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Dear Mo,

Here is the essay on Jesus I discussed with you and Peggy earlier this summer.

It could be used as a prologue or epilogue to the story of Jesus . . . or published as a small book by itself,

Love,

Vern

The Galilean

As a child he came to us
Born of the womb of infinity
Wrapped in the swaddling clothes of time and space.
The sovereign of stars and smoldering suns he was
Whose hands had held the very planets in their paths,
Whose fingers formed this glowing galaxy,
Who sprinkled the blackened sky with glistening beads of liquid light,
Who hung the midnight with a thousand diamond constellations
All looped like necklaces across a jeweler's velvet cloth.

As a child he came to us
Born much as all men are born
And dying much as all men die
But living not at all as all men live.
For divinity surged in his veins.
In Jesus mankind got a glimpse of God
As never prior nor since
And we have not forgotten it.
The world can never be the same again
For we have seen what God it
And have seen what man can be.

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THE GALILEAN

By Vern Bennom Grimsley © MCMXCIII

The career and character of Christ were such that one out of every three persons on this planet today calls himself or herself a Christian. His name, Jesus, was the Greek form of the Hebrew "Joshua." It is translated "Savior." It was a common name in Palestine two thousand years ago. The word "Christ" is from the Greek "Christos" meaning "the anointed one" or "the messiah." Scholars estimate that the entire Bible covers only about fifty days in the life of Jesus and the first thirty years of his existence are hardly mentioned at all. And yet, the ideals of his life and teachings have dominated the art, literature, and ethics of western civilization for twenty centuries.

Jesus not only taught the truth, he lived it. He was it. If you had been a deaf man living in Jesus' day -- and if by some chance he hadn't healed you already -- you could have learned the essence of his message simply by watching him live, even if you didn't hear a single sermon, parable, or proverb he ever spoke. He preached in pantomime. He lived the truth in such love, compassion, strength, and joy that you would have seen God in his life. In his comprehensive volume, *An Outline of History*, H. G. Wells wrote, "This Galilean has been too great for our small hearts." The author Charles Lamb once said at a gathering of literary friends, "If William Shakespeare should come into this room we would all rise. If Jesus Christ came into the room we would all kneel."

Men and women through the centuries have sensed the very power and presence of God in the life of Christ. Most human beings are products of their times. They are formed by the ages in which they live. History makes them. But *Jesus made history*. And because Jesus was different in the way he lived, this world has become different since he died. For he made history. History did not make him. He was not merely molded by the ideas of his century, he molded the ideas and ideals of centuries yet to come around the supernal truths of the Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man.

Some two thousand years ago this Jesus of Nazareth was both and since that time it is remarkable to consider that no king, general, or statesman who ever lived has influenced humankind as much and as little as he. As much, because thousands have been spiritually transformed by his life and

teachings. As little because millions who have heard his message have never dared to heed it...have never dared to live as the sons and daughters of God as he preached they were born to be.

The religion of Jesus and the religions about Jesus are two entirely different things. In the case of almost any great leader -- be he a statesman, military general, philosopher, or religious teacher -- if he was the sort of man whose charismatic character and personality mightily attracted others, soon after he is dead, whole volumes of literature, legends, superstitions, folk tales, and tall stories begin to grow up around him until the man himself, like a trellis overgrown with vines, is virtually obscured by all the tangled traditions which cover him. So it was with Jesus.

Most people know more of the theories and theologies about Jesus than they know of Jesus' *actual* life and teachings. If you go into a great library and tally up all the works of Plato--translations of his writings--and compare that sum with the total of books written by scholars and professors *about* Plato, you will find a ratio of thousands to one. For every one book *by* Plato there will be hundreds of books *about* that book by Plato--books of theories, hypotheses, and interpretations.

Then go into a theological seminary library and tally up the number of translations of Jesus' life and teachings, as we have them, then compare them with the number of books about him and the ratio is tens of tens of thousands to one. Is it then any wonder that many people know a great deal of a religion *about* Jesus, but not so much about the religion *of* Jesus--the love of God and of humankind.

As a parallel, consider the technology of medical vaccination. A doctor fills his hypodermic syringe with a mild or weakened form of a virus, injects it into the human body, and the person thereby becomes immune. Is this not precisely what has happened in the history of religion? The world has been exposed to such a weak, diluted, and watered down version of the teachings of Jesus for so many centuries that by now many people are almost immune to the real thing. Some have become so accustomed to half-truths they no longer recognize truth. They have become so bored with the *religion* about Jesus that they have ignored the religion *of* Jesus.

This Jesus of Nazareth came not to write a creed, but to teach a truth; not to build a temple, but to create the kingdom of God in the hearts of men and women upon this earth; not to change people by

dogmatism, but to free them by faith; not to frighten people with fear, but to lure them to live in love; not to enslave people with ritual, but to liberate them with joy; not to preach God's condemnation, but to proclaim God's forgiveness; not only to tell us what we *should* be, but to tell us what we *are* -- the sons and daughters of the living God. This Jesus came to thaw the frozen traditions of religion into the liquid liberties of finding and knowing God.

Once on a university campus, a student told me his idea of Jesus was that he was just a great teacher of ethics and morals and that was all. That is like defining a whale as a sardine who made good. It is hardly adequate.

Jesus was more than merely a moralist or a theological theoretician. He was God incarnate. Jesus WAS what he taught. He lived and proclaimed the vital truth that people can personally know God--that we cannot just find out *about* God, but FIND God; not merely know *about* God but KNOW God, and that life can become a spiritual adventure of living by loving purposes.

Somehow God wrapped his heart in human flesh and a man named Jesus came into the world. In the life of Jesus, God became man. The Deity was then no longer an abstract conception, but a vital person. In the life of Jesus theology became biography, and thus was the love of God revealed. The very heart that throbs at the center of this vast, star shimmering universe of universes was the heart that beat in the breast of this Jesus of Nazareth.

I remember back in my hometown in Kansas I knew a little boy in grade school who honestly thought the name "Jesus Christ" was a swear word. He had no idea it referred to a human being, an historic person, because the only time he ever heard anybody use it out at his place was when his mother scorched the scrambled eggs, or his dad got a burr in his boot or the hired hand fell out of the hay loft. In that little boy's mind the name "Jesus" became associated with calamity, major and minor.

In one way or another, multiplied millions of people have had to overcome erroneous or unfortunate concepts of Jesus from childhood. As a young boy I thought of Jesus as a stained glass Galilean nine feet tall gazing down glassy eyed from the south window of a local sanctuary. Or I thought of him as depicted on the crucifixes. My father was ill with heart trouble for years and our local hospital

had a crucifix in every room, hallway, staircase, corridor, broom closet, and lavatory in the building. And in every case Jesus appeared to be either dead, dying, or in between. And I confess that as a boy trying to understand how this was intended to cheer the suffering and their relatives was not entirely clear to me. Incidentally I later came to an understanding of how the remembrance of his fearless and stalwart suffering *could* strengthen someone in an hour of pain, but as a boy it was a mystery.

And then there were the statues of Jesus, which in cold marble depicted Jesus as being as loving, warm, and personal as cold marble. I even saw him in a wax museum one time. He looked waxy, sallow complexioned, stiff, and there was dust on his shoulders. Such are some of the images we have of Jesus . . . the many conceptions and many misconceptions of who and what he was . . . but what was he really?

I remember once discussing religion with a young man just back from several years of military service, and he remarked that for him one of the most important glimpses into the personality of Jesus lay in the fact that little children came to him freely. Jesus couldn't have been a somber, morose, stilted, and formal sort of man; children would not have been this attracted to him. Jesus was joyful and outgoing in his love and his cheerfulness. And he reminded his hearers to have faith as a little child.

What was this Jesus really like?

It was virtually impossible to be neutral about Jesus in his own day. People either loved him or despised him; either shouted hosannas of praise to him as the Messiah or cried out for his crucifixion as a blasphemer. He was variously believed to be either a prophet, John the Baptist risen from the dead, a madman (some said he was beside himself), in league with the devil, the prince of devils, or the Prince of Peace. But anybody who had heard of Jesus at all had an opinion about him. He was the most controversial figure of his day and of ours.

Shepherds leaning on their walking staffs with their backs to the burning Palestine sun would discuss him all afternoon. Their teeth would flash when they laughed to hear some passing traveler tell

how the scribes and Pharisees in Jerusalem tried to trick him with a question and lost. They who, proud with learning, declared that ignorant men could not please God discovered their own ignorance the day they asked him whether to pay taxes or not, and he replied by asking, "Whose picture is on the coin?" And when they answered "Caesar's", he said, "Render to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God."

Women talking at their village wells, their sandals gray with powdered dust, would tell of the Samaritan woman he asked for a drink one time and clucked their tongues at his indiscretion, for single men were not to speak to women thus. Then they would wonder what he meant by the "water of life" he told that woman about -- water which quenched the very thirsting of the soul. How could this be?

Some thought him a dreamer and some a deliverer, but nobody was neutral. Old men in the temple courtyards would debate his heresies. Young fishermen straining hand over hand with wet nets on the Sea of Galilee wondered if he could be the Messiah. Carpenters at their splintered benches, farmers plowing furrowed fields, young boys walking home from synagogue school -- all talked about this strange new preacher and those stalwart twelve who followed him, and proclaimed that all men and women on this earth are children of the most high God. But no one was neutral.

And even yet, today, a person must choose to follow the truth this Jesus spoke and lived, or not. It is transformative truth. He is a transformative person.

The apostles of Jesus must have been immensely impressed by their Master to follow him as they did. Although we have no photographs or portraits of Jesus and hence cannot be sure of how he looked, we can be certain how he did not look. He did not look like the frail and fainthearted mystic some artists have portrayed. He was a carpenter. He was broad shouldered from swinging a hammer and driving a saw through tough timbers, strong and sinewy from lifting lumber, fitting planks and using his tools. He had a powerful, commanding voice. How else could he have talked to thousands of listeners on windy Galilean hillsides and be heard? How else could he have given a sermon from a boat with his hearers on the shore and with the waves of water splashing in on the beach before him? He was not pale and bleached. How could he have walked all over Palestine, which was one of the sunniest lands of the world,

and still have the delicate peaches and cold cream complexion some artists have bestowed upon him? He was suntanned and rugged. He had to be. He was a man of action. He strode up to the money changer's tables in the Jerusalem temple and drove them out. He was criticized as being a glutton and a drunkard because he relished a good meal and enjoyed wine. Far from being a statue in saint's clothing, he was a man. He was a man of *God*, living life valiantly and well by the very power of God, and he declared that others can as well.

What did Jesus teach? That man is a child of God; a son of the Universal Father; that all men and women are brethren; that indwelling the mortal mind there is the spirit of God, and by seeking to do the will of God one can cooperate with divine purposes, thereby obtaining eternal life by loyalty to eternal values -- truth, beauty, and goodness. He taught them that people are living in one universal family of God, and that each of us is a child of the Father. His two great commandments were: You shall love the Lord your God with all our heart, all your soul, all your mind, and all your strength, and you shall love your neighbor as your self.

Some years ago there was a successful lecturer and attorney who toured the banquet circuit giving an after dinner speech titled "The Trial of Jesus from a Lawyer's Standpoint." Then one evening in Chicago the master of ceremonies, in introducing this famous speaker, remarked, "You know, I can only imagine one lecture that would be more interesting and that would be: The Trial of a Lawyer from Jesus' Standpoint." Whatever a man's or woman's work or profession may be, he can judge and assess it by the life and the teachings of Jesus.

In some regions of Asia the severe disease Beri Beri used to run rampant among the population; it is caused by a lack of Vitamin B, which is lost in the process of polishing brown rice to make white rice. But white rice is regarded as much more fashionable and modern than plain brown rice, so people kept polishing the brown rice, eliminating the Vitamin B and dying of Beri Beri. Is that not what humanity has done to the marvelous, simple, age-old teachings of Christ? We have grounded and polished them to make them smooth, modern, fashionable, and bland until we have husked them of their power and spiritual vitality. But in our souls we hunger for spiritual truth, and nothing less than that can satisfy us.

If, somehow, I could return and live one day with Jesus and the twelve, I wouldn't choose the time he fed the multitudes, or even when he gave the Sermon on the Mount. I wouldn't choose the day he entered Jerusalem to the ringing hosannas of the welcoming throng, or the day he died, or even the morning he rose again.

No, I would choose an ordinary day, perhaps in one of their encampments by Galilee. I would love to watch him rising in the dawnlight duskiness of early morning and throwing a cloak across his broad carpenter's shoulders against the lakeside chill, watch him walk through the coarse grass heavily hung with cold dew, see him take a stick and stir the coals of fire to burning life again, hear him greet the apostles as they rose from their slumbers; see him eat, discuss, debate, ask questions; observe him settling an argument, laughing with the children of those who came to listen to him speak.

And then after supper, I would watch from a respectful distance as he climbed a nearby hill to commune with his heavenly Father and draw strength for his mighty mission among humankind. I would learn more watching him one day than I could put into practice in one lifetime -- more of patience, love, understanding, loyalty, strength, determination, joy, zest, jest, and vitality than I could begin to assimilate. And yet, the living spirit of this living Christ is real and present even here and now. In that discovery lies a valiant and victorious way of life.

You could be blinded staring directly at the sun in the sky, but if you take a clear glass prism in your hand and hold it so the sun shines through it, catching it afire with crystalline colors that glint and glimmer in the glass you will see a flashing rainbow of beauty -- the full and splendrous spectrum of that otherwise blinding white light. So it is that in the life of Jesus, in the living prism of his personality, you can behold the beauty, truth, and goodness of God's almost blindingly brilliant living love, and learn to love that God as a Father and a Friend.

Jesus of Nazareth was not born with burnished brass trumpets blaring, not with silver horns splitting the silent midnight air with sound, not with court drummers pounding cured goatskin hides stretched over great resinous casks of wood to thunder forth the tidings that a prince had come into the world.

The sounds that Jesus heard at birth were not the flutes and cymbals of the court musicians, but the quiet bleating and mooing of sleepy sheep and cattle.

No silken gowned, rustling robed attendants bustled about the birth of Jesus. No statesmen of the palace come to call. No corpulent captains of the Roman guards attired in gleaming breast plates, plumed helmets, and glistening armor stood nearby to watch the long night through. No chanting prophets made mystic gestures and incantations of blessings the day that Jesus was born. No priestly pomp and patriarchal pageantry surrounded his birth.

He was born as you and I were born--into a world as bitter and bothersome as our world at its worst, a world that was as hungry and poor as parts of Palestine today are hungry and poor. He was born into a world that knew the ways of war far better than the principles of peace . . . a world that knew more of iniquity than integrity, more of corruption than God consciousness, more indifference than idealism, more cruelty than kindness. Into such a world of this was Jesus born ... a world much like our own.

Our time is separated by long centuries from Jesus' time. Thick volumes of printed history divide ancient Palestine from the twenty-first century today. Yet the problems are much the same. And hence the need today to hear once more the words that Jesus uttered then -- the words of faith and hope that changed people's lives and made them new.

For this child, this quiet child, this babe not strong enough to crawl, would turn the world upside down one day by teaching that God is not a leaden hearted Lord of wrath, that God is not a jeering judge who laughs to see the pain of men, not a spiteful deity sneering at human misfortune, but a Father and a friend, a good God of love, a forgiving God, and a God who loves each person on this planet. This Jesus of Nazareth's life has changed this world forever!.

It was in the month of June in the year 1215 that King John of England, on the plain at Runymede, signed the Magna Carta, the doctrine of English liberty. And history cannot forget that date. But it was two thousand years ago, in the hilly land of Palestine, that this Jesus of Nazareth proclaimed the Magna Carta of the human soul, a document of spiritual liberty and joy: "You shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free," that all of humankind are sons and daughters of the living God and members of one family of God.

This Jesus of Nazareth was born, and lived, and taught, and then he died.

Political might, dominion, pomp, and power are always more impressive than the quiet teaching of truth. When Caesar Augustus died, all Rome wore black for many days. The solemn sounds of muffled drums were heard along the flower strewn pathway of his funeral march. Gold glinting trumpets heralded the day of his death. The flutes and pipes wailed melancholy melodies.

The very statues of the fallen Caesar were garlanded with blossoms in the public squares. A thousand messengers rode horses foaming at the flank to cry the news in distant provinces and protectorates: "Mighty Caesar has fallen! Let all the world weep."

Wet blades flashed red in silver sunlight as priests with sacrificial swords gave offerings of blood and beast to the countless gods they served, for mighty Caesar had fallen, let all the world weep.

But there was another who was born and who lived and who died in the world of Caesar Augustus. Or was it the other way round?

Perhaps it was Caesar Augustus who lived in his world, in the world of this Jesus of Nazareth, who died by criminal execution, rejected by the religion of his fathers; the soldiers of Caesar gambled for his robe. His body was laid in a borrowed tomb. He died without ceremony, funeral, or eulogy. Yet he is the one we remember! Not Caesar, but Jesus of Nazareth! His life and words proclaimed the joyous living love of God for all of humankind.

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Born of the womb of infinity
Wrapped in the swaddling clothes of time and space.
The sovereign of smoldering stars and suns he was,
Whose hands had held the very planets in their paths,
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