

We all know someone who's a walking catchphrase waiting to happen; they relish that moment when they can slip in to a conversation their favorite overused movie line. As one pundit put it: "A sign of how much a movie contributes to the public psyche can be determined by the quotes it generates." You've probably used one or two yourself! I know I'm guilty. A few of the most overused quotes and their origins are:

I'll be back — Schwarzenegger, *The Terminator*

May the force be with you — *Star Wars*

Heeeeere's Johnnie! — Nicholson, *The Shining*

Hasta la vista, baby! — again, *The Terminator*

You're gonna need a bigger boat — *Jaws*

Go ahead, make my day — Eastwood, *Dirty Harry* series

Toto, I've a feeling we're not in Kansas anymore — Judy Garland, *The Wizard of Oz*

Houston, we've got a problem — Tom Hanks, *Apollo 13*

There are others, of course — "Run, Forrest, run!" "If you build it, he will come," "We've got company," and many, many more. But, at a screenwriters' conference, one phrase was considered the top catchall, overused line in current cinema, occurring in over 102 films: "You just don't get, do you?"

It's a phrase that grates on the ear — your son or daughter flings it at you as he or she stomps out of the room; a couple might use it to verbally slap

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the other as they avoid dealing with feelings and emotions in their relationships; a frustrated colleague may utter it in a meeting as the argument begins...

If John the gospel writer was a modern screenwriter, he might have had Jesus saying this to the crowds. "You just don't get it, do you?" when I say, "I am the Bread of life..." "You just don't get it, do you?" when I say, "Who ever eats this bread will have eternal life..." "You just don't get it, do you?"

when I say, “No one can come to me unless drawn by the Father who sent me...”

At least, that’s what we might expect to hear. But, Jesus doesn’t say this. He knows what a conversation-stopper this line is. He doesn’t pick the argument, nor does He try to end the relationship. I daresay that’s it’s fully the opposite — With every person and group He encounters Jesus is interested in initiating a dialogue that can lead to a faith that is the beginning of a relationship with God.

And, that’s where our expectations disconnect. Like I said, we expect Jesus to become exasperated to the point that He throws down the gauntleted catchphrase. We expect Him to become angry enough to call down from heaven fire and brimstone. That’s what we expect because that could well be what we would do. Yet, that’s not what Jesus does.

Now, before I go further, somebody’s gonna be thinking, “Kim, what about Jesus overturning the tables in the Temple? And, what about His rebuke of

Peter? And, what about God in the Old Testament destroying Sodom and Gomorrah, of the Flood, of the droughts and famine, the invasions and exiles, the wars and pestilence which the Hebrews experienced?” I’m not saying God Himself, nor Jesus, doesn’t get angry. But, here, when from a human point of view, one would expect anger and argument, Jesus gives us something else.

And, therein lies part of our confusion. Jesus is being pursued by the crowd which, having been fed with a multitude of loaves and fishes, now seeks avidly after another free meal. Cloaked under the pious demand for a “sign” — the crowd addresses Jesus with a none-too-subtle reminder of the manna which fed the ancient Israelites in the wilderness. Jesus’ response is, as I said, not what they expect, but it also gets the Judeans, those Jews who opposed Jesus and his message, to murmuring.

Which brings us to another expectation disconnect: the Jews of Jesus’ time argue that Jesus is fully human (which He is), “Is this not Jesus, the son whose father and mother we have known?” Surprised, we have a hard time reconciling our religious expectations and the Gospel message that Jesus

reconciling our religious expectations and the Gospel message that Jesus brings. Our expectation is that earthly things are separate from those heavenly. You see, for those Jews then, this carpenter whose family they had known for many years couldn't possibly be from God. To admit such would be to bring the earthly and the heavenly into absurd proximity. And that might pose an obstacle to faithfulness in even our lives today.

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Let me illustrate: Theologians point out that we are extraordinarily reluctant to consider that the church, an earthly and fallen (read: sinful) institution would at the same time be a divine reality, the body of Christ. How many times do we hear people say they believe in God while simultaneously rejecting the church because it's an all-too-human institution? Even some in the church have a strong tendency to treat the church as just another business — selling a product, or providing a service — social services and counseling, rather than a human institution with a divine vocation to proclaim the Gospel and to reflect, in word and deed, the reality of God's Kingdom in the world. Dr. Mark Achtemeier notes that, "Genuine Christian discipleship is never as marketable as the more self-serving alternatives. Failure to see that God has assumed human flesh and made His home among sinners may lead us, as it does the Jews in our passage, to reject Christ as the center of our religious life."

On the flip side, this coming together of heaven and earth plays havoc with our desire for religion to be "otherworldly" — and hence sufficiently vague as not to make too many demands on us! Our democratic instincts incline us toward a God who is universally accessible through natural endowments like reason and religious experience. Such a religion gives everyone a "fair" say in who God is and what God requires. Such a god is highly likely to say things a majority of "religious" folk want to hear.

And here lies the scandal — how can God and eternal life be given through this one particular carpenter and his (frequently offensive) teachings? No

one has seen the Father except the One who is from God; and everyone who hears and learns from God comes to Jesus... So, no more is the path to salvation a matter of indeterminate speculation. Confronted by Jesus, we cannot hide behind vagaries of divided religious opinion. "Whoever believes has eternal life." Jesus' claim is that the religious question is no longer an open one.

Scandalous as this is in this day and time, it is also an astonishing gift of grace: God has come to us by taking on human flesh, and in so doing, opened up the path to eternal life. No longer are we doomed to stumble blindly amidst a din of conflicting claims and opinions about the shape of truth or the path to life, for we have heard Jesus' promise that whoever comes to him shall never hunger and whoever believes in him shall never thirst. No longer in the midst of trial do we need wonder whether life isn't controlled by blind forces hostile or indifferent to human existence — for in Jesus we have seen the heart of God! No longer need we stagger under the dead weight of mortality and sin, because the living bread which gives life to the world has appeared in our midst. All this because the divine and human have come together in Jesus Christ. So instead of confusion, instead of conflicting expectations, we can rejoice and give praise to God and Jesus His Son.

Let us pray: Holy and mighty God, we do give You praise and honor and blessing. You have come to us as a child, as one of human flesh and blood, yet mysteriously remaining fully divine. You invite us into relationship with You through Jesus, whom we know and call Lord. You call

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us to live in and work for Your Kingdom where Your grace, mercy, and love abounds. Let us respond to Your invitation and call. Let us be Your hands and feet and tongues to serve Your people, to go where You send, and to speak Your words of eternal life. We pray this in the name that is above all names, Jesus the Christ. Amen.

