

Do you remember when you were little and had a bigger brother or sister you wanted to be just like? **My brother, Glenn, was five years older than me, 6'6" tall, a tremendous athlete, handsome, outgoing, engaging, and very popular.** I was shorter, tended to be shy around girls, and uncoordinated. I was very proud of my brother and always hoped a little of his star quality might rub off on me. I entered high school the fall after he'd graduated.

The teachers would call my name and ask if I was Glenn's brother.

I would answer, "Yes."

**They would appear surprised and somewhat disappointed.** I knew what they were thinking. "Philip must have been adopted."

My mother knew the vast discrepancies between us bothered me and she would point out my virtues, and tell me that one day I would grow up to be just like Glenn, that I just needed to be patient. **But we both knew it was a lie.**

As I grew older, I realized different people have different gifts. I discovered my own gifts and eventually stopped coveting the gifts and qualities of my brother. For the most part. I *would* like to have his hair and his Harley-Davidson motorcycle.

But I grew up with this tension—being told I could be just like my brother, but knowing in my heart it wasn't likely to happen.

**That was the same way I felt about Jesus.** From an early age, I was taught certain things about Jesus, that he was, in the words of the Nicene Creed, “the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds, God of God, Light of Light, Very God of Very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father by whom all things were made; who for us men, and for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the Virgin Mary, and was made man, and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate. He suffered and was buried, and the third day he rose again according to the Scriptures, and ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of the Father, from thence he shall come again, with glory, to judge the living and the dead.”

Did you get all that? That is part of the Nicene Creed, the profession of faith I made each Sunday at St. Mary's. **I was also taught Jesus gave sight to the blind, made the lame walk, raised the dead, healed the sick, cast out demons, walked on water, that no one had ever been like him, and no one ever would, but that I should try.** It was my brother Glenn all over again.

Jesus died around 30 A.D., give or take a few years. **It took the church 300 years to arrive at the description of Jesus found in the Nicene Creed.** Even then, not everyone agreed, and to this day the Eastern and Western churches are still divided. The church has a long and unfortunate history of making pronouncements about Jesus, claiming universal consensus, and conveniently neglecting to mention that millions of other Christians don't see it quite the same way.

**After I began studying theology, I came to suspect that if a theologian had approached Jesus and said, "Teacher, this is what we've concluded about you," then read him the Nicene Creed, Jesus wouldn't have recognized himself.** That is to say, the eventual assertions the church made about Jesus were not assertions Jesus would have made about himself.

**Indeed, I would go so far as to say that two thousand years after the life of Jesus, there are now two Jesus's—one Jesus is the Jesus Christ of the church and the creeds, the Second Person of the Trinity, created and formulated, one could even say *invented*, by a church whose chief desire was to elevate its central figure to the status of God, consequently elevating itself to the same divine status and power.**

Incidentally, there is no way you can be like the Jesus the creeds describe. Don't even try. His nature is entirely different from ours.

**The other Jesus is the Jesus of the gospels, the Jesus of Nazareth—a first-century Jewish teacher whose awareness of the Divine Presence within him was so keen, and his response to the Divine Presence so full, that he was empowered to live and love so powerfully that those who encountered him were often made whole themselves and more fully equipped to say “Yes” to that same Divine Presence that was also in them.** (Repeat) That Jesus, you can be like. You can be like him. You can be like him when you say “Yes” to the Divine Presence that is in you.

Here's the problem: For the past two thousand years, the church has tried to make us believe in the Jesus of the creeds. **But there is scant historical evidence that Jesus would even have recognized himself in those creeds.** Nevertheless, we were told that to be Christian was to believe those creedal statements about Jesus. That's what creeds do. They erect a wall of words around someone or something and say, “If you're going to be inside the Christian house with us, if you're going to be one of us, you must believe these words about Jesus.”

When the church fathers wrote the creeds, they had three objectives in mind: authority, conformity, and control. If you believe the Christian life is all about authority, conformity, and control, then you'll love the creeds. **But if you believe the goal of the Christian life is to respond as fully as we can to the Divine Presence within us, just as Jesus did, then creeds are superfluous.** You can live all your life without them and be just fine.

Creeds can point to the Divine Presence, they can hint at it, but they aren't the Divine Presence. So it is entirely possible to say "Yes" to the creeds about Jesus, and still not live in the power in which he lived. And what was that power? **It was the power of one who followed the Divine Presence in himself, which is also in you, and his commitment to follow it as lovingly and devotedly and thoroughly as he could.** When he did that, lives were transformed. And when you do that, your life will be transformed, too.

I grew up wanting to be just like my brother Glenn. Eventually, I was content to be myself. I'm glad Glenn is Glenn. I love my brother. He's a wonderful man. But now I'm glad to be Phil.

When I began to seriously engage the Christian faith, I wanted to be just like Jesus. But the only Jesus I knew was the Jesus of the creeds, which the church assured me was the authentic Jesus. **I found no life or power in that Jesus.** I found only abstract, theological formulas which were so disconnected from the Jesus of the gospels they had lost their meaning.

But when I began to understand Jesus as one who went about saying “Yes” to the Divine Presence wherever he encountered it, whether in himself or in others, I began to see that same possibility for myself.

Do you believe the Divine Presence is in you, just as it was in Jesus?

**Instead of living in discouragement, never measuring up, always falling short, and missing the mark, we too can say “Yes” to the Divine Presence, whether in ourselves or in others, and as we do that, our lives, and the lives of others, will be transformed.** God’s joy will be in us, and our joy will be full.