

Jesus College, Oxford
Ezekiel 17:1-12
Psalm 150
Luke 2:41-52

February 5, 2017

Belief in Jesus: Son of God, Son of Man

The Community of St Anselm is a new religious community, in the midst of its second year, born out of a vision of our current Archbishop of Canterbury. It is a one-year commitment for young adults to practice putting God at the center of their life through prayer, study, service and community.

As a resident member of last year's community, I shared this year of living and praying with fourteen others from around the world, from different Christian denominations and with different professional backgrounds. Three times a day we would put on our white robes and go to corporate prayers. Two hours a day were set aside for silent prayer in the Lambeth Palace crypt. We shared all our meals together—in true monastic style repeating a similar menu again and again. We served at various sites in the local community and travelled together for retreat—some we could speak at and others days and days, or weeks and weeks, in just silence.

In addition, to residents who spend most waking moments together, there is a non-residential component for those who continue work or study and come into Lambeth Palace once a week. They choose to devote this one year intentionally to look at God, to listen for God's call on their life and to invite God into every part of their normal routine. It is an experiment to practice living as Christian in their work-place and other social settings, in relationships and in service to others. But, to do this with accountability and support of others trying to do the same.

This year is meant to immerse every member, resident and non-resident, in what it is like when following Jesus is the first component of our identity as a Christian and what it is like when we allow Christ to be the director of our decisions and actions.

And the Community of St Anselm, like most religious communities, is bound together by a shared rule of life and the first rule is Learning from Jesus:

“Jesus, being fully God and fully human, is our example in everything. Our very identity is in Christ and it shapes how we interact with other people... There is nothing we hold back from Christ: no thought or doctrine or attitude or value is exempt from the transforming presence of our Lord.”

It's a tall order, to hold nothing back from Christ, but this rule puts in right perspective Jesus at the beginning, Jesus at the center and Jesus at the end of this Christian community. And it is something to strive for in any Christian life. Jesus is the One God gives us to show us more about God, Jesus the One who shows how to live as human. Jesus, both fully divine and fully human, Son of God and Son of Man.

And in Luke's gospel Jesus is, in the literal way—both son of God and son of man. Visiting the temple when he is twelve, Jesus stays to ask questions of the rabbis and teachers, he desires to know more, to find out all he can. And when his parents arrive frustrated and anxious he talks back to them—of course they should know he would be with his Father, doing his true Father's work. However, even though he is God's son he is also man and woman's son and, after asserting his own autonomy recognizes his place as a boy and human child and obeys his parents.

Son of God, as a traditional title, was used for kings and nobility at the time of Jesus. A title that shows one's authority and power as near to God. Son of Man, translated as mortal in our first reading, is however, the more exalted title. Son of Man, in its traditional sense, is one who is truly close to God, who speaks for God because their words come from God. They do not speak from their own authority as a king or noble person but from what God says to them. Son of Man is one who fulfills God's coming in some way, who reveals and communicates God with humankind. And Jesus is unique, even as Son of Man as one who not only speaks for God but is God, truly and fully divine and human.

Jesus is Son of Man, God who comes into our world and shows us Godly living, a clearer picture of salvation and God's kingdom. And Jesus is Son of Man who grows and learns, questions and responds. And from there, progresses and grows in wisdom and stature, divine and human favor. He is the Son of Man who bridges for us God and humankind.

But Jesus, is not just a collection of titles. Jesus is not just a face on a Christmas card or a man in many paintings. It can be tempting to make Jesus almost frozen, a figurine stuck in one moment or state of being, locked into one set of values or who performs only one action again and again and again. But Jesus is a life we follow, a life that forgives us when we fail, that lifts us when we fall. A life, like yours and mine, that experiences a variety of pushes and pulls, that grows in wisdom and age. And a life that keeps asking questions and revealing more and more of who God is.

And Christ still asks questions. Questions of how we, in best conscience respond to personal and political situations. A question asked by the Community of St Anselm and a conversation that continues is how we respond to a world in which some parts no longer see God as necessary or important. Where God is still a cause for persecution from being looked down upon by classmates or colleagues to being killed for following the wrong kind of God. God is still asking questions about how we can be participants in building God's kingdom, and God is still listening to our responses, to each thought we have, each word we speak. And the questions God asks are not exempt, as the first Rule of Life says, from challenging any thought, doctrine, attitude or value we have.

In most forms of silent or contemplative prayer the hope is to simply sit and listen to God. If we listen, it was the experience of most of last year's community that God's questions can be quite piercing but they direct us beyond what we can see in our limitations to a fuller and deeper understanding of who we are, of how we are in relationship and how Christ calls us to act.

As set in my ways as I can be and maybe many of us may be, I find it helpful to remember we have a God who sometimes speaks in parables, in riddles, a God who asks challenging questions. There is comfort in believing we know how things work, we've got it figured out. Friends from the Community talked about not wanting to *really* give God their career paths, their relationships. A fear that if they do, something out of the ordinary, that demands something of them may happen. Yet, if we listen to the questions Christ asks us, and not just reply automatically we can hear that it is Christ who teaches us, Christ who leads us and Christ, this One who is God and Man, who calls us to more. And, there is nothing off-limits from God.

“There is nothing we hold back from Christ: no thought or doctrine or attitude or value is exempt from the transforming presence of our Lord.”

This is what the Community of St Anselm Rule of Life says and it is something to strive for. There is plenty we can hold back from Christ, plenty of things I fear giving to God. But when Christ nudges a little or a lot, where His questions challenge us—often in our vocation, our relationships, the choices we make and habits we form daily—it helps to remember Christ is one we can give everything to and we do not need to fear because He is one who is gentle and humble in heart, who sees God's Creation with unending love and a depth of mercy beyond comprehension.

Faith is a choice. We *choose* to put faith in, to learn from and believe in Jesus. The true embodiment of God. The choice to believe is a choice we make with Christ and with all our questions and responses. To believe in this life God has given that is fully God and fully human, to learn from Jesus who grows and progresses, questions and responds leads us on a path with and towards the God who cares for all Creation and the life that shows us Godly living. That leads us on a path of praise and thanks, challenge and growth with the one who is Son of God and Son of Man.