



**July 4, 2010 Sermon by Kimiko Karpoff**  
*Jesus of Spirit*

Readings: Galatians 6: 1-6, 7-16

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable to you, O God, our strength and our redeemer.

Once there was someone who did such amazing things and said such wonderful things that people followed him. One day they asked him "Who are you?" and he said, "I am the light of the world."

Light is an evocative word. Light fills shadows and brings us out of darkness. This is both a practical fact and a metaphor for a coming through a place of challenge or unknowing. Light also speaks of a lessening of burden. When a load is lightened, we have less strain in our carrying of it whether that is an actual thing or, again, metaphorical. I'd like to share with you a poem called "to struggle is hope"

the light is there  
in the darkness I know  
it is and any moment  
I will turn  
my head in the right direction  
and catch the flicker beckoning  
through the black<sup>1</sup>

This is a poem written for advent, a time when we wait for the light to come. Liturgically that is the coming of the Christ child. Metaphorically it is about what that coming means, a new hope after difficulty. A lessening of burden.

The Jesus of Spirit is a way that we know and engage this sense of hope.

Last week, Jen Beth invited us into a time of meditation, imagining the light of Christ filling us. Let's do that again for a moment right now.

Settle into your seat, take a deep breath and let it out slowly. Imagine the healing energy of the light of Christ beaming on you. ....Let yourself be bathed and your whole body-self infused with this loving healing, energizing light of Christ.....Imagine it flowing into your heart.....opening up your feelings..... healing heart wounds...tenderly massaging tight places that have become knotted through remembered pain.....Imagine it creating space for receiving and giving unconditional love...

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<sup>1</sup> Kimiko Karpoff. "to struggle is hope." 2009.

In your mind's eye, sense the light of Christ moving through your head...bringing healing to your patterns of thinking...pouring healing light through your memories...bathing them, releasing what can be released....bringing sacred wholeness to all that it touches....

Imagine this light flowing both within you...but also surrounding you...enveloping you with Christ's protective healing energy...restoring your body...your spirit...your soul... to its connection with the healing love of the Creator<sup>2</sup>...(silence)

And...I invite you to come back to this place.

This Christ that we can feel flowing into our bodies, that we call upon when we need strength or wisdom, the one that we breath in when we want to feel connected to the divine spark of life, this is the Jesus of Spirit.

These images of light and healing energy are powerful for Christians, for us, because we have heard stories of Jesus and how he healed, how he brought new hope to the world, how he overcame even the darkest of nights by rising from the dead.

"I am the light of the world." We know that light as Jesus the Christ. However, two thousand years before Jesus, that light was Osiris. In ancient Egypt, Osiris was known as an incarnation of spirit in human flesh. He was born to Isis, who was called the "Mother of God."<sup>3</sup>

"[Osiris] suffered betrayal, death, and mutilation at the hands of the powers of evil; and after a great struggle with these powers, he rose again. Because he had conquered death, the righteous too might conquer death."<sup>4</sup> Osiris was known as the god of resurrection. "He represented the ideal of a person who was both god and human and he typified to the Egyptians...the being who by reason of his sufferings and death as a human could sympathize with them in their own sickness and death."<sup>5</sup>

What can we make of this? Osiris seems to have plagiarized the stories of Jesus. Except that he came two thousand years earlier.

Tom Harpur, in his book *The Pagan Christ*, stirred up a lot of controversy by drawing parallels between the life of Jesus and other eminent religious figures, such as Osiris and Buddha. He does this to two ends. One is to conclude that the stories of Jesus are entirely fiction. The other is raise up a more powerful Spiritual Christ.

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2 Sharon Moon. *The Healing Oasis*. 81-83. adapted.

3 Tom Harpur. *The Pagan Christ: Recovering the Lost Light*. [Toronto:Thoman Allen Publishers, 2004]. 6.

4 Ibid. 70.

5 Ibid. 70-71.

According to Harpur and, many other scholars, there was no person called Jesus. Rather, Jesus was an archetypal figure created for the time. He is a myth, but a myth in the true sense of the word.

Sometimes we think of myths the same way we think of fairy tales, as simply stories, fictional tales. Yet a true myth expresses universal truths about life, the soul, our place in the universe, the mystery we call God. "Myth is what never was, yet always is, in the words of Joseph Campbell.<sup>6</sup> Myths, like legends, are more than. They take us out of mere historicity, which simply tells of a particular event at a particular time, to tell us a truth.

The ancient Egyptians used the sun as a metaphor for God. It's not that they believed that the sun was a god, but that the sun represented the most powerful force that they could describe. The sun brought light and heat, it made things grow. And every day it was taken into darkness. Yet every day it overcame that darkness and rose to new life. They crafted archetypes around this to tell stories of what this meant to them.

Harpur believes that the stories of Jesus never were meant to be taken as history. That's why there are so many contradictions among them. They are different tellings of archetypal stories, not history. He is not alone in this belief. And he points out that many early Christians also did not believe in a historical Jesus. Perhaps the most famous of these is St. Paul.

Harpur notes that in his letters to various groups of people, Paul never speaks of an historical Jesus. He speaks of the Christ, he speaks often of the Spirit and of the essence of Christ, but never stories. Paul never refers to the birth stories or recounts parables. It's as if he had never heard of those.

Today we heard a portion of a letter to the Galatians. In this letter Paul chides the Galatians for moving away from the proper teachings of Christ. "If you sow to your own flesh," he says, "you will reap corruption from the flesh, but if you sow to the Spirit, you will reap eternal life from the Spirit."

He does not refer to any story of Jesus here, or remind the people of something Jesus said. He speaks, instead, a spiritual language. If you plant your expectations in yourselves, then you get something weak and human. But if you plant your expectations in the Spirit, then they will grow in the power of the Spirit. Reach for something better, Paul says. The Spirit is available for us all.

I am inclined to agree with Harpur that Paul's Jesus is the Jesus of Spirit. In this he also agrees with a group of early Christians who were called

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<sup>6</sup> Joseph Campbell, quoted in Harpur. 17.

Gnostics. Gnostic gospels include the Gospel of Thomas and the Gospel of Mary. These Gospels, however, were ones that did not make the canon that we know as the Gospels today. But they exist.

The Gnostics also believed in a Spiritual rather than a bodily Christ. And this powerful notion raises point number two. It is powerful because it opens for us the concept that the Spirit that raised Christ from the dead is there for us too. The manifestation of God in human flesh is not just for one person, but is attainable by all people. The stories of Jesus are stories of what that looks like, but they are not limited to only the person of Jesus. They believed that each of us has Christ within us and that, "The Christ within gives each of us the power to find and express our own true voice."<sup>7</sup>

So, when Jesus calms the storm, we know that we have access to the power to calm our own storms.

Diarmuid O'Murchu reframes our Christian story from the context of what he calls a relational matrix. He speaks in the voice of the Divine who is in relationship with creation. He points out that the life force energy that we would call God has been around for millennia, long before the evolution of the human species and certainly not to be confined to the past two thousand years.

"Worse still," he says, "Christians support the idea that my incarnation is confined solely to the one you call Jesus the Nazarene. Why should my relational matrix, prolific in abundance, fertility, and liberating potentiality be confined to one outstanding personality?"<sup>8</sup> The answer to that is that it's not.

This understanding of Jesus does not make the Gospel stories irrelevant. On the contrary these beloved stories are how we know truths about the power of God that we would otherwise have no language for. And it takes that power out of the confines of the stories making it available to all. The power of the resurrection is that the Divine Spark that filled Jesus is available to each of us and cannot be suppressed. God beckons through the darkness and we only need to turn our heads to see.

May it be so.

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid. 97.

<sup>8</sup> Diarmuid O'Murchu. *Catching Up with Jesus: A Gospel Story for our Time*. [New York; Crossroad Publishing Company, 2005]. 71.