

Still the One Message to Rule Them All

- Bryan Patterson -

“Religion is for people who are afraid of going to hell; spirituality is for people who have been there” – Anonymous

A PRESENT-DAY incarnation of Jesus roams the streets of Washington in Joseph Girzone's latest book *Joshua In A Troubled World*.

Jesus, known these days as Joshua, is one man, poorly dressed, in a vast crowd, but he stands out.

His cool detachment and Middle-Eastern appearance set him apart as possibly sinister.

Joshua immediately raises suspicions. Two neatly dressed FBI men approach and ask for his identification. Of course, Joshua has none and is arrested under new homeland security legislation.

Girzone's book makes much of the paranoid political climate, in which religious "scribes and Pharisees" abound but hardly anyone recognises the presence of the Son of God. Again, he is rejected by the authorities.

It's not a new thought. Legendary American broadcaster Edward R. Murrow said if TV networks were offered screening rights to the Second Coming of Christ for an hour, "there would be a considerable number of stations which would decline to carry it on the grounds that a western or a quiz show would be more profitable".

An Irish Catholic priest, Shay Cullen, caused a minor stir this week when he said that if Jesus were on Earth today he would not take up residence in the Vatican.

Father Cullen said Jesus would be "still out on the dusty roads and down in the markets and on the radio and the TV, trying to get his message out".

A number of years ago, a billboard outside a Melbourne church asked: "What would you do if Jesus came to Hawthorn?". A wag wrote underneath: "Move (Hawthorn's champion goalkicker) Peter Hudson to centre half-forward."

A group of Australian Christian teenagers, asked recently where they thought Jesus would most likely hang out if he appeared today, came up with this list: in the pubs

and clubs, on the streets helping the homeless and addicts, in hospitals, at gay bars, at schools talking to dorks. These are the places he would most likely to be recognised.

If Jesus walked the earth today, chances are that not too many churches would accept him easily.

He would again seek out those frustrated with religious systems.

He would make the blind see, heal the lame and raise people from the dead while preaching his unique gospel of love. But, still, many would not believe or understand.

The religious conservatives wouldn't like this friend of publicans and sinners. The religious liberals wouldn't like his insistence upon being born again and repenting of sins.

Jesus would infuriate some theologians with his simple words that the whole Gospel could be summed up in the words: "Love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, and love your neighbour as yourself."

Still, his message would be, as always, for all: "I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door; I will come in to him."

Perhaps the children would best see him for what he really is.

These are the words of Summer Waters, age 11:

I saw Jesus last week.

He was wearing blue jeans and an old shirt.

He was up at the church building.

He was alone and working hard.

For just a minute he looked a little like one of our members.

But it was Jesus --

I could tell by his smile.

I saw Jesus yesterday.

He was at the hospital visiting a friend who was sick.

They prayed together quietly.

For just a minute he looked like Brother Jones.

But it was Jesus --

I could tell by the tears in his eyes.

I saw Jesus this morning.

He was in my kitchen making my breakfast and fixing me a special lunch.

For just a minute he looked like my mum.

But it was Jesus --

I could feel the love from his heart.

I see Jesus everywhere,

Taking food to the sick,

Welcoming others to his home,

Being friendly to a newcomer,

And for just a minute I think he's someone I know.

But it's always Jesus --

I can tell by the way he serves.

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