

Sunday, May 3, 2026 Fifth Sunday of Easter

Who Is Jesus?

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Thanks to our book group here at church, I recently came across a Mary Oliver poem called "The Whistler." The poem speaks of having lived with someone for thirty years and suddenly hearing them whistling downstairs. Feeling surprised by this, the writer goes downstairs and asks, "Is that you?" The whistler says, "I used to whistle, a long time ago. Now I see I can still whistle." As the poem comes to an end, we hear this: I know her so well, I think. I thought. Elbow and ankle. Mood and desire. Anguish and frolic. Anger too. And the devotions. And for all that, do we even begin to know each other? Who is this I've been living with for thirty years? This clear, dark, lovely whistler?

What a great question: Who is this?

Recently, I was talking with someone who was considering the concept of the Trinity. As they talked, they described in detail who God was to them and what God does, who Jesus is to them and what Jesus does, who the Holy Spirit is to them and what the Holy Spirit does. All of that was clear. But this notion of God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit being a "Threefold Holy One," that was confusing.

And when the moment came for me to respond, I found myself saying something to the effect of, "Well, it seems to me that what you are describing is the functions of each and that the question is how all of that fits into some sort of unified whole, some sort of Oneness. And maybe what might be useful here is a metaphor. I guess the one coming to me right now is that of a tree. A tree has roots and they have a function.

Then there is a trunk and branches and leaves, and each of these has a function.

But they're all the tree." And then I asked, "What metaphors come to mind for you?"

And the person said, "Oh my gosh. That's a really great analogy for me." And then they told me all about the parts of a tree and what they do. Later on in the conversation, we talked about grafting trees and how each of the grafts is an equal part of the tree. It was a metaphor that gave us a lot of traction. And I bring all of this up because today we are talking about Jesus. Who is Jesus?

Probably, many of us in this room would have an answer to that question. Many of us might lay out details about what Jesus does – what Jesus' function is. There would be things that we feel we know about Jesus because of our years of relationship with and study of. And yet – maybe like Mary Oliver's poem – for all we know, any moment on any day could offer us some new-knowing, some new insight.

This happened for me in yet a different conversation I was having with someone a couple of months ago. We were talking about this Scripture from John 14 where Jesus talks about himself as "the way, the truth, and the life." And as we were talking, my friend said, "...which, of course, is a direct quote of Proverbs." Now...I will tell you honestly, this was not an "of course" for me. I had not heard this information. I have been relating with and studying Jesus for more than 30 years, and here I was hearing something new. And then, can you believe it, I was asked to preach today, and the gospel scripture for today is this one. So here we are, on the path together, beginning with John 14:6 where Jesus says, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." And on one hand, if you like absolutes, doesn't this appear to be a really good one. I am the way. I am the truth. I am the life. If you want to come to the Father, you come through me." That sounds so cut and dried. But if we take a closer look, Jesus is known for utilizing what we call "Old Testament Scripture" to talk about what is going on. These parallels are well-quoted when it comes to his death and resurrection. But they

aren't always clear in other instances. Proverbs 4:11 says, "I instruct you in the way of wisdom." And so might we ask: What is this Wisdom Way? The first 9 chapters of Proverbs talk about this at length. Proverbs 3 tells us that "wisdom is more profitable than silver and has better returns than gold." Jesus tells us that the "Kingdom of Heaven is like a treasure hidden in a field." Proverbs 3 tells us that "by wisdom, the Lord laid the foundations of the earth and set the heavens in place through understanding." The Hebrew word used in the book of Proverbs is Hokmah – a word that is used roughly 149 times in the Old Testament, a third of those being found in the first 9 chapters of Proverbs but also being found in other wisdom books of the Bible like Job and Ecclesiastes. This wisdom that is called "Hokmah" in Hebrew and "Sophia" in the Greek – or Lady Wisdom in Proverbs 8 & 9 – takes this notion of wisdom and personifies it. In other words, Wisdom is not only knowledge, is not only theory. It is morality in the midst of real-life circumstances. It is the embodiment and the application of our faith and belief. The Jewish mystics found this so important that Chochmah is represented as the first of 10 divine attributes. It is the power of selflessness. It is divine creative intuition. Now, Jesus does not directly use this word Hokmah in John 14:6, but we do get there through the interconnectedness of Scripture. If we back up to John, Chapter One and Verse One, we hear, "In the beginning was the Word. And the Word was with God and the Word was God." One of the early theologians, Origen Adamantius loved to talk about this. For reference, Origen was born in 185 and his understanding was this: (2024, DeGruyter article) The words "Wisdom" or "Sophia" are the titles we use when we are talking about the structure and form of all things. Now, the Greek word in John 1 is actually "Logos." But Origen's line of thinking says that creation took place in multiple stages, the first stage being the idea stage and the second stage being the action stage. And so, for Origen, before there is Logos, there is Wisdom – Chokmah – Lady Wisdom – Sophia. Origen says that Christ needs to be represented both as the one God speaks through in order to create (Logos) and also as the one that creativity and the embodiment of Love come through (Hokmah). And so by this thinking, Origen decides that creation took place in stages – first there was the idea and a structure put in place, and then there was the execution of those ideas. As this happens, it brings together what we call today the Divine Masculine and the Divine Feminine. Others might call this the yin and the yang. But the important item of note is that we need both of these ways of being. Whether we are looking at Christian Scripture, Jewish Scripture or the ways of the Tao, the importance of the way of Wisdom is prominent – front and center. And equally important is this equality between these ways of being. In fact, I think Paul puts it best in Galatians 3:28 when he says, "There is no male or female in Christ Jesus." Indeed there is no male or female because there is both. Jesus willingly offers up female references of himself to his followers. In Matthew 23:37 and Luke 13:34, Jesus' describes his love for the children of Israel in terms of a hen gathering her brood under her wings. This, too, harkens us back to the first 9 chapters of Proverbs where Wisdom, with a capital W continually calls people to share in her blessings and invites her children to remain near her. And so we take all of this information, then, and we return to John 14:6. Many of us will not know this today, but in the first half of the second century, the identification of Jesus as Sophia had become widespread, so much so that, according to Dr. Rev. Jann Aldredge-Clanton, in her book, "In Search of the Christ-Sophia," "the early Christians absorbed part of a collection of wisdom sayings into a collection of Jesus sayings." It was an "of course" to associate wisdom and the Wisdom Way with Jesus – something that continues to be true to this day, though we may not always be aware of the origins of this line of thinking. Jesus, from the beginning, even before Logos brings God's words into being, is the embodiment of the creative, guiding, and redemptive power of God who creates a "way" for humanity to return to God. And this all matters very much to me because our world, as we will all know, is often in a state of division and hostility. When I read the words, "I am the way, the truth, and the life," it is very good news to know that these are not words that were meant to draw lines in the sand. They were not words that were meant to be about either being in or out. These were words that were meant to invite us into creative action in the midst of real-life circumstances. These words were meant to be in invitation to join Jesus in the embodiment of the guided and redemptive power of God, which is

continually creating a way for humanity to return to God and be made new. To say more about this, at the 2014 Science and Nonduality Conference, Kurt Johnson, an etymologist and former monk, gave a presentation titled "The Twin Pillars of Science and Spirituality" where he said this: Just look around at the news today, and it is easy to see the predicament the world is in. Religion will either become part of the solution, or it will be doomed to remain part of the problem. He went on to say, "If we are to be able to create a healthy, multicultural civilization, we are going to need to recognize the "twin pillars" of what that process will take." The twin pillars he was referring to were that of science and spirituality.

In order to try to wrap our heads around this, we need to take a look at science for a moment. For years, we understood evolution to be linked with the words "survival of the fittest," and we understood this to mean that in order to survive, we needed to become "the most fit," "the best." Whether we had control over this or not is another story, but what we thought we knew was that becoming the most suited to something was intrinsic to our survival – and this fit very well with the pervading notion of an individualistic society. Much of how our society acts today is based on these sorts of ideas.

But! Thanks to research done by Yale University, the Templeton Foundation, and so many others, something new has emerged. In 2015, in the Quarterly Review of Biology, Dr. David Sloan, quoting sociobiologist Dr. E.O. Wilson spoke of proofs that "Group and "multi-level" selection in nature select not for processes and structures that serve self-interest groups but those that serve the well-being of the whole." (Interspirituality, the Future, page 26)

That's a lot of words, but it seems to me that it boils down to this: Cooperation is how we survive. It's how we have survived up to this point, and it's how we find a way forward. We get along by getting there together. When Jesus says in John 14, verse 12, "12 Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father." He is talking about continuing this creative, embodied, Wisdom-Way practice. It is as it is at the beginning of Jesus' ministry. Over and over again, Jesus turns to people and says, "Come. Follow me." Consider what needs to be done in order to bring love into the world, in order to heal, in order to create justice and equity in our world. Consider it and then do it." Jesus says, "You think what I am doing here on Earth is great? Just wait. You will do even greater things than these."

Now, if you're like me, we hear Jesus' words and we ask, "How could we possibly do greater things than Jesus? Jesus died for us. He defeated sin and death. He created a way for all to be connected to God. How could we do anything greater than that?"

And I'll be honest, I don't know. It's a mystery to me. But Jesus said it. And so the best I can imagine is that there is something pretty special about what we're all being called into. And Jesus has promised us that He will be there with us in the midst of it. "Whatever you ask for in my name, I will do." Jesus is telling us: I'm there for the conception of the idea. I'm there for the breathing of life into it. I'm there for all of it.

This is Jesus – our Divine Feminine, Divine Masculine, Divine Inter-gender Jesus. We thought we knew Jesus. But as it is when we've lived with someone for 30 years, we continue to learn more about the Oneness and the Unity of this amazing Threefold Holy One.

To quote verse 4 of the hymn we're about to sing:

O Jesus, you have promised to all who follow You that where You are in glory Your servant shall be, too. And, Jesus, I have promised to serve You to the end. Now give me grace to follow my Master and my Friend. Amen