on the margins of society. His table fellowship is of great significance here, highlighting his commitment to participation in the very life of others. He broke down social barriers. He shared the same table with those who were at the fringe of Jewish society. This was indeed a very powerful gesture, especially because Jesus was going against the tide which regulated the social customs of his milieu.

Loving Service

Jesus, the Son of God and the promised Messiah, brought a new idea to the traditional Jewish idea of the promised Messiah. This new dimension was that of humble service. Meier notes that “his whole life was loving service” (1991, p. 189). His servant nature completely illustrates his life for others. This was the whole purpose of his earthly mission, “for even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mk 10:45). Cardinal Kasper affirms that Jesus came “as a servant for our sake, for our good and in our place” (1976, p. 211). Jesus was called to the work of a servant, “the supreme teacher is one who embodies his teaching in his own life. Jesus showed this when he washed his disciples’ feet” (Howard Marshall, 1969, p. 37).

The Paschal Mystery of Jesus

The ultimate expression of Jesus as a man for others and with others is seen in his paschal mystery. His passion, death, and resurrection are the truest expression of love for others. The Last Supper narrative underlines his death as being for others: “This is my blood of the new covenant which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins” (Matthew 26:28). Kasper highlights the importance of this when he writes:

The post-Easter proclamation correctly grasped the centre and meaning of Jesus’ life and work when it made the “for us” (*hyper hemon*) and the “for many” (*hyper pollon*) the main theme of his history and fate and defined him as the man for others. (1976, p. 216)

Edward Schillebeeckx (1914-2009) states that Jesus’ death is a consequence of his way of life, a life of service, justice, hope, and love for others. Hans Urs von Balthasar (1905-1988) notes that the whole purpose of the incarnation was the cross.

Jesus died to redeem humanity of all its sins. He did this in complete obedience to his Father as the ultimate expression of love, grace, and mercy so that all sinners could be forgiven. He suffered great pain and humiliation on the cross. This is the climax of the extent that Jesus was a man for others: He lived a perfect life and was willing to save others from their sins. Jack Dominian insists: “Jesus’ thoughts on the cross were those of love, as they had been throughout his life ... to the very end Jesus had the good of others to the forefront” (1998, p. 189). The extent of his love for others is seen not only because of his suffering on the cross, but due to the fact that even then his love and concern for others shine through. He promised the criminal crucified beside him that he will be saved and will, that very day, be in paradise. Amazingly, from a human point of view, he was compassionate even towards those who were crucifying him, praying, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing” (Luke 23:34). Indeed, “the work of Christ is a continuous work. Between his resurrection and his revelation in glory he is united to his people and they are spiritually dependent on him” (Howard Marshall, 1969, p. 67).

Jesus the Altruist: One with Each Person

Jesus’ public mission and paschal mystery undoubtedly indicate that he was a man for others and with others. He dwelt amongst us, experiencing all human emotions, feelings, and temptations, yet did not sin. He was one with us, and was willingly ready to die and give himself to humanity. His public missions, including his teaching, parables, miracles, followers, lifestyle, and companions, all reflect a life for others and with others. His paschal mystery uniquely illustrates the ultimate expression of love for others, to the extent that he gave himself up for the redemption of humanity. Howard Marshall affirms that “Christ thus took the place of sinners and endured the consequences of their sin so that they were redeemed from sin” (1969, p. 76). Surely there can be no higher measure of a life of love for others than to make the ultimate sacrifice of that very life, indeed demonstrating that his life was for and with others, and ultimately through his death, his unique love for others is realised.

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