

Singer Joan Osborne asks some questions in her song “One of Us.” She wonders:

If God had a name what would it be?
 And would you call it to his face?
 If you were faced with Him in all His glory
 What would you ask if you had just one question?

If you could ask just one question to God, what would it be? “What is my purpose in life?” you may ask. Or you might ask about why we have mosquitos that spread disease. Or why so much violence and three shootings this weekend?

Or maybe you might ask questions on a grander scale: “How large is the universe? Do parallel universes exist? What other life have you created in the universe, and will we ever get to meet them?”

Many of us might want to ask, “Why do humans have to struggle and suffer?” Have you ever asked that question—why do we have to suffer? When faced with the tragic news of an illness, that’s often our first question: “Why, God, do I have to go through this illness?”

When experiencing a job loss and wondering how you’re going to pay the bills, you might

exclaim, “This is so unfair, God! I’ve worked hard and now I don’t know if I can pay my bills. Why must I suffer through this?”

Especially when we see children suffering, we ask, “Why do innocent children have to endure such trauma at an early age?”

I imagine the unknown writer of Hebrews also wondered about suffering, but for him, God sent Jesus to the world who suffered in order to identify with us. The author explained the purpose of Jesus as he wrote:

It makes good sense that the God who got everything started and keeps everything going now completes the work by making the Salvation Pioneer perfect through suffering as he leads all these people to glory. Since the One who saves and those who are saved have a common origin, Jesus doesn’t hesitate to treat them as family. (The Message Bible 2:10-11)

Jesus suffered along with all us, for we are bound together by our humanity and our suffering. Some in the early church had a hard time seeing Jesus as human, viewing him as only divine,

believing it was scandalous to call Jesus human. But the author of Hebrews emphasizes Jesus' human nature when he wrote, "We are people of flesh and blood. That is why Jesus became one of us" (2:14, CEV).

Isn't that amazing? Jesus became one of us. As Joan Osborne expressed in her song,

What if God was one of us?
Just a slob like one of us
Just a stranger on the bus
Tryin' to make his way home?

Imagining Jesus as a slob trying to make his way home on the bus may sound sacrilegious, but the writer of Hebrews would agree that Jesus became human like one of us, suffered and died like one of us, in order to set us free from the limits of death.

The author of Hebrews identifies Jesus in the Greek language of the New Testament as the ἀρχηγὸν (archegon), a hero or leader, or as often translated, a pioneer. Often when we think of a pioneer, we think of someone traveling the western frontier wearing a coonskin cap and exploring new lands. A pioneer travels to new places for the first

time, whether by crossing a river into unmapped land, sailing the oceans to new continents, or by being the first to step on the moon. A pioneer blazes a new trail for all those who come later, making travel safer for all those who follow.

In the face of suffering, the author calls Jesus the pioneer of salvation, the one who leads us beyond times of struggle and turmoil toward a path of hope. If Jesus' terrible death on a cross could lead to resurrection, he has provided a path for us—no matter what happens in our lives, we can move past it, something good can sprout forth from the seedbed of suffering. Jesus experienced new life, which gives us hope that we can too, since he's like one of us.

The writer of Hebrews also used another image of why Jesus became like one of us—to be part of our family, for he's not ashamed to call us brothers and sisters. It's not always easy to be part of a family, though, is it? Family members don't always think the same way. Families have arguments, as was the case with two brothers.

Patrick was four years old and his brother, Luke, was five. Already a half year in kindergarten had made Luke wiser.

Luke and Patrick were fighting over who would go first in a game. They had quite a debate that almost ended in a fight.

Luke changed his strategy and reasoned with his brother: “You know, Patrick, Jesus says that the first will be last and the last will be first, so it is better to be last.”

Patrick thought about that for a moment and then answered, “Then I’ll go last.”

Luke replied, “Okay, then I’ll go first.”¹

Sometimes family conflicts go beyond that of arguments, as a resolution at the General Assembly reminded us of the many forms of violence in families:

not exclusively physical, but include emotional, sexual, spiritual, and financial abuse, as well as manipulation, isolation, unequal power and control dynamics, threats and blame shifting among other forms, occurring across age, ethnic, gender and economic lines, among persons with disabilities, and among both heterosexual and same-sex couples.²

The resolution encouraged the church to “identify, utilize, and support local community agencies seeking to eliminate the causes and effects” of domestic violence and to support those who experience this trauma in their families. When Jesus became like one of us, he encountered a world where even families experience conflict.

I sometimes wonder if Jesus became like one of us so that we might continue to look for him among us. Would we treat our family members with more respect if Jesus lived with us? How might we treat one another if we thought Jesus was among us? That’s a question a group of monks encountered at a low spot in their lives.

There was once an old stone monastery tucked away in the middle of a picturesque forest. For many years people would make the significant detour required to seek out this monastery. The peaceful spirit of the place was healing for the soul.

In recent years however fewer and fewer people were making their way to the monastery. The monks had grown jealous and petty in their

relationships with one another, and the animosity was felt by those who visited.

The Abbot of the monastery was distressed by what was happening, and he poured out his heart to his good friend Jeremiah. Jeremiah was a wise old Jewish rabbi. Having heard the Abbot's tale of woe he asked if he could offer a suggestion. "Please do" responded the Abbot. "Anything you can offer."

Jeremiah said that he had received a vision, an important vision, and the vision was this: the messiah was among the ranks of the monks. The Abbot was flabbergasted. One among his own was the Messiah! Who could it be? He knew it wasn't himself, but who? He raced back to the monastery and shared his exciting news with his fellow monks.

The monks grew silent as they looked into each other's faces. Was this one the Messiah?

From that day on the mood in the monastery changed. Joseph and Ivan started talking again, neither wanting to be guilty of slighting the

Messiah. Pierre and Naibu left behind their frosty anger and sought out each other's forgiveness. The monks began serving each other, looking out for opportunities to assist, seeking healing and forgiveness where offence had been given.

As one traveler, then another, found their way to the monastery word soon spread about the remarkable spirit of the place. People once again took the journey to the monastery and found themselves renewed and transformed. All because those monks knew the Messiah was among them.³

Through Jesus, God became like one of us.
Look around. You might catch a glimpse.

¹ Hodgins, Michael. *1002 Humorous Illustrations for Public Speaking: Fresh, Timely, Compelling Illustrations for*

Preachers, Teachers, and Speakers (Kindle Locations 3035-3041). Zondervan. Kindle Edition, #443.

² <https://ga.disciples.org/resolutions/2019/ga-1928/>

³ <https://storiesforpreaching.com/the-messiah-is-among-you/>