

Easter Homily – Jesus and Christ

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April 20, 2025 – St. Barnabas' Episcopal Church

Two thousand years ago, the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ changed the universe forever. However, did you know that in the Hebrew spoken during his lifetime, Jesus was actually called Yoshua or what we today would say as Joshua?

As Joshua was translated into the common Greek of two thousand years ago, his name shifted to Jesus, and that translation from Hebrew to Greek is why today we call the Son of God Jesus instead of Joshua.

Do you know the last name of Jesus? It would actually have been “bar Joseph” or son of Joseph, but we often think of Jesus’ title of Christ as his last name. Jesus Christ.

Do you know the middle name of Jesus?

In the 19th century, the famous American author, Mark Twain, noted the specifically American profanity of Jesus H. Christ. The stress is on the “H”. There is no specific evidence of where the “H” came from, but my favorite story is that the “H” is in honor of Jesus’ heavenly Father, Harold. As in the prayer “Our Father who art in heaven. HAROLD be thy name....”

So we have Joshua – Harold – bar Joseph, or he that we know of as Jesus Christ.

The name Jesus is our representation of the human nature of Christ and the name Christ is our representation of the divine nature of Jesus. Jesus, Christ. They are not a first and last name, but are two natures that are somehow fused together in a perfect union of matter and spirit. Jesus, Christ. The four Gospels in the Bible give us a glimpse into the human-side, into the nature of Jesus. And, for the last two thousand years we have spent a lot of time studying and worshiping this human-nature of God that is represented by Jesus. But, for me, it sometimes feels like we have gotten out of balance in our worship of Jesus. To me it seems like we have focused almost exclusively on the human nature of Jesus and ignored the divine nature of Christ.

Now, don’t get me wrong. I am one who believes that Jesus was a real human being in time and space. I also believe that Jesus is God. I believe that the life, death and resurrection of Jesus changed the universe forever. However, I also believe that a rebalance with the divine nature of Christ will expand our understanding of our God of the cosmos and our God of the sub-atomic particle. Let me share what I mean by this.

At the beginning of time, the first emanation from God was the Christ, the perfect union of spirit and matter. And with the Big Bang, the Christ, the perfect union of spirit and matter is throughout all of time and space. The Christ is here with us today, but also throughout the vast expanse of the entire universe.

Two thousand years ago, perhaps when humanity was finally ready, this Universal Christ came into the world as a baby boy, a perfect union of God and human. We know this perfect union of God and human as Jesus. And, through his life, death and resurrection from the dead, Jesus changed the universe forever.

My personal belief is that Jesus' own human mind knew his full divine identity only after his resurrection. He had to live his life with the same faith that we must live, and also "grow in wisdom, age, and grace", just as we do. Jesus was capable of feeling our weakness with us, for he had been put to the test in exactly the same way that we are. Thus, he can well serve as our practical guide and model and act as the "pioneer and perfecter of our faith".

For the last few weeks, I have been rereading Richard Rohr's book, "The Universal Christ." In that book he shares the following insight. Two thousand years ago, if a video camera had been placed in front of the tomb of Jesus, Rohr's write that he does not think it would have filmed a lone man emerging from a grave. Instead, he wonders if the video camera would have captured something like beams of light extending in all directions. In the resurrection, the single physical body of Jesus moved beyond all limits of time and space into a new notion of physicality and light—which includes all of us in its embodiment. Christians usually called this the "glorified body," and it is similar to what Hindus and Buddhists sometimes call the "subtle body."

What happened at the resurrection is that Jesus was fully revealed as the eternal and deathless Christ in embodied form. Basically, one restricted, initial human body of Jesus morphed into universal, ever-present and abundant Light. I wonder sometimes whether light might be the best metaphor for Christ.

For me this is a very helpful image for the resurrection of Jesus, which might be better described as Jesus's "universalization," sort of an Einsteinian warping of time and space, if you will. To be accurate, Jesus was always the Universal Christ, but now, with his resurrection, he may have somehow been more aware of his true nature. With his resurrection from his initial body, Jesus now speaks from his omnipresent and inclusive Christ role.

Unfortunately, many Christians worship a God who is much smaller than our God of the universe. So, is it any "wonder that science and reason have now taken over as

“the major explainers” of meaning for much of the world. Jesus was indeed a deep and life-changing encounter for many people, but the official Church often showed little evidence of his universal love. For example, Christians brought Jesus to the “New World,” but hardly ever Christ, as we see from our treatment of indigenous peoples and the earth. But that light that is both Christ and Jesus will not be hidden or warped into something it is not. The truth will be revealed once again. God will keep revealing and revealing until we finally get it right.

And, there are a few benefits to having this more inclusive view of Jesus Christ.

First, we are reminded that our God is the God of the universe and all that is in it. God is not for one family, tribe, nation, planet, or galaxy. Jesus Christ is for all times and places. Imagine what our world and nation would be like if we knew that Christ was in and around all, and not just those who are already like us.

Second, since Christ is manifest in all creation, we need to have reverence for all of creation. Imagine our world and nation with a reverence for creation.

Third, our more balanced view of Jesus and Christ lets us see how a man named Yeshua bar Yosef could be the perfect union of human and divine. You and I, and all who have ever lived, are an imperfect union, and Jesus is the perfect union of human and divine.

And a final benefit, is that we can see that the laws and rules of God are also the laws and rules of science and nature. There need be no false dividing of God and science.

Now, to get these benefits and to shift this notion of Jesus and Christ back into balance, you can begin with either Jesus or Christ, but eventually it is easiest to love both. Too many Christians have started and stopped with Jesus, never knowing the universal Christ. Many non-Christians have started with loving the Christ by another name. I have met Hindus, Muslims, and Jews who live in this hidden mystery of oneness; and I have met many Christians who are running away from the Christ Mystery.

However, the Christ mystery is a central part of the resurrection of Jesus that we celebrate today in our annual observance of Easter. As I said earlier, for me, the life, death and resurrection of Jesus changed the universe forever.

Fourteen billion years ago, God created the universe. The Christ and all of creation is a manifestation of God’s love and of a union between spirit and matter. This means, the first coming of Christ was actually creation itself and the universe.

As I said a few minutes ago, two thousand years ago, the Christ was further manifest to us through the birth of a baby boy in the back regions of the Roman Empire. God joined us in this cycle of birth and love and growth and decay that is all part of the flow of the universe.

We have such a small understanding of the universe. The wonders and depth of God's creation continue to be revealed to us. The resurrection of Jesus is a glimmer of what we may still learn some day. And the resurrection is a reminder to us of the perfect union between Jesus and Christ, and that neither will be bound by death.

But wait, there is more. After his resurrection, Jesus once again showed us even more wisdom – the wisdom to let go of the awful things that had been done to him by others. Jesus is the living example to us of forgiveness and peace and love. He showed us how to live what I will call a resurrection life. Imagine what our world and nation would be like if we were to live into that resurrection life of forgiveness, peace, and love.

A resurrection life is one in which we can unshackle ourselves from painful experiences, and we can help others grow into the potential within them. And as with all of God's wisdom, we can move into healthier relationship with God, others, self, and the rest of non-human creation.

And finally, part of our Christian tradition is that Jesus will come again. The Christ will once again be manifest within humanity. We do not know how or the when. Interestingly, if the consummation of history is still 10,000 years in the future then today we are still in the early church. And, it is no wonder that we are still figuring thing out. However, even in the distant future the truth we cling to will still be fact. The life, death, and resurrection of Jesus changed the universe forever in wonderful ways that we can scarcely imagine.

Parts of this sermon are based or taken from the daily blog by Richard Rohr at the Center for Action and Contemplation.