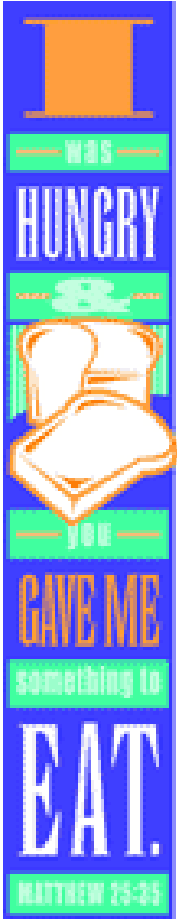


ARTISTIC IMPRESSIONS OF CHRIST

Dr. Fred Fourie ~Sunday, November 26, 2006



Matthew 25:34-40

Then the king will say to those at his right hand, 'Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.' Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?' And the king will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.'

Revelation 1:12 - 18.

"Then I turned to see whose voice it was that spoke to me, and on turning I saw seven golden lamp stands, and in the midst of the lamp stands I saw one like the Son of Man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash across his chest. His head and his hair were white as white wool, white as snow; his eyes were like a flame of fire, his feet were like burnished bronze, refined as in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of many waters. In his right hand, he held seven stars, and from his mouth came a sharp, two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining with full force. When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he placed his right hand on me, saying, "Do not be afraid; I am the first and the last, and the living one. I was dead, and see, I am alive forever and ever; and I have the keys of Death and of Hades."

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About forty years ago – a revolutionary Dutch political party came up with a shocking full-color political picture poster. It portrayed a Catholic nun, ripping open her nun's habit, revealing her naked breasts. The nun had engraved over her heart, a tattoo of Che Guevara, the famed revolutionist, still known as the father of all terrorists. **Light was emanating from Guevara's face!** The message was clear! Outwardly, she was still part of the established world and Church, but Che ~ revolution ~ change ~ ruled in her heart! The Nun on the political poster portrayed the hero in her heart as a fighter for revolution, change and overthrow of the establishment

The author of the book of Revelation in the bible portrays a totally different kind of hero that walks amongst the lights with encouragement and power and love. During the height of persecution against Christians in the early Christian era, someone called John portrayed Jesus as **walking amongst the lights**, holding seven stars in his hands. John knew that, if he could encourage the persecuted of the first century to carry the image of Jesus in their hearts - their faith would not falter and their hope would stay alive! John's Jesus is telling those who suffered **not to fear but to trust him as the living one who will be with them forevermore**. John's message hit home and the fearful band of early Christians overcame the suffering, outlived their torturers and became an unstoppable force that would enlighten the world!

We still prefer to portray Jesus with light ~ Christmas is a time of lights ~ millions of Christians will celebrate with lights during this Advent and Christmas time. **A winsome picture in many Christian hearts – Jesus amidst the lights – Jesus as light!**

What images or visions of God and Christ do you carry in your heart? Our times are times of unrest and strife. The foundations of our country and the world are shaking. If you have to make your own drawing of what your Jesus looks like, will you draw an imitation of one of the many artistic impressions of Jesus Christ, that come a dime a dozen, or will it look totally different?

In recent years, the tattooing of images on people's bodies has become a billion dollar industry. Many people try to engrave their philosophy of life, or the love of their life, or the desire of their lives, **somewhere** on their bodies as a bold statement. This is who I am and there is nothing that you can do about it. Sadly, some of these images are nothing but indelible scars and tell the story of emptiness, useless heroes and ultimate failure in life.

A century ago, Gamaliel Bradford, the poet and writer, tried to capture the optimism of his age. Things were going great in his life, and things were going well in his world. He thought that faith in God was something of the past and that God was something of the past. He wrote a poem and called it "Exit God!" "Exit God!" Not with a tattoo, but with a few strokes of his pen, he ushered God off the stage of human life. **God, you are fired! We do not need you anymore. We can take care of ourselves just fine, thank you!**

Then Gamaliel Bradford went off to war. He saw the horrors of human depravity. He saw the stupidity of greed and corruption. He threw up his hands at what lurked in the human beast. He lost all faith in himself. That year there was a new cry from his pen. These are the words in his diary, "Who will tell me something of God?" he said. **"Who will tell me something of God?"**

A British nurse tells about the time she was attending to **Rudyard Kipling, the immortal British poet**. He was terribly sick. He tossed and turned on his bed. He spent his nights in restless agitation. One morning she quietly asked what he really wanted. In a very weak voice, he said, **"I want God, I want God!"**

In a variety of ways, we still say it, "I want God! I want to see God and **make some sense out of this crazy world**, out of this world of lunatics playing unholy games in the politics of humankind, this world of murder and hostility and famine and broken homes."

I want to feel God, and lose the loneliness that has wrapped itself around my heart. I want to know God, and find some purpose for what I am doing with my life. **"There is a God-shaped hole in our lives"**, said Augustine, "and our hearts are restless until we find rest in him." When God suddenly appears out of the woodwork of our lives, God shakes us with overpowering light and glory. **When the God-shaped hole in my life is filled, I find wholeness and direction in this tricky labyrinth called life.**

Truth is that all the existing images of Jesus that still exist are nothing but artistic images of Christ, born out of the imagination of artists, or religious fantasies of many who have heard the name and story of Jesus and then attempted to portray what they believe about Jesus. None of them is true – not even one is real!

**However, Jesus did leave some portraits of himself behind. He artistically portrayed himself as the typical underdog, someone who is dying of hunger and thirst; who is a total stranger in town; someone naked, robbed of his clothes, someone sick and without hope. 'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.**

During the height of the Apartheid era in South Africa, a colleague and friend of mine, a deeply respected man of color, preached a sermon that reverberated through the country. He described Jesus as a black person, living in Soweto, battling side by side with the impoverished masses against the suppressive apartheid-laws. Can you imagine the reaction? When a journalist demanded an explanation, he simply quoted the words of Jesus: **"for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a**

stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.' Then they also will answer, 'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not take care of you?' Then he will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.' Then my colleague said, "Because of the color of our skins you are rejecting us. Therefore, during times like these, Jesus is black!"

Carrying the image of Christ in your heart is not as safe and as comfortable as many people think. **God is in our neighbor, in our enemy. God comes to us in the shape and form of the underdogs of our times.** He challenges us to be different, take risks, and think dangerously.

During the Civil war, President Lincoln was asked if God was on his side. His reply was, "It is not is God on my side, but am I on God's side?" Consider as to the way of becoming on God's side, what does it mean in light of current events, and how does my being on God's side affect me? Lincoln & Jesus asked, "Am I on God's side?" May I now ask you and myself, "Are you on God's side?"

AMEN