

Jesus a mystical personality

I grew up loving Jesus. And I'd say I still do. I say "I'd say" because not everyone would agree with me — like my mother, for instance. As hard as it is for me to contemplate, my mother believes I'm in danger of the fires of hell because I don't love Jesus any more. Or not the right one. And she's not alone. The world is filled with those who would condemn my love of the wrong Jesus. The Jesus I love is a man, like me.

If he is also god incarnate, then — as another "son of man" — maybe I am too.

But, like god, he's inscrutable; a deeply mystical and fundamentally mysterious religious figure.

He offers clues and mysteries and signs and wonders, but very few clear-cut answers.

And everything he means to say comes out in riddles.

He was — and remains for me — as complex, as challenging and as difficult a personality as I ever hope to encounter.

His teachings are arcane and almost totally opaque: What does "the kingdom of Heaven is within you" actually mean when addressed to a lot of hookers and lawyers and drunks?

What does his saying about the mustard seed tell us about the nature of faith?

Or the story of the shekel in the fish's mouth?

I'm sure I don't know. And neither, apparently, does anyone else.

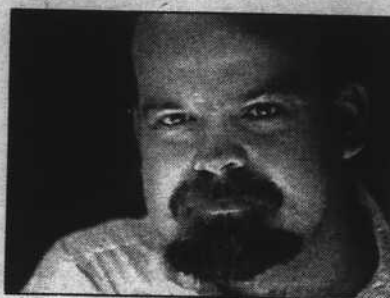
Many of the teachings of Jesus and the stories about him are completely glossed by modern "teachers of the law."

Sayings and stories that don't fit today's mold are omitted.

And what is that mold?

There are two — equally gruesome:

There is "gentle Jesus, meek and mild" who lies down like a lamb to



Mark Baldridge

"But, to me, Jesus is more than all of these. He is my mother and my father, my teacher and my stumbling block."

the slaughter.

Who wouldn't hurt a fly. Who waits, knocking patiently at the door of your heart. Waiting and waiting for you to let him come in.

Then there is Jesus the thug — the fundamentalist Christ.

Whose followers lay heavy burdens of rigidly proscribed behavior on those who would love him ... and never lift a finger to help them bear the weight.

I can stomach neither of these modern Christs with their blind adherents.

And every age has had its own Jesus — reinventing him at every opportunity; each epoch has its personal Jesus to keep it company on its long, dark flight.

Each person, almost, is entitled to his or her own Messiah, made to order: dominating or docile and available in a surprising range of prices.

There exist an infinite number of Christs, all clamoring for our attention.

It nauseates me.

Why not rather forgo the attempt

to pin Jesus like a bug to a tray? Why not rather insist on the mystery than attempt to pierce the veil and come back blind — and what's worse, not know it.

For myself, I am content to go on not understanding Jesus.

I'd rather listen to him like his earliest disciples —

uncomprehendingly — than try to cram him whole into some magic genie's lamp; I don't want any favors from him, anyway.

I want to let him be himself, to learn from him whatever it is he has to teach me.

And I suspect there's still plenty to learn at the hands of the Nazarine.

Because what Jesus said and did, even filtered through the eyes of dozens of witnesses and second and third hand reports, is still more than I can grasp.

Like Lao Tzu, Kafka and the fundamental teachings of Buddhism, Jesus constantly offers me a fresh face, a new meaning. And he helps to light my way.

But, to me, Jesus is more than all of these. He is my mother and my father, my teacher and my stumbling block.

Everything I feel about right and wrong, good and evil, is informed by his presence. His marks are all over my principles. He has taught me to act justly and to love mercy.

I have spent my life thus far trying to come to terms with Jesus, wrestling with him, and no one will deter me from this struggle.

So — the fears of my real mother notwithstanding — I will continue to love, and be troubled by, the wrong Jesus.

And I am not afraid of hell.

Jesus died before me and I'm sure, when I die, all the same things will happen to me that happened to him.

Baldridge is a senior English major and the Opinion page editor for the Daily Nebraskan.

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Time has come to leave nest

I am about to graduate. If all goes well, I will then find a real job.

Finding a real job and working 40 hours a week doesn't really scare me. But not finding a job? That would be disastrous.

If I don't find a job, I have to live at home again, a fact that became abundantly clear this weekend.

I stopped at my parent's house to pick up some winter clothes. My mother met me at the door to tell me she had just tried to call me.

Apparently, she had just seen a little girl in a magazine who looked just like me and the resemblance had moved her to tears.

(Which is sweet and touching and all that, I know. I love my mom, don't get me wrong, but ...)

Then she led me to the kitchen and repeatedly tried to feed me though I had just eaten.

"Why do you always eat before you come home? I never get to feed you."

My mother has a long history of expressing love through fresh-baked goods. I've oft wished she would have offered healthier rewards. Rather than making cake or pizza, she could have said, "Good girl, you cleaned your room. Now we get to do jumping jacks!"

Anyway, back to the kitchen where my mother has just remembered that my graduation is three months away.

"Will you be coming home?" she asked.

"If I don't get a job," I replied.

"Will you come home while you're looking for a job?"

"Yeah."

"Will you work at Toys 'R' Us again?"

Dear God. Toys 'R' Us. Again.

Did I really spend four years at this university so I could move back home and stock Barbies for minimum wage?

Did I learn European history and the subjunctive mood so that I could wear a red smock and help frantic mothers find the Micro Machines?



Rainbow Rowell

"Just when I'm feeling independent, like the non-smoking section of a Virginia Slims ad, Mom starts tearing up and recalling how small my hands were when I was born."

My mom doesn't understand why that would depress me. She's just excited that I'm coming home.

I think sometimes she thinks this whole college, career thing is just a phase I'm going through. That I've stayed up all night worrying about my grades, begged for internships and scrambled for work experience just to keep busy.

And that will end in December.

Come December, I'll hang out with her all day, follow her to the grocery store and to the thrift shops, help her quilt and cook.

When I'm not working at Toys 'R' Us.

I left the nest for a few years, but she's sure I'll be back. No where else is as safe. And, as she has endlessly reminded me, no one else will ever love me as much as she does.

Staying home wouldn't be horrible. She's right, I'm safe there. I'm loved there. It's my home.

And if I never left, no one could hurt me. I would stay close to my family, and I certainly would be well fed.

But I can't stay home forever ("And why not?" my mother would demand.) I just can't.

Neither can my siblings. I have three younger brothers and a sister, and they're all hovering on the cusp of adulthood.

My younger brother is engaged. My other younger brother just got caught kissing his first girlfriend ("Mom," he insisted, "it was just a good-night kiss.") And my sister is hardly ever home.

Even though I'm the oldest, in Mom's eyes, I'm the baby. I was the first baby so everything I did was a miracle, something to remember.

Just when I'm feeling independent, like the non-smoking section of a Virginia Slims ad, Mom starts tearing up and recalling how small my hands were when I was born.

It's tough to be tough when someone is fondly remembering you at your most helpless state.

Sometimes, when I'm very stressed or very hurt or very, very sick, I'm glad she treats me like a baby. It's nice to regress for a few hours and let your mom blow away your troubles with a hug (or a homemade spinach and potato pizza).

And it's nice that she always takes my side when I wage war against the rest of the world.

And I will come home in December. I might accompany her to a few thrift stores or help her quilt. If she gives me grief, I'll even do the dishes.

But I can't stay home forever. I can't hide from all the scary people and scary places.

And I definitely can't spend the rest of my life working at Toys 'R' Us.

Rowell is a senior news-editorial, advertising and English major and the Daily Nebraskan managing editor.



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