

# JESUS, I WANT TO SEE YOU!

A neighbor is working on an environmental project to look at the impact of a gardener's feelings about growing things on the quality and quantity of insect life in the garden. It got me wondering at this Christmas time how our attitudes about others affect their ability to thrive and how our willingness to change our views might be the best present we could give to God who put aside godhead to become one of us.

God certainly turned people's perception of importance up-side-down when he became human, not in the royal robes of a king, but in the vulnerability and insignificance of an infant. The all-powerful God was dependent on Mary's "Yes" to take on our flesh—not something any self-respecting god of that time or ours would do.

Yet as Isaiah tells us and Pope Francis has been reminding us—God's ways are not like ours. God's value system is different. Just look at the way Jesus lived. For most of his years he lived a simple life in a non-descript town. When he did venture into the public arena, he went to his wild-eyed preacher cousin John, considered kooky by many, and asked to be baptized by him. Jesus did everything wrong for what was expected of a Messiah. He hung out with smelly uneducated fisherman and was happiest with the poor, the wounded, the prostitutes, the lepers, the low-lives of his society. Even his family at one time thought he was crazy and tried to set him straight. But he was intent on following the way of his father. Nothing could dissuade him.

Imagine Jesus sitting next to you during this Advent time. The world says, "Buy, buy, and buy more. You deserve the biggest and the best. You've earned it. Show someone you care by buying them a gift: the more expensive it is the more you love them." And Jesus weeps. "This isn't why I took on your flesh. I didn't come as a king," he says. "I came as a helpless infant, one with no wealth, no power. I was poor, a refugee, an exile. Look for me there this Christmas. Don't just give "things" to those who are marginalized Spend time with me and examine how you look at others who are different from you. It will change your heart and you will find that you are the one who is poor and you need them to become whole."

The late priest Henri Nouwen was a widely acclaimed author and lecturer on spirituality and deepening one's relationship with God. He taught at top-notch universities and was the featured speaker at international conferences. By the world's account, he was important. Yet, Henri would tell you that it was not he, but the profoundly disabled Adam whom he cared for at L'Arche community where able and disabled lived together—it was Adam who was important and reflected the face of God.

Could Jesus be inviting you this Christmas to take a fearless, honest look at the people you tend to turn away from, are afraid of, and label? It's an uncomfortable journey to go outside your comfort zone, to get to learn about and know people who are different from you, to let go of fears and quick judgments. Realize that each person comes with a unique gift to bring to the world and all of us are poorer without that gift. It would be a great loss for everyone if we missed out on it.

When you're out shopping take a few moments of quiet in the midst of the hubbub of the crowded mall and look at the faces that pass by and let go of any judgments. Ask Jesus to help you see the gift each one is. Your heart will overflow with the goodness that is around you. And you will realize that we are all family—each one of us—we need each other to be whole. There's no place for divisions. It's not "we" or "they." It's all of us—rich, poor, able-bodied, challenged, native born, immigrant, refugee, people of every nation, culture, and religion. We need all of us to survive and thrive. That's what Jesus showed us through his birth, life, death, and resurrection.

So stretch beyond your comfort zone, Look deep in your heart, repent of past judgments and embrace Jesus in faces you've overlooked, savor the gifts that are there. Sing "Joy to the World." The Lord has come and is reuniting his people!

—Angela Anno, Pastoral Associate

