

You all know 54-year-old me. But if you met 44-year-old me – would you know me? Maybe. What about 34-year-old me, or 24-year-old me?

It's easy for me to have a sense of who I am, an idea of me that feels stable and familiar and somewhat constant. But, really, I'm quite different today to who I have been. If someone only knew me at 24, they might not really know me now at all – because their idea of me would be tied to who I was from their perspective, at that time in their life; what they know of me would be bound to a time that's past and to a context that no longer exists.

Life is constant change. Change really defines what life is. So, who is the me I think I know?

That's a hard question to answer well or definitively, or even in a way that's meaningful, but I do know what I'm not. No human person is an object, created once and staying the same for all time, and so none of us can be known in that way. There's no description or set of facts about any of us that can really enable someone else to really know who we are.

We are alive, and so it would be far more accurate to think of the human person as an ecosystem, complex, and constantly shifting and changing. My body is constantly renewing itself, constantly in a state of flux. Add to all this biological change, the complexity and ongoing impacts of my relationships and my experiences and responses to the world, all of it, all of it always changing; all of it, together, is what makes me, me.

So could I ever really show you 'me' in a way that you could fully know me as I know myself. I don't think so. The complexity of life, and the constancy of change, makes that kind of knowing, the kind of knowing that satisfies the mind, impossible.

I only know me, because I live 'me,' I live the constant change and the complexity, and living it somehow makes it make sense, to me, but I can't share that with you.

And each one of us, in our own particular and specific ways, is that complex, is constantly changing, and is that impossible to fully know.

In today's Gospel reading, Thomas and Philip want answers from Jesus they can grasp, want to know what's impossible to know: where are you going, how can we know the way? Show us the Father, then we'll be satisfied. Help us know who you are, they're saying.

But Jesus can't give them that satisfaction, because the questions they're asking can't be answered in the way they want.

Instead, Jesus steers them toward an answer that's bound not to what the mind can hold, but to what the whole person "knows," knows from life as it's lived. Jesus' friends have walked with him, eaten with him, listened to him, witnessed his healing and his reconciling love, they have been in relationship with him. They do "know" him, and "know" where he's going, inasmuch as they are sharing life with him, they're participating in it, they've become part of it with him, he loves them, and they love him.

But this is all very mysterious and understandably they want something clearer, something more certain.

And I think that's a human impulse, don't we also want that too, to know Jesus more fully and completely, with certitude, with the mind.

I think that's why the commandment against idolatry is so central to our faith, so critical to our being in right relationship with God. Because the mind can and will run amok in its attempt to fix Jesus, to make Jesus make sense ... and if we don't guard against this human impulse, we risk creating a version of Jesus, and that version of Jesus can do great harm.

If the Jesus we think we know mirrors who we are, fits well with our assumptions about life, or about how society should be; if the Jesus we think we know mirrors our politics or our way of being in the world, we've, in fact, created an idol.

If the Jesus we think we know only reflects part of what Jesus taught and lived and died for (the part we can comfortably accept, because the rest, all of it, that's really hard), then we've created an idol.

If we use the Jesus we think we know to justify our own biases, to justify exclusion, or domination, or control, or hate, or violence, or destruction, or killing, we've created an idol; we've created a fixed, knowable representation of Jesus, an object that satisfies the mind.

Jesus refuses to give his friends the certainty that would satisfy them, not because he's holding anything back, but because the answers they want can't be given that way.

Instead, what he gives them (and has given us) is the way, the truth, and the life.

The way is a way of living centered on God, oriented toward justice and healing, that's focused on building relationship, that insists on non-violence, and that's infused with love.

The truth: that love, as it's given shape and form through lives lived, love absolutely does has the power to transform the world.

The life is an invitation into that which flows freely from the Source of All, and is poured into us, and holds it all together, and is eternal.

Jesus: the way, the truth, and the life. Not fixed, constant and also constantly changing. Not an object for the mind to hold, but a knowing that is the life we each live.

We can't have certitude, but we can have relationship. We can't have a satisfactory definition of what it all means, but we can participate in it. There's too much complexity and too much change for any answer given at any fixed point in time to both satisfy us and be meaningful for all. All life is complexity, and change, so we need to trust another way of knowing.

And this brings me back to where I began.

I can't pin down who I am, I can't explain fully who I am or define myself clearly, I only know me through my own lived experience of me.

And I believe this is true of all people, and I believe this is definitely true of Jesus.

We don't come to know Jesus by landing on a satisfactory explanation, or a satisfactory set of answers to our questions. We can only come to know Jesus by living his way, by embodying his truth, by entering into his life, as we heal, and forgive, and as we love.

We know Jesus as we center our lives on a living and present God, living and present in the world and in us, and as we resist all forms of idolatry that will become our focus if we settle our minds on a version of Jesus we've created.

Our faith, our life in Christ, just like our own selves, is no object that can be defined or explained, not in a way that will satisfy the mind. Instead it's much more like an ecosystem, wildly complex and constantly changing and becoming. And if it's to flourish, if it's to come into fullness of life, it needs to be nourished and cultivated, not by certainty or definition or evidence, but by intention, attentiveness, commitment, care, and love.

I only know me because I live me.

And I can only know Jesus in exactly the same way.