

## The Way of Jesus<sup>1</sup>

Let me tell you the story of Louise Seger who has now died, but whose story contains the core idea of this sermon. In 1957, Ed Seger and his homemaker wife, Louise lived in a modest home in Houston. Along with millions of Americans, Louise heard the rich voice of Patsy Cline on the Arthur Godfrey radio show. Well, Louise couldn't get enough of that voice. She made quite a pest of herself phoning the local DJ, Hal Harris, for replays of Patsy Cline's first songs. A few weeks after Louise fell in love with Patsy Cline's music, she got several of her friends together to hear Patsy Cline perform at Houston's Esquire Ballroom. Louise arrived at the Ballroom in plenty of time and decided to have a beer. In the process she bumped into another woman in the crowd who appeared to be lost. That woman was Patsy Cline. After the show on the street in front of the Esquire, Louise again encountered the singer who was hailing a cab. Louise insisted that Patsy stay with her as a house guest.

That was the start of a long-time friendship between the two women. On that first visit to the Seger's home the two ladies sat up and talked until 4:00 a.m. They drank a pot of coffee and talked about friendship, kids, men, family, and life. They remained fast friends with many letters, phone calls, and

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<sup>1</sup>Douglas DeCelle preached this sermon on March 22, 2009 at the First Presbyterian Church in LaGrange, Ga.

return visits to Houston until Patsy Cline's untimely death in 1963.

No I tell you Louise Seger's story because it parallels the brilliant center of Christian faith, namely that God in Jesus Christ has stopped by, has shared life and experiences, has talked until 4:00 a.m. about human concerns, and has, by his presence with us, buoyed you and me much as Louise Seger must have been buoyed by the thought that Patsy Cline was sitting at her kitchen table. Basically, what I want to talk about this morning is that Jesus is ready or already has accepted yours and my hospitality and hangs out with us.

I don't know of any other religion or outlook that has hanging out together as the main point. We often think of Christian faith as being a moral standard, as if the heart of it were the imperative. You know..."be good!" It is true that there is a Christian morality. But that's not the main event. Some religions have prophets who claim or write about having special access to God who has released to them a lot of information about God's will. The point is information. Not conversation. Now God does give us amazing information about all sorts of things. But information is not the heart. The heart is that God has moved into the neighborhood and is knocking on the door and would probably drink a cup of coffee with us.

Back in the early days of Christianity some people reasoned that God just couldn't have really become a human being. Who then was Jesus? Well, they speculated that Jesus was an image that looked like a human but really wasn't. It's like God sent a cardboard cutout that looked a lot like a person, but really was merely the image of a person. That thinking was called docitism. That word, docitism, comes from the Greek word "to seem" or "to appear." Jesus looked like a person, but really wasn't. He really didn't join us. He really didn't need food and rest; he really didn't die a painful death. Now, the church struggled with docitism for a good while and then decided that God really did join the human race. He really did sweat and struggle and feel exhausted and felt hunger and died in shame.

And because he really did join us, just as Patsy Cline really did sit at Louise Seger's kitchen table, we suddenly learn a great deal about ourselves.

One of the things we learn is how valuable we are in God's eyes. When someone chooses to live with us, that gesture is a tremendous boost to our dignity as people.

Have you heard of the L'Arche communities? L'Arche started in 1964 in France when Jean Vanier, moved by a sense of God's calling, welcomed two men with disabilities into his home. He named his home L'Arche which is French for the Ark. L'Arche houses have sprung up all over the world. Can you imagine the

boost in self-esteem that a developmentally disabled person, consigned to an institution must feel when someone says, "Come live with us?" God did that in sharing life with us.

God also conferred value to the world around us by coming into it personally. Don't we abandon what we basically have given up on? The city seems like it's a mess. Too much crime and drugs and ugliness and blight. So, if we can leave it we do so. We go to the insulated neighborhood or semi-rural area.

Have you ever quit a job, saying to yourself, "this place is never going to change?" Have you ever left a church because it was never going to get better? Switched schools? Think. God moved into the world that he may well have been tempted to abandon.

I hope all of you have or will check out the DVD, "Beyond the Gates of Splendor." It's the documentary story of the missionary families who went to the Amazon Rainforest in Ecuador in the mid-1950s. There were several couples who graduated together from Wheaton College in Illinois and felt called to missionary work in South America. Five of the men were killed by the primitive tribe members whom they were trying to befriend. What makes the story stunning is that their wives didn't move back to the United States. As widows they continued their work with the Waodani Tribe. Since that time there has been significant change in the culture of those primitive

people. There is enormous power in showing up and staying. It basically says that this situation is worth my time and my life.

Perhaps above all, God's showing up and joining us as one of us, demonstrates just how amazing we are. Think, God the Son, the Second Person of the Trinity, left behind all of his power and majesty. He left behind his super knowledge of all things; his place of splendor in heaven; his undisputed status as God of the Universe. The Son came into this world without all of those attributes. He poured himself into the being of a human. And still he was God. Being a human was sufficiently dignified and full of potential that God could live in this mode—this human mode—and still be God. Doesn't that say something about our humanness?

By the way, when Jesus went back to heaven, he didn't leave his humanness behind. The son is still fully human and fully divine. There is a human element to God. We are elevated by the simple thought that a human is able to blend into the community of the Trinity. So, there's a human element to God. And there's a divine element to...to us!

Nobody else is saying anything like this. Other religions, other philosophies, other ethical systems may have theories about how we should behave, or lots of information, or beliefs about this or that. But no one is saying "we're hanging out

with, we're friends with, and we're on first name basis, with, the Creator of the Universe."

So, what difference does it make? To start, it gives us big clues as to what mission looks like. Go. Live with them. Share life with them.

How's that saying go? "Teach a man to fish, feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish, feed him for a lifetime?" Well, that's okay but doesn't Jesus teach us—"Go fish with him and both or you are fed for eternity!"

I think of our Berta volunteers, and our mission trips have a good grasp of what I'm trying to say. My hunch is that it is the personal contact, the conversation, the sharing of commonplaces like meals and relaxation and conversation in our service projects that makes them reminiscent of Jesus. I kept thinking that when one of you at Berta gets stuck in one of those little children's chairs, you will have perfectly understood this sermon.

God came personally. He shared meals and conversation and lived in the dailyness of life. Jesus made the central cultic act of faith a meal around a big table. And we now dare to think, "He really did become one of us." And what a difference that has made!