

You think you know Jesus?

Mark 6.1-13

Rev Dr Jos M. Strengholt

It is possible to think you know Jesus Christ, even to describe him in the most perfect, carefully chosen biblical words, and still miss the point.

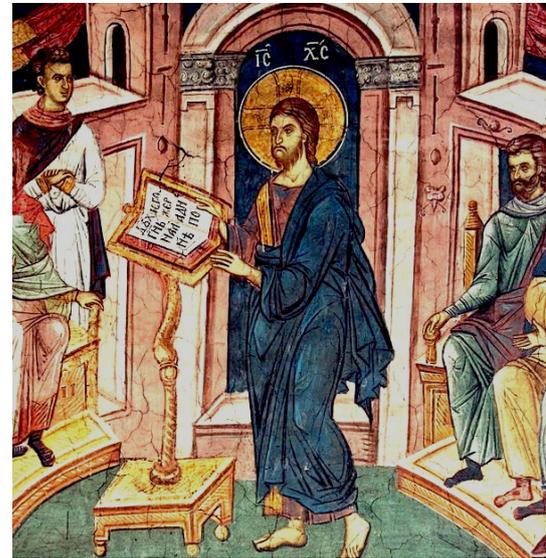
We are so used to Jesus, that it can become boring. If you talk all the time about something or someone, it is easy to lose any sense of marvel, of surprise, of adoration.

1. People who think they know Him

Jesus had just been in Capernaum, where he had healed a small girl, the daughter of Jairus, and a woman who had been haemorrhaging for twelve years. We looked at those great miracles last week.

Then Jesus went with his disciples to Nazareth. This was the home town of Jesus. The Greek word used for home town means something like, his fatherland. The place his father, hence his family came from.

And Jesus then went into the synagogue and he began to teach. Not just a little emotional sermonette, not a few good stories, but teaching. From your priest you must also demand that he teaches.



The response of the people in Nazareth was strange. They recognised the wisdom of Jesus and that mighty works were done by his hands.

But in spite of that, they mocked him. ‘He is one of us. A carpenter, we all know his workshop. And we know his family. He is the son of Mary. And we know his brothers and sisters! James, Joses, Judas, Simon are mentioned. Boys from the village.

They recognised his wisdom and might, but they took offence at Jesus. They considered what He said and did as something scandalous.

John says in his Gospel, ‘He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him’ (John 1:11).

Familiarity breeds contempt. “A prophet is not without honor except in his own country, among his own family, in his own house.”

You probably have to be brought up in a small town to understand the mentality and psychology that are involved here.

The people in Nazareth did not expect anybody who had been brought up there to rise above what they were. 'He is one of us, he just cannot be great. He cannot be for real.'

And if Jesus really was just the hometown boy, and nothing more, then they were right not to be impressed. If he was just a religious fanatic, well, of those there were two a penny in those days; they arrived on the scene, and before too long they were put in their place – usually by the Romans, with nails.

But Jesus was much more than just their hometown boy; they should have known, as they recognised his wisdom and power.

We read that Jesus “could not do mighty works, except lay his hands on a few and heal them.” That seems quite mighty to me, but the suggestion is, of course, that people did not believe in him, so they did not bring their sick people.

Gregory Nazianzen, a Greek church father, concluded: “Something essential for healing is required on both sides - faith on the part of the patients, power on that of the healer.”

The power was not lacking, but people did not believe in Jesus, except for a few.

And Jesus marvelled at their unbelief. The Jewish people in his own hometown did not accept him.

Only at one other occasion in the gospel, do we read that Jesus marvelled. This is when he meets the Roman centurion whose servant was sick. Jesus “marvelled and said [...] With no one in Israel have I found such faith.”

The people who were familiar to Jesus did not care about him. The heathen Roman soldier had real faith.

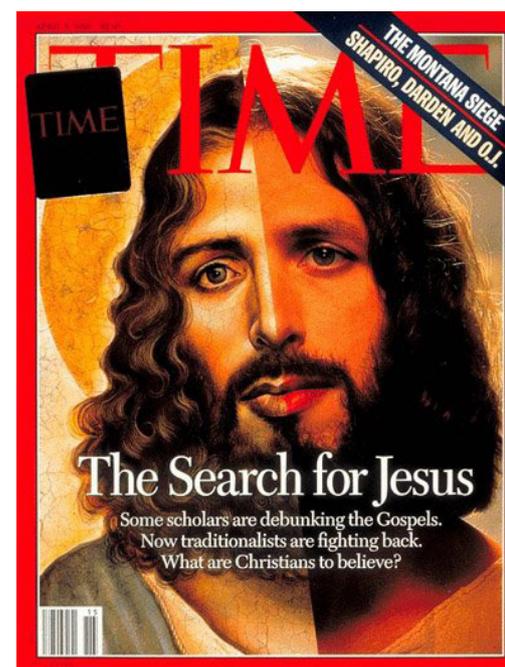
2. Our society

Is this not, in a way, also symbolic for our own society? We act as if Jesus has always been with us, and our society does not care about him.

Many people think they know about him, and they treat him with contempt.

The resistance against the real Jesus, the historical Jesus, especially from people who have a nominal christian background, is enormous.

The Jesus Seminar, for instance, tries in a semi-scientific way to prove that Jesus was just like all of us, a mere human being, though somewhat visionary maybe.



But the idea that Jesus is God who came to us, is rejected at all cost. The train of our modern times has past that station.

Oh yes, we are spiritual. Even religious. But for our spirituality nowadays, we have to go Buddhist, we have to try Zen, or Reiki.

For a feeling of peace people put a statue of the fat Buddha in their garden. That is how we have sunk. We buy the Buddha statues in our garden shipping centers.

Jesus must marvel at our unbelief. His own people have distanced themselves from Him.

And where does Jesus positively marvel at the belief of people? You should go and visit some of the areas in the world where the christian faith landed in the past 100 years.

There you can find Jesus. There, people believe in Him, as one filled with wisdom and with the might of God himself. There the churches grow.



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3. Our church

And perhaps we need to ask the question, have we, here, become too familiar with Jesus? Are we so comfortable with his story that we don't see it for the dynamite that it really is?

People who have grown up in the Christian faith, and who have learned to use the right words to describe Jesus, are also in danger of in reality treating him with contempt. Not purposely, okay, but still.

It is so easy to make Jesus into a sweet Jesus. Or to make him into the construct of our perfect theology. And to take him for granted.

If we make him into the one we like, the one like us, we act as those people in Nazareth.

And in a sense that is not bad, because He did become one of us. He was truly from Nazareth.

God really came down to us in the human being, Jesus from Nazareth. He did eat their food, He did construct their doors, He did make locks on the houses, He did repair the ploughs of the farmers.

But He is also much more. Even in Nazareth they realised his wisdom and might, but they did not know how to connect this with his humanness. And therefore they rejected him altogether.

What would have happened if the people of Nazareth had believed in Jesus? Would there just have been a lot more healings? Yes, probably. But more important, the entire community would have been transformed.

People with resentments would have forgiven each other. Rich people would have given away most of their wealth to people who didn't have enough. People would have stopped hating Roman soldiers and started inviting them for meals in their houses.

The whole community would have started practicing love and contentment and reconciliation and peace and justice. That is the power of Jesus in action.

In our church, as Christians, we are also in danger that we reduce Jesus to what we can understand and what pleases us. And that is not good. Not good because it is not good for us, and not good because it is untrue.

Jesus Christ, the one making those doors in Nazareth, is the Son of God. He is the Door to God. As we say in our Creed, He is true God from true God.

In the history of the church, theologians have tried to understand this: how can He be fully God and fully man.

But even when we are able to repeat the most perfect theological phrases, totally orthodox, we may subdue Jesus Christ by doing so.

We need the right theological languages. We need to understand. We must proclaim that He is one of us, true man, and that He is God at the same time.

But how is it possible that we just go on and on with our gentile religion without being awestruck that God is in our midst and without radical obedience.

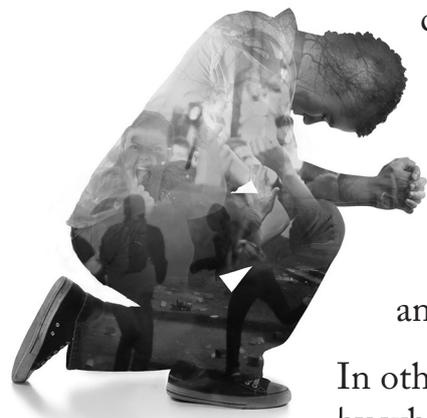
We hear so much in church that the things of God get to be commonplace and we are unmoved. It is a dangerous situation for Christians to get in - when Jesus and the message of the bible don't stir us anymore.

Because of our lack of faith, we haven't actually done the things that Jesus told us to do; we've tamed Christianity down, and the result is that all He can do is lay his hands on a few sick people and heal them.

In other words, yes, some people do come to church, and they are helped by what they find here, but our lives are not transformed as Jesus had intended when he started his Kingdom revolution in the first place.

Jesus Christ is with us. The one who is all-wise and all-mighty. He who created the world, who holds our world in his hand, and whose same hands are able to do great things for us. And his might can enable us to do great things through us.

As Christians we must never be satisfied. Always strive for knowing Him better. We must always be aware that He is far above all we know of Him. And we want to live for Him. Obey Him.



Jesus taught in the synagogue, and we also believe in teaching our faith. We teach about Jesus, and we must do that carefully. But He is always far beyond all we teach.

He will never contradict what we know of Him from his self-revelation, because He is always the same. But what we know of him is so limited. Because He is God.

Conclusion

So let us not stop studying, reading our bible, reading other good books about our faith.

And that reading and studying must always lead us to more faith. To marvel. To adore. To worship. To obey.

So – have we become too familiar with Jesus? If so, maybe it's time for us to take a fresh look at the gospels and think about who He truly is, and what Jesus was really up to when he sent his followers out to announce that the Kingdom of God was at hand.

Let's not allow familiarity with Jesus to dull the sharp edges of that revolution in our lives. Let's pray for the courage to truly believe in Jesus, and to show our belief by doing the things he taught us to do.

Amen.