



Do You Know their Names

By The Rev. Jarrett Kerbel (12/26/25)

The great Latin-American theologian Gustavo Gutierrez once said, “You say you care about the poor. Then tell me, what are their names?” Decidedly not an Ivory Tower scholar, Gutierrez listened closely to the campesinos of Latin America and how they read and interpreted scripture. He helped with the ‘base community’ movement in the Roman Catholic church that empowered small groups of impoverished laborers to gather around prayer and scripture to find direction and solidarity.

“You say you care about the poor. Then tell me, what are their names?” I bring up this challenging observation at Christmas because followers of Jesus already know the name of one poor person. That person is Jesus and, thanks be to God, our knowing starts with him.

Jesus was born a nobody, in a nowhere place, to non-descript parents, attended at first by good for nothing shepherds and cattle. He was born in poverty that most of us could not fathom and his life was immediately threatened by the powers that be. Campesinos in Guatemala, El Salvador and Nicaragua related to Jesus on the basis of their lived experience. In Jesus, they saw God-with-us even while their overlords accounted them cursed and less than human.

The poverty of Jesus, the naked fragility of his early life, and the threats that stalked him from the beginning tell us, first of all, how much God loves humanity. How much? So much that God enters into our vulnerable, limited, mortality to restore humanity to harmony with the Divine. God faces the risks and temptations of the human condition in Jesus to blaze a trail to restoring every human to the relationship with God that sets us right, brings us peace, and heals our souls.

Second of all, entering human life as an impoverished infant in an obscure locale tells us that God loves everyone, absolutely everyone, no matter who they are or where they are from just as they are. God’s love is for everyone and precedes every other consideration of life. After all, what can a baby do to earn God’s love! The idea is

absurd yet it points to a level of grace and love that is more fundamental than our human ability to respond to God from our own resources.

Third, God is not ashamed of our humanity. God made humans good and very Good according to the creation accounts in Genesis. God has always wanted humanity to be a collaborator and partner with God in stewardship of God's creation. In the birth of Jesus, God is investing everything - holding nothing back - to regenerate the image of God in humanity.

Fourth, and finally, the incarnation of Jesus tells us that God loves the small, the defenseless and meek above all. Throughout scripture God shows a predilection to work with small, obscure people and groups to manifest the Divine will for humanity. As someone famously said, "If you cannot find God, maybe you are not looking low enough." Feeling the absence of God in your life? Who are you with? Whose names do you know? Where are you to be found? At Christmas we are reminded to be found in humble, vulnerable, dependent places where God chooses to dwell. This is why I spend so much time relating to our homeless neighbors. Jesus in them. Jesus is with them. I want to be where Jesus is and a small part of relieving the stigma that isolates the poor from the relationships we all need.