



"Beer With Jesus"

*If I could have a beer with Jesus
Heaven knows I'd sip it nice and slow...
I'd be sure to let him do the talkin'
Careful when I got the chance to ask
What's on the other side? Is Mom and Daddy alright?
And if it ain't too much trouble tell them I said, "Hi"
I'd tell everyone but no one would believe it
If I could have a beer with Jesus.
- Thomas Rhett*

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Having a beer with Jesus at the local tavern or bar is, for some, an unconventional and even shocking proposition. Some might ask, "Why would Jesus be in *that kind of* establishment in *that part of* town?" It's a good question, because it presumes that if Jesus has a beer with hot and sweaty, blue-collar, working-class people after work, that means he doesn't obediently remain in the places religion has assigned to him—you know, the "holy places" where he is illustrated in stained glass and displayed on a cross behind altars. Why in the world would Jesus be wasting his time, hanging out at a bar, when he has important things to do like presenting a lecture at a seminary or giving a sermon at a packed cathedral or mega-church?

Where is Jesus in our world today? Is Jesus deeply involved in all of the "busyness" of religion? Is he worried and concerned about people being "purpose driven" and "having their best life now"? Does Jesus spend most of his time today quoting dead theologians and arguing about dogma, or is he still telling colorful stories like he did when he walked this earth? During his earthly life Jesus was found in all kinds of unexpected places with all kinds of people—beggars, lepers, working class-farmers and fishermen—even, as some saw it, "wasting his time" with children. Jesus wrote himself into the parable of the Good Samaritan as someone who is always willing to stop and help those who are neglected, marginalized and forgotten by institutionalized religion.

We are just as likely to meet Jesus in the checkout line at Walmart as we are in the parking lot of a brick-and-mortar church. Most of the stories about Jesus we read in the Gospels are not about his visits to religious places like synagogues or the Temple—*most of the time Jesus went to where the people were and immersed himself into the lives they were living.* Jesus might be sitting there on the bus bench next to you or when your bus arrives he might be driving it! Jesus is not where our Christ-less religious world expects him—or where religious authorities display him. *Jesus is risen, he is on the loose, out there, everywhere!*

The womb and the tomb (Christmas and Easter) are the two times when many at least pause to think about Jesus. Institutionalized religion expects Jesus to be "in church" on Christmas and Easter, in buildings where he is "assigned" to be on display. So, unless they want the wrath of religious authorities to rain down on them, "good, church-going folks" make sure to do the predicable "right things" at Christmas and Easter. But the real Jesus is just as unconventional and unpredictable now as he was 2000 years ago when he confounded, confused and confronted the religious leaders of his day. Let's remember that as He walks with us into the unknown, unpredictable future awaiting us in 2015.

Larry

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