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## **THE NORMAL CHRISTIAN LIFE: CHRIST IN YOU**

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Colossians 1:27-29

“To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. 28 We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ. 29 To this end I labor, struggling with all his energy, which so powerfully works in me.”

I met Isaac last January when I was in India. Isaac is a small, quiet, unassuming man who possesses very little of what the world values. He and his wife share a single room in a children’s home where they care for about 30 children. The children lovingly call him Poppa. Isaac does not own a house, a boat, or a retirement account. He has never owned a car. His salary is less than \$100 a month. Isaac did not preach or teach at the church conference we attended, although all the kids from the children’s home were there with him. I am not sure if I would even remember Isaac were it not for something my friend Babu said about him. I did not spend much time with Isaac. I was busy playing with the kids and other than greeting Isaac briefly, we did not talk. Isaac had only a little English and I had no Malayalam. He was not one to push himself to the front of a group. So, I am not sure I would remember Isaac, had Babu not said this about him. Babu said, with just a touch of wonder in his voice, “Isaac is more like Jesus than anyone else I know.”

That is quite a statement. Babu works with twenty some churches and a Bible College. He has many friends. Everywhere we went, everyone knew Babu. I met several of Babu’s friends and fellow workers while I was in India. They all impressed me. They were compassionate, faithful, gifted, intelligent, passionate people. Reggie was their best preacher. They all agreed about that. He was good. He held me spellbound and I could not understand a word he said. Raju had the best sense of humor. Sibi had the best English. In just a few days, Sam seemed like a close friend to me – he was generous and kind. All of them were extremely gifted people, respected by those they worked with, but Babu, who knew them all, looked at Isaac and said, “He is more like Jesus than anyone else I know.”

Babu knew Isaac; he had seen the way Isaac lived his life, the way Isaac treated the children entrusted to his care and when Babu looked at Isaac, he saw something of Jesus in that small, unassuming man. Isaac did not have much that our society values. He had no fame, position, wealth, possessions. Still, some days, I find myself thinking I would trade all I have if only others could see Christ in me the way Babu sees Christ in Isaac.

I was eating at Emma Krumbies several years ago. (I was) sitting in a booth, when a woman slid in beside me and embraced me and then said, “Oh, I’m sorry. You’re not Jim.” I knew that I was not Jim before she did. I am not sure who was more embarrassed at that moment. I do not know Jim. Sadly, it occurs to me that I must resemble Jim more than I resemble Jesus because to the best of my knowledge, no one has ever mistaken me for Jesus. Did you ever wonder if anyone has seen Christ in you? That is the hope of glory: Christ in you, Christ in me. The hope of glory is Christ living in us.

I do not remember where I first heard this story and I am not sure if it is a true story or just a parable. This is how I heard the story. “A few years ago a group of salesmen went to a regional sales convention in Chicago. They had assured their wives that they would be home in plenty of time for Friday night’s dinner. In their rush to the plane, one of the salesmen inadvertently kicked over a table which held a display of apples. Apples flew everywhere. Without stopping or looking back, they all managed to reach the plane in time for their nearly missed boarding.

All of them but one! He paused, took a deep breath... and experienced a twinge of compassion for the girl whose apple stand had been overturned. He told his buddies to go on without him. He asked one of them to call his wife when they arrived at their home destination and explain that he would be taking a later flight. Then he returned to the terminal where the apples were all over the terminal floor.

He was glad he did. The 16-year-old girl who ran the apple stand was totally blind! She was crying, tears running down her cheeks in frustration, and at the same time helplessly groping for her spilled produce as the crowd swirled about her, no one stopping or caring about her plight.

The salesman knelt on the floor with her, gathered up the apples, put them back on the table and helped organize her display. As he did this, he noticed that many of them had become battered and bruised; these he set aside. When he had finished, he pulled out his wallet and said to the girl, "Here, please take this money for the damage we did. Are you okay?" She nodded through her tears. He continued, "I hope we didn't spoil your day too badly."

As the salesman started to walk away, the bewildered blind girl called out to him, "Mister...." He paused and turned to look back at her. "Mister," she asked, "Are you Jesus?"

Theresa of Avila, a nun during the sixteenth century, wrote, "Christ has no body now but yours, No hands, no feet, on earth but yours. Yours are the eyes through which He looks with compassion on this world. Yours are the feet with which He walks to do good. Yours are the hands with which He blesses all the world. Yours are the hands, yours are the feet, yours are the eyes; you are Christ's body. Christ has no body now but yours." I think she was right. The apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthian church and said, "Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it." We are the body of Christ. If the world is going to see Jesus, if Cleveland, Le Center, St. Peter, Le Sueur, Waterville, Madison Lake are to see Jesus, they will see Him in us (His church, His body, in you and in me) or not at all. The apostle Paul reminded us in Galatians that "we have been crucified with Christ, that we no longer live but that Christ lives in us." I wish the world saw less of me; less of Jim (whoever he was), and that they saw more of Jesus in my life. Our glory is not in what we have, what we are able to do, or how we look. Our only hope of glory is Christ shining through us. Has anyone seen Jesus in you?

In one of Brennan Manning's books, he tells the story of a man who returned to his family at the end of the day, filled with wonder because as he said, "Today, I saw Christ in a man." He was amazed by that experience. However, as I considered our text from Colossians this week, it occurred to me that seeing Christ in one of His followers should not be that surprising. In fact, the best definition of a Christian might simply be – one who is filled with Christ – one who is so full of Jesus that others can see Jesus in him or in her. The Isaacs in the church should not be the exception but the rule. For months, I have been thinking of Isaac as an exceptional Christian, almost an abnormal Christian. Isaac is not the abnormal one. Those who bear Jesus' name but are not filled with His presence, they are the abnormal ones. Isaac was just living a normal Christian life – a life filled with Jesus.

Jesus said, "Because I live, you also will live. On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you." Did you realize that that Jesus is in you? Christ is in you. C. S. Lewis wrote in his book *Mere Christianity*, "When Christians say the Christ-life is in them, they do not mean simply something mental or moral. When they speak of being "in Christ" or of Christ being "in them," this is not simply a way of saying that they are thinking about Christ or copying Him. They mean that Christ is actually operating through them..."

Christ is working in us. Did you pick up what Paul said in verse 29 of our text? He said, "To this end I labor (he was trying to present everyone perfect in Christ), — to this end I labor, struggling with all His energy...(i.e. Christ's energy)." Paul did not say, "struggling with all *my* energy or might." He did not

say, "I am trying my best, doing everything I can." Paul said, "I am struggling with all His energy which so powerfully works in me." That makes all the difference in the world.

Being a Christian is not something I do through my effort alone. Many followers of Jesus try to make it on their own and it is a burden greater than they can bear. We are Christ-like not only because we follow His example but also because His presence in us – empowers us and transforms us. (It) makes us like Him. The living Christ has taken up dwelling in us. That is not always easy for us to grasp. The apostle Paul said in 2 Corinthians 13, "Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you?" You are not in this alone. You are not dependant on your own strength. Do you not realize Christ Jesus is in you? He is. 1 Corinthians 3:16 says, "You yourself are God's temple and God's Spirit lives in you." The apostle John wrote, "We know that he lives in us by the Spirit he gave us."

The normal experience of those who encounter followers of Jesus should be an encounter with the risen Christ. The surprising thing would be that Christians could be in the world without anyone seeing Jesus. The apostle Paul said in Galatians 2:20, "I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me." When the apostle Paul said, "Christ lives in me," he was not describing something special or unusual or something for super Christians. He was presenting God's norm or standard for all Christians. The normal Christian life is one in which Christ lives in us.

On the day of Pentecost, Peter preached the first gospel sermon. So powerful was the message of the death and resurrection of Jesus that the crowd did not wait for an invitation. They interrupted Peter asking, "What should we do?" Peter responded in Acts 2:38-39, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off — for all whom the Lord our God will call." That promise is still good today. Repent and be baptized and God will forgive your sins and His Spirit will take up residence in your life. That was not just for the first century. It is for today. Jesus Christ lives in His followers. That is the normal Christian life, though I admit it is not necessarily the average Christian's life.

There is a difference between the normal Christian life and the average Christian life. I am making a fine but I think rather important distinction. If you are like me, you may confuse normal with average or ordinary. While they can be similar, they are not same. Normal has to do with how something compares to a norm or standard. Average is how something or someone compares to the rest of a group.

Take for instance our concrete pouring crew this summer. On one eight-yard pour, the average age of the workers was fifty-eight. Compared to our group, I was a relatively young fifty. Tony was just a baby at forty-one; Art, well let's just say, 'Art raised the average a little.' However, I would assume that the normal age of someone pouring concrete is not fifty-eight; in fact, it is probably closer to thirty than it is to fifty-eight. So, that day, while I was below average, I was above normal. And while we might have been an average group when it came to our skills, if you worked with us for a day, you probably wouldn't have described us as normal at all. There is a difference between average and normal.

In our walk with Jesus, we are sometimes satisfied with being average instead of striving for the norm. You see, if you compared us to the most of churchgoers, we would probably fall in the average range – maybe even high average. I would like to think we would. While I probably should not do this, I find that I try to make those comparisons sometimes. I wonder how our attendance compares to other churches located in towns about our size. How does our attendance compare to churches with similar membership? How does our giving compare? How are we doing in Bible reading and prayer compared with other churchgoers? I always assume we are above average.

Then I remembered reading that 75% of all drivers think they are better than average. (Think about that...) I am guessing that 75% of Christians think they are better than average too. Even if it were true,

even if we were above average, it is important to remember that being average, or even above average, does not mean that we have reached the standard, or norm, God desires for us.

Consider the standard the apostle Paul was aiming for in Colossians 1:28. He said, "We proclaim him (Jesus), admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ." The goal is perfection in Christ not just for some, but for everyone, for all, who follow Jesus. It does not matter if we are as good, or even better than most churchgoers are. That is not the standard. The standard is perfection in Christ. God's norm for the Christian is Christ living in us.

Christ in you, the hope of glory. He is the only hope of glory. Is Christ living in you? Does the glory of the risen Lord shine through your life? That is the normal Christian life. The normal Christian life is a long way from average. It is Christ living in you. He is our hope of glory.