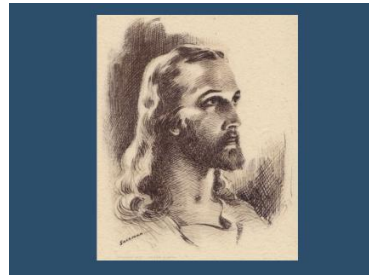


Theme Slide



Sallman's Head of Christ was the most popular depiction of the Face of Jesus in the 20th century. It began as a charcoal sketch for the first issue of the *"Covenant Companion,"* a youth magazine for a denomination known as the Swedish Evangelical Mission Covenant in 1924. The image was so popular that the 1940 graduating class of North Park Theological Seminary in Chicago commissioned Sallman to create a painting based on his drawing as their class gift to the school, according to the Evangelical Covenant Church's official magazine. Sallman painted a copy for the school but sold the original "Head of Christ" to the religious publisher Kriebel and Bates, and **what we could call a "Protestant icon" was born.** This particular image of Jesus met the dawn of the 'Mad Men,' of the marketing agency," said Matthew Anderson, an affiliate professor of theological studies at Concordia University in Montreal.

Quickly over time this image of Jesus was printed on cards and distributed widely. When soldiers went off to World War II they were given this very image to carry with them and I am sure that image gave many comfort. This image was officially endorsed by President Dwight Eisenhower and early 20th century and preacher Norman Vincent Peal. The image also appeared on pencils, bookmarks, lamps, and clocks and was hung in courtrooms, police stations, libraries and schools. It became what the scholar David Morgan, a professor of religious studies at Duke University in North Carolina, has heard called **a "photograph of Jesus."**

The image quickly spread via organizations, missionaries, and a wide range of churches: Catholic and Protestant, evangelical and mainline, white, and yes even black churches. Sallman's image crowded out other depictions of Jesus.

There are likely many of you that had this very picture hanging in your home as a child as I did, and you may have it hanging in your home today. It is a beautiful picture that has inspired many. Yet, what does this depiction really tell us about the Face of Jesus?

Anderson goes on to said that it has been common for people to depict Jesus as a member of their culture or their ethnic group. *"If a person thinks that there is only possible representation of Jesus, then that's where the problem starts,"* he said. Sallman wasn't the first to depict Jesus as white as David Morgan tells us. The Chicagoan, Sallman had been inspired by a long tradition of European artists, most notable among them the Frenchman Leon-Augustin Lhermitte. ("How an iconic painting of Jesus as a white man was distributed around the world" By Emily McFarlan | Religion News Service June 25, 2020 at 2:24 p.m. CDT CHICAGO)

However, against the backdrop of U.S. history as European Christians colonizing indigenous lands with the blessing of the Doctrine of Discovery and enslaving African people, this universal image of a white Jesus has become seriously problematic.



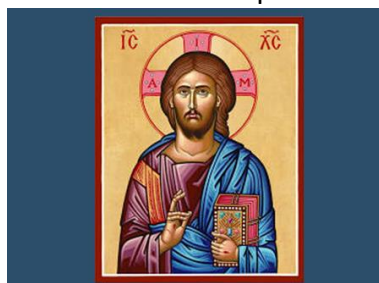
I agree with this and go one step further. The patricidal Jewish society of the Old Testament and the that of the Greeks and Romans made the image of God male. In so doing women became a subset of men to the point that only a male was a perfect image of God and a female was just a “*man with a womb*” and thus not fully man or a complete man. In the ancient mind a seed was planted in woman who was nothing more than fertile ground to grow a baby. That way of thinking made women less than men through most of time. I thus struggled with the Trinitarian formula “*In the name of the **Father, Son, and Holy Spirit***” which so male dominated. I wanted to be inclusive, so I began saying, “*In the name of the Creator, Savior, and Holy Spirit.*” But I struggled with the coldness of those names. That is when I came upon an article in Christian Century magazine. It argued for saying, “*In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, **One God and Mother of us all.***” That took me back to the familial relationships that are so powerful to my personal faith while also being inclusive of the feminine images of God. After all it was my mother who taught me the faith and became the very image of my Savior to me.

The Roman Catholic church wanted a softer image of God and so over time Mary the Mother of Jesus was venerated to help fill that void. And of course, there is the faces of God in the book and the movie “**The Shack.**” The lead character, Mack enters the shack and encounters manifestations of the three persons of the Trinity. **God** takes the form of an African American woman who calls herself Elousia and Papa; **Jesus** is a Middle Eastern carpenter; and the **Holy Spirit** physically manifests as an Asian woman named Sarayu.

Any time I talk about the names we use for God I say, “**God does not care what you call God, God just want you to call.**” After all God is too big, loving, and caring to be uptight about simple thing like a name. I know that for a fact since I am a grandfather who is known by my grands as Pop Pop. And if that changes over time I could care less, I just want those sweet babies to call me.

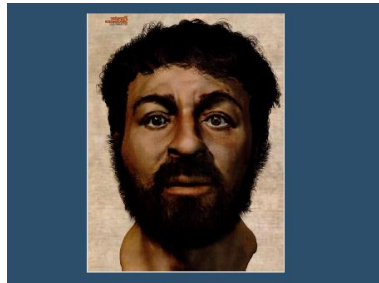
Our oldest granddaughter was playing in the driveway, supervised by her parents of course, when a woman my wife’s age walked by last summer. Evie Lou asked, “*Are you my Mi Mi?*” meaning Beth. The woman was delighted a 3-year-old wanted to talk to her and said, “*No I am not your Mi Mi, but I would love to be.*” That stranger is now a friend of Leslie’s family. The woman’s face reminder Evie of Beth and that is who she thought of first and foremost. Looking at someone tells you a great deal about them as does any pictures you see of them.

There is no problem in how you see God or what you call God. The problem develops when we decide that there can be “**only**” **one** acceptable image of God that you expect others adhere to. That can be destructive to the faith of others and that diminishes the importance of Jesus as the Christ in their lives.



Dr. Bruce W. Dobyns Preaching at First Christian Church, Murray, KY

We westerners are not as familiar with the Eastern Church’s iconography. I was blessed to have been able visit an icon studio and shop when I was in Greece 2 ½ years ago. We stood just behind the artists as they did their work. We were shown the stages of the painting and even how the gold leaf was applied. The one thing you will quickly see is that there is a particular style to **“all”** official icons of the Orthodox Churches. To paint an acceptable icon of Jesus or any other saint you must follow the convention of the craft. However, the one thing that does vary is the race of those depictions as long as the basic style of the painting does not change.



Thus, it is not surprising that some of the earliest images of Jesus showed him with very dark skin and possibly African. While ancient and medieval artists typically painted and carved Jesus and others the way they saw people in their lives we also need to stop and think about the area in which Jesus was born, raised, and lived. In the BBC documentary *‘Son of God’*, forensic anthropologist Richard Neave created in 2001 a model of an average Galilean man in the 1st century. This was done based on an actual skull found in the region. He did not claim it was Jesus’s face. It was simply meant to prompt people to consider Jesus as being a man of his time and place since we are never told exactly what he looked like.

This image may challenge your view of Jesus and I am extremely glad it does. It is not our place to decide how others see Jesus. I want to show you pictures that Milo, Sam and Allison did for today’s sermon.



When a child shows you pictures like these your first thought must be, *“How beautiful!”* The second is to say, *“Who is that a picture of?”* And when they tell you *“Jesus”* your only response can be, *“That is wonderful!”* To say otherwise at their tender ages would hurt them and even be harmful to their faith. So why do we think we can tell adults what their images, or the names God for that matter, should be?

It is not our place to say anything, but to say, *“How beautiful!”* After all, when we make the good confession we say, *“I believe that Jesus is the Christ the Son of the Living God and **my personal** Lord and Savior.”* And to be personal to you, you have to have your own images and words in mind. If they are just what you have been told you have not brought Jesus into heart, mind, and soul. It is here that Paul speaks to us in his second letter to the Corinthians (4:6)



2 Corinthians 4:6

*Let light shine
out of darkness’,
who has shone in our
hearts to give the light of
the knowledge of the glory
of God in the face of Jesus
Christ.*

For it is the God who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness’, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. You cannot get any more personal than that. If Christ is shining in your heart others will see it. So, to test your faith, just ask others, *“Do you see the face of Christ in my face?”* When the glory of God is in you there is no way that you will not shine with the glory of God. Remember in Exodus when Moses came down off the mountain? He had been in the presence of God and his face so shined that he had to wear a veil because it was so overwhelming to be hold.



John 29:28

*Blessed are those
who have not seen
and yet have come
to believe.*

So many times, we have said or at heard said, *“If I could only see the actual Jesus all would be better and my faith stronger.”* But ask yourself, *“Just how many people saw Jesus when he was on earth?”* Likely thousand, but only 12 followed and they were nowhere to be seen at the cross. Oh, wait there Jesus’ mother was there. That does not look good for us guys, does it? The point is while many heard only a few followed and saw the bright shining face of Jesus. It is clear then that seeing is NOT believing or even helpful. On the other hand, Jesus explicitly says ***“Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.”*** (John 29:28)

One of my favorite picture books is ***“The Faces of Jesus.”*** The text is by theologian Fredrick Buechner and the photography by Lee Bolin (Riverwood Publishers Limited, Croton-on-Hudson, NY, 1974)

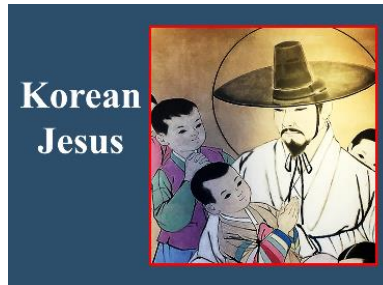


**Maori
Jesus**

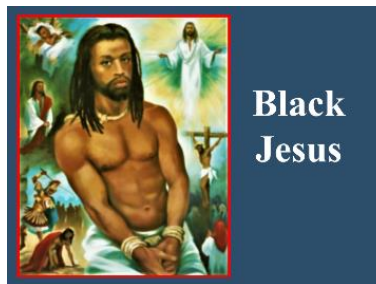
Buechner writes, *“(Jesus) had a man’s face, a human face. So, suppose as the old game goes that we could return in time and see it for ourselves, see the face of Jesus as it actually was 2,000 years of faces back. ... If we were to see the actual face of Jesus, we run a big risk. His face may be too much for us to see **OR** his face may be not enough, i. e. just like any other man’s face. Would it be a haunting face that we cannot stop seeing, a face that is just too quickly forgotten. ... There is part of ourselves, I think, we might avoid meeting his real eyes ... just as we avoid meeting **our** real eyes in the mirror because for better or worse, they threaten to tell us more than we want to know. ... We have been dreaming for 2,000 years about what Jesus looks like. But we need to think as the Hebrew writers did and ‘thinking of the many faces of God.’* (pages 9 & 10)

Dr. Bruce W. Dobyns Preaching at First Christian Church, Murray, KY

The most common Hebrew word for face, **always** appears in the plural (panim) in the Old Testament (New Interpreter’s Bible Dictionary). Thus, from the very earliest of times there was no limit to how people could see God just as there is no limit on how we can see Jesus Christ now.

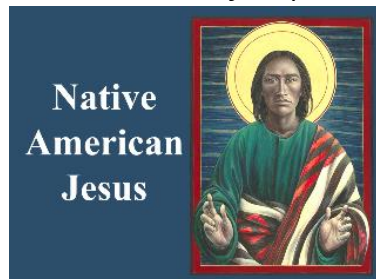


“We face that face—all the ways men (and women) have dreamed it down the years, painted and sculpted it, scratched into the teeth of whales, stitched it into wool and silk, hammered it or of gold. ... Take it or leave it, if nothing else it is at least a face we would know anywhere –a face that belongs to us somehow, our age, our culture; a face we somehow belong to. Like the faces of people we love, it has become so familiar that unless we take pains, we hardly see it all. Take pains. See it for what it is and, to see it whole, see it too for what it is just possible that it will become: the face of Jesus as the face of our own secret and innermost destiny: The face of Jesus as our face.” (page 14)



And in seeing *“See not God as machine or engineer and we just as pawns. But see God as Mother and Father of us all. A spontaneous and real love freely given and freely received. Evil existence not because God is indifferent or powerless, but because we are free to love or not love.”* (page 56)

*“We need to read the NT with not just our eyes but our hearts and imagination open as well is to catch a glimpse of a figure who from time to time we believe we are finally able to identify whether as Gentle Jesus Meek and Mild or Christ the Tiger, the teacher, the revolutionary, the merchant of dreams. While we have a good mines eye here, there will always be the mystery of what is behind the face who Jesus as the Christ saw himself as and what that meant to him as the Son of God. ... And wherever men have so believed in this resurrection, it is because in some sense they have so seen him. Now as then it is NOT his absence from the empty tomb that convinces men **but** the shadow at least of his presence in their empty lives.”* (Page 93)



“The face of Jesus is a face that belongs to us the way our past belongs to us. It is the face that we belong to if only as to the face out of the past that has perhaps had more to do with the shaping of our present than ANY OTHER. According to Paul, the face of Jesus is our own face finally, the face we will all come to look

“The Faces of Jesus”

Matthew 2:1-1

April 11, 2021 Easter Season

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like a little, when the kingdom comes, and we are truly ourselves at last truly the brothers and sisters of one another and the children of God. ... All those faces – they come drifting back at us like dreams (those images we have seen in this book and elsewhere.) What words do we face him with? The very best are the words from the Bible, ‘Come Lord Jesus.’ ” (Page 240)