

Many people seem to think that being a Christian is largely about trying to become somebody you are not. We imagine that a Christian is someone who is always nice and helpful, someone who doesn't get angry as much as other people and who doesn't have lustful feelings nearly as much as others. Or maybe a Christian is someone who is absolutely sure of his or her faith and feels a little sorry for other people who have so many doubts.

But one of the reasons we're here tonight is to dispel this notion that being a Christian is about becoming somebody you are not. In fact, when Jesus said, "Let your light shine before others..." he was very specifically saying, "Let your light shine before others..." In other words, don't try to become someone you are not. Instead, focus on becoming the person you already are. Become the person you already are.

A friend of mine teaches Christian meditation, and he's been at it for over thirty years now. He teaches all kinds of people, from students to wealthy business executives. And he told me once about the process he goes through in teaching meditation to people who are new to it. He begins by teaching them certain stilling exercises, helping them to relax and become comfortable with silence. Then he moves on to teach them about the body in prayer, about various postures for meditation and about breathing. About how to deal with distractions and so on.

And after several days of this, my friend will introduce the person to uses of the imagination in prayer, and he often leads them through this exercise. He invites them to use what he has taught them thus far and settle into a posture of quiet and stillness with their eyes closed. Then, once they've settled in, he asks them to imagine that they are in their favorite place where they feel most comfortable, safe, and at peace. For some, it's in the mountains at a special spot by a babbling brook. For other's, it's some lonely stretch of beach where they unwind and feel most peaceful, calm and secure.

Wherever it is, my friend just encourages them to rest in this place for a while and take it all in. Then, after a few minutes, my friend says, "Now imagine that you can see in the distance that someone else has come into this scene, and this person is heading your way. Notice how you are feeling about someone approaching you while you were resting.... Now, notice that this person is getting closer and is not only coming your way, he is coming to see you. And now you recognize this person. It's Jesus. And he is beaming, he's so happy to see you. With this big smile, he sits down beside you. And all he wants to say to you is that he is thrilled to see you. He thinks the world of you. He couldn't be happier with you, and just wants you to know how very much he loves you. Now," my friend goes on, "just spend some time resting there and talking with Jesus."

My friend comments that it is the hardest exercise he can give his students in meditation, because they can't believe it. They can't believe that Jesus would be so much in love with them and that he would be so happy with them. Because so many of us seem to

believe that God's main concern for us is that we should become someone we are not and that if God were to come to visit with us for a while, God would probably want to spend most of the time talking with us about what's wrong with us.

But when Jesus says, "Let your light shine before others....," he's saying, "Be yourself. Be you. Don't try to be someone else, don't hide the person you really are, but dig down deep and be fully yourself." In fact, many believe that this is what Jesus meant when he said, "Be perfect, as your Father in heaven is perfect." The word that we translate as "perfect" means "complete" or "whole." Be complete, be whole, be fully and completely yourself, not someone you think others want you to be.

One of the earliest saints we know about, a man named Irenaeus from the second century, very close to the lifetime of Jesus himself, once put it this way. Irenaeus said, "The glory of God is the human person fully alive."

This is what we're talking about. You don't need to try to be someone you are not; you only need to focus on being fully alive, and you can only be fully alive when you are focused on being fully yourself.

There's an old Jewish story that says it very simply. Rabbi Zoysia once said, "When I get to heaven and stand before God, God is not going to say to me, 'Zoysia, why were you not Moses?' Instead, God will say to me, 'Zoysia, why were you not Zoysia?'"

All of us feel pressure to conform to someone else's idea of who we are or who we should become. But tonight we are focused on remembering that our unique identity, with our peculiar passions and interests, is beautiful to God and has special purpose in the world. This is what Jesus means when he says, "Let your light shine...." Don't work on being someone else, because that would mean covering up your true self, putting your light under a basket. Instead, just relax and settle into your true self, and then let that true self shine in the world.

[Parker Palmer's Mobius Strip – Quaker Power Point presentation – many present to the outer world something very different from their true identity inside. The mobius strip shows an authentic, seamless self, in which the inner truth is not hidden but flows naturally into the world.]