

My wife and I attended the baptism of a friend's grandson not too long ago. I noticed how people many were hovering over little Tyler and remarking "Wow - he looks just like his dad!"

I was overcome in those moments by an overwhelming awareness of the deepest meaning of what it is to be a baptized person. Turning to my wife I asked "How come no one ever looks at a baby and says, 'Wow - he looks just like Jesus?'" She gave me that special look and I sensed that it would be very wise for me just to sit back, shut up and enjoy the rest of the baptism.

All I meant was that if our life in Christ begins at baptism, shouldn't we begin to look a little like him even then? Implicit in today's readings is the invitation to you and me to ask ourselves some profound questions. What's most important in our lives? What significance do we possess beyond the meanings which arise from our family relationships and pursuit of our own ambitions? Are we, in any way, beginning to look like Jesus?

The point of today's readings is to suggest very clearly what the correct answers are. Simply put, the love of God expressed in and through Jesus Christ is the most important thing. Our meaning and significance unfold as we embrace the mission of Jesus by spreading through the unique story of our own lives the message of God's merciful, healing love. When you and I actually do that, it shows.

What would your reaction be if someone were to look at you right now and tell you: "Wow – you look just like Jesus?" You know, you really do – just look at you! I suspect many of us would object to that comparison, claiming we're not worthy. But when we understand what being "worthy" really means, we might change our opinion.

Worthiness, as it turns out, is about capability, not merit. It's like this: When we say a boat is seaworthy, we mean it's capable of going out to sea without sinking. When an airplane is capable of taking off and landing without crashing, it's said to be airworthy. When you and I are capable of holding and expressing the love of Jesus Christ, and no other attachments eclipse our commitment to that love, we're "Jesus-worthy." We will know this is so beyond a doubt because people will see and respond to the presence and action of God within us and actually tell us we're beginning to look like Jesus.

Let me tell you a little story about that. For several years I was a volunteer chaplain at Hartford Hospital. From time to time I'd do an overnight double-shift to give the staff chaplains a break. On occasion I'd walk into a patient's room in the middle of the night and he'd wake up and be alarmed to see an old guy with a white beard approaching his bed. I'd reassure him that no, I wasn't God, and no, you're not dead. When they'd calmed down we'd get on with business.

One evening I was called to spend some time with a woman who was scheduled for surgery the next day. She was quite apprehensive about what was going to happen to her, and anxious about the prospect of dying during the procedure. She was Christian, but not Catholic, and there were things on her mind.

In response to her questions, I told her I was there simply to listen – she could say anything she felt comfortable saying. If she wished, we could pray together, but I would follow her lead on that. Staring intently at me, she gripped my arm tightly and began to share her pain. She said she was deeply worried about some of the things she had done in her life. Frankly, she admitted, she hadn't thought that God and God's law of love were all that important for most of her life. She realized that she had been dazzled by money, power and control and now she was terrified by the prospect of God's judgment, as the real prospect of her death loomed before her.

No one's story is simple. The depth and extent of her pain, both received and inflicted, was staggering, and I began to feel enormously unworthy and incapable. With her permission, we prayed a little bit, and read some psalms: 23 and 103, if I recall correctly. In my heart, I prayed "Dear God – help - I have no idea how You want me to respond right now." God, I need to tell you, has never failed to respond to that prayer, sometimes in breathtaking ways.

In those next moments I felt like a spectator as God reached out through me to her, to reassure her of His merciful love, and allay her fears about His judgment. I felt as if Someone Else was doing the listening and talking; there was really no Tim there at all. Never in a million years would I have come up with those words and those gestures. I watched as her face and voice gradually relaxed and her grip on my arm loosened. Her doctor arrived eventually and was astonished to see her patient so much calmer and less anxious than she'd been just a short while ago. So was I.

I gently suggested some professional follow-up as I stood up to leave. With a smile, the patient thanked me and then asked "Has anyone ever told you that you look like Jesus?" I chuckled and told her about the patients who thought I was God and she laughed too, but then she said seriously "No, it's not just your appearance. It's something more. Do you know what I mean?" Our eyes met and I nodded thanks to her wordlessly. "Believe me, lady," I thought to myself as I left the room, "I know exactly what you mean."

I've told you that story because, with people and circumstances changed, it's your story, too. Every day and in every life, God waits for those Jesus-worthy folks just like you who wish to love Him above everything else they deeply cherish, including even themselves; to allow Him the freedom, through them, to spread His merciful love deeper and further among His people in ways, very similar to the Eucharist, that only He can do. May it come to be more and more the case that when people see you and me they exclaim "Wow – you guys look just like Jesus!"