

The all-time most-reproduced image of Jesus comes from commercial artist Warner Sallman in 1940. “The Head of Christ” in a gold frame can still be purchased for \$150. Along with “The Head of Christ,” Sallman’s other images—Christ at Heart’s Door, Christ in Gethsemane, The Lord is my Shepherd—adorned the walls of many a church.

His Jesus, the one most of us grew up with, was white with long shoulder length blondish hair, moderate length blondish beard, and eyes—almost blue—lifted up to the heavens. This Jesus was a Christian, died for our sins, endorsed church and state, and blessed our troops as they went off to war.

If we use solvents strong enough to restore the image to something more closely approximating the original, we will see a middle eastern brown skinned Jew, a child refugee, first born of a widowed, single mom with a house full of half-siblings, friend of sinners and outcasts, colonized by Rome, killed by “church” and state, non-violent.

We continue our look back to see more clearly not only who Jesus was but who we are called to be. Today we focus on Jesus’ notion of life together in relation to family and nation.

As Jesus’ fame grows he picks up hecklers, who attempt to draw him into staged conversations. These conversations are designed to get him into trouble or to make him declare himself unambiguously for one of the factions. He arrives in a new town and anti-welcoming committees greet him. Take the crazy talk somewhere else they say.

But it isn’t just strangers that think he is making a fool of himself. His own family thinks so too. They are embarrassed by him, and beginning to be frightened for him as well, correctly seeing if he goes on like this, he is setting himself up for trouble.

One day when he’s preaching in a house, and the alleyway outside is blocked solid with interested onlookers, his mother and his brothers and sisters turn up to retrieve him as if he were a lost child. Mary has never fully recovered, emotionally, from losing him when he was twelve.

The search party cannot force its way through the crush, so they send a message: tell him his family has come to take him home, tell him his mother is here and very upset, tell him it’s time to stop all this nonsense.

But he won’t go. He won’t even come out to talk to them. Instead he weaves their message straight into what he’s saying. Mother? Brother? Sister? What are those? What good does it do if we only love those who love us back?

God wants more than kin loving kin. God wants more than natural bonds, more than biology. God wants our love to do more than run around the tight circle of our self-interest. God, he says, wants us to love wildly and without calculation. God wants us to love people we don't even like; people we hate; people who hate us.

He says this, and he looks away from the familiar faces who're bobbing up and down behind the wall of shoulders in the doorway, calling him, trying to be heard. He isn't going with them. His brothers, his sisters, his mother start the long walk home, defeated.

Jesus may be remembering the episode reported in the Gospel reading for today (John 2:1-11). It occurs early on before he is ready for prime time. He is still gathering a few friends around him and has much to teach them. His mother is impatient; she acts on insider information. Jesus is not happy being outed by his mother. Tensions arising from conflict between family and work are a perennial phenomenon of life together.

Wherever did we get the idea Jesus thought the nuclear family was the gold standard of life together? Warner Sallman's Jesus may be used to validate white family life in 1950's America, but the dark skinned Jesus of Palestine tells the bereaved wanna-be disciple who pleads for time to bury his father, "Let the dead bury the dead!"

Ever since the emperor Constantine, in the fourth century CE, set in motion a history that would convert the Roman Empire to Christianity and convert Christianity to the Empire, our vision of Jesus has been blurred by the glittering images of power.

God knows we need justice, without which no human city can stand. Innocence and guilt must be portioned out to protect the weak from the strong. Punishments must be assigned to guard the widow and the orphan and the traveler on the road. Judgments must be made to settle quarrels without massacres.

Our nature requires rule by rules. But God's nature doesn't. The law is needful for us but not for God. God is not in the game of harnessing fear and anger, and trying to turn them into fairness.

God sees that we need to do justice to each other, but Jesus says God wants to give us mercy. God wants deserving to be flooded by love. So, if you want to live in accord with God, you can't do it just by being law-abiding. You have to try, again, to be like God, and to do what God does.

Jesus talks of the coming of the perfect kingdom all the time, every day, almost every hour, as much as the insurrectionists hiding in the threadbare hills around Jerusalem who tell themselves they'll be sitting on silk cushions in the city when the *christos* comes.

Yes, the kingdom is coming, but Jesus never says what it is, only what it is like. It's like a tiny seed. It's like a big tree. Like something inside you. Like a pearl you'd give everything to possess. Like wheat growing among weeds. Like the way the world looks to children. Like the servant making good use of the master's money.

Like getting a day's pay for an hour's work. Like a wedding party. Like yeast in dough. Like a treasure, like a harvest, like a door that opens whenever you knock. Or like a door you have to bang on in the middle of the night until a grumpy neighbor wakes up and lends you a loaf. Like a narrow gate, a difficult road, a lamp on a stand.

The kingdom is—whatever all those likenesses have in common. The kingdom is something that can only be glimpsed in comparisons, because the world contains no actual example of it. Which is not exactly what you would call a manifesto! Christianity is a “permanent revolution” or *metanoia* which does not come to an end in this world, this life, this time. (H. Richard Niebuhr)

What Mary does by pressuring Jesus to act immediately may be intended to spare her neighbor embarrassment at running out of wine. We know, however, that our motives are not always clear, even or especially to us. Mary may be as impatient as the insurrectionists with the mercurial nature of her son's description of the coming kingdom and want to force him to show his hand, to fight for the soul of the nation.

What Jesus knows, what his family and disciples find hard to accept, is that the grand cru of life together is neither the nuclear family nor the nation state. The grand cru of life together is a communion of Jews and Greeks, men and women, blacks and whites, natives and immigrants, members of every nation and of all tribes, and peoples, and tongues, inebriated with God's love for one another and for the life of the world.