

Along the track

God with a Human Face

Pope Benedict called Jesus 'God with the human face.' Pope Francis added if you want to know what God is like, look at Jesus.

It is always helpful to take a bit of time occasionally to refresh what we know – to think again about who Jesus is, to come to understand what he did and why, and what he asks us to do.

What were the key influences on his life? What nurtured his faith – what images and words and experiences and people made him the person he was? His faith was nurtured by many of those same images that nurture our faith.

From an early age, both at home and in the synagogue, he would have heard about the God who created us out of love; God as the loving parent who cares, who is there in good times and in bad; and he would have been nurtured by the beautiful images of the Shepherd, God as the potter, God as the mother who cannot forget the child of her womb, the lover who comes in search of the beloved. He sang the psalms as we sometimes do and read the same scriptures that we often do.

Nazareth was a small village with a population of up to four hundred or so. Village life was simple, very communal. Sometimes six or eight houses were built in a circle with the stable in the centre of the courtyard.

Jesus spoke Aramaic. He had an accent; when he spoke, people knew where he came from. He worked with his father as a carpenter, a plumber, a stone mason, a tiler, a builder - he is what we might call today 'a tradie' or a handyman. Nazareth was not big enough to support a craftsman, let alone a father and son, so Jesus probably did seasonal work on the local farms and the large estates. That comes through in some of the stories he later told.

He saw how badly some people were treated, how they were overworked, how they lost their farms because of crippling taxes. The villagers he knew depended on each other; seasons could be very hard so at times life was tough. He came to know the lives of the battlers from the inside.

As far as we know, Joseph died relatively early in Jesus' life and he became the breadwinner.

Some time later, Jesus took the unusual step of leaving home. He joined up with his cousin John for a while, but then Jesus gathered a group of men and women - and what a group! Fishermen, a tax collector, a doctor, men and women seeking a better way.

He visited villages and towns across the country and offered a very different message about God – not a God who is remote and untouchable, judging and punishing, but God who is very near, inviting us into friendship, everyone – the outcast, the sinners, the poor and despised, not just the elite.

And it wasn't just talk. In Jesus, God's love took flesh - we can see it in his actions. He 'lived' compassion, he welcomed the outcast, the sinner, those who thought God had abandoned them. He put his arms around the lepers and the outcasts. He shared meals with people who were considered to be 'sinners', considered to be 'lost' and unredeemable. He cured the sick, the lepers, the lame and the crippled.

He spoke of God's passion for fairness and justice, and God's love in actions and words we could understand and relate to.

We can see the Good News in his works, and in the stories he tells us about God and he tells them in ways that relate to the people of the time, using images, examples, things from nature and their lives that they understood.

They were stories of freedom, of healing and reconciliation, of God's faithfulness and enduring love, stories of hope, trust and compassion, like the stories of the Prodigal Son and the Good Samaritan.

People came to see and hear the Good News – they had never heard anything like it and many were transformed by it! Others rejected it. It was all too much, too hard.

His Sermon on the Mount upended long-held beliefs and customs:

Blessed are the poor, not the rich and influential.

Blessed are the meek, not those who seek power and prestige and authority.

Blessed are those who sympathise with others, who walk with those who mourn, who share their sorrows and sufferings.

Blessed are those who stand up for what they believe.

Blessed are those who work for justice and fairness and peace.

What thoughts come to mind when you think of all this?

Regards
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