

**One Plus One is...?**  
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There was a survey done a few years ago which determined that most folks who call themselves Christians consider themselves to be “Golden Rule Christians.” A Golden Rule Christian is someone who does their best to follow the golden rule as *the primary expression* of their faith. In other words, most folks who identify themselves as Christians—at least to survey providers—think that the essence of Christian faith is to do unto others as you would have them do unto you. Now, don’t get me wrong: I think the Golden Rule is a great rule. If more people followed it, we would no doubt be better off for it.

However, I think the fact that so many self-professed Christians center their faith on one small piece of ethics—even a solid one like the Golden Rule—well, I think that is a little sad. I think they have missed the boat as to what is really essential to our faith. Because it seems to me that our faith should be centered on our relationship with God. Otherwise, a church could be an ethical society or a Rotary Club where God isn’t especially necessary. And we are not those things. We are a church, and God is right in the middle of everything we do.

Recently I read *The Heart of Christianity* by the famous historical Jesus scholar and popular author Marcus Borg. He listed five characteristics of Christ from a perspective which did not depend on faith. These would have been obvious to *anyone* who encountered him in person, not just a Christian. Guess what topped the list? Jewish mystic.<sup>1</sup> That surprised and delighted me; Jesus was a mystic—first and foremost. Not an ethics professor, not the bringer of the Golden Rule, but a mystic.

OK—so what? Why does that matter to us, and what does that have to do with the passage we have just heard from John’s Gospel? There are two lines which leap out at me from this morning’s reading. First Jesus says “My sheep hear my voice. I know them, *and they follow me.*”<sup>2</sup> Now, here you may be wondering “so what,” again. Jesus says follow me all the time. He said it when he called the first disciples, he kept saying on the road to Jerusalem, he calls us to follow him all the time...and that is exactly the point! By “follow me,” Jesus doesn’t *just* mean to believe in him, although he clearly means that and repeats that a lot, too. But, at its fullest to follow Jesus

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<sup>1</sup> *The Heart of Christianity: Rediscovering a Life of Faith*, Marcus Borg (Harper Collins: New York, 2003), page 89, and onwards.

<sup>2</sup> John 10:27.

is to be like Jesus and to do what Jesus does. And Jesus is inviting us to follow him to a very specific and unusual place in this morning's reading, which brings me to the other line to really get my attention: (T)he Father and I are one."<sup>3</sup>

I believe that this morning's reading is an invitation for us to follow Christ into a relationship with God in which we and God merge. And that's the mysticism piece that Borg mentioned. That is how mystical traditions have worked in every religious setting throughout time. Mysticism is the practice of merging humanity and God into one—the freaky math of one plus one equals one. The place where we can't figure out where our breathing and God's Spirit begin or end, because they flow into one another. The place where any and all borders between God and our selves melt away and we are just...together, abiding in one another.

Now, I know that this may be a challenging perspective for many believers. We more often choose to revere Jesus as someone to strive toward being *like*, without being convinced that it will actually work out. More often than not we set Jesus on a pedestal so far above us that we forget that he is also human. And his humanity assures us that we other humans, too, are bound up in the work of salvation, and abiding in God's presence intimately. Jesus says as much "Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do *the works* that I do and, in fact, will do *greater works than these*, because I am going to the Father."<sup>4</sup> And there, very plainly our belief in Christ and our *work* in Christ are intimately connected, but we are also commended to carry on and even *build* upon Christ's work in the world. We are called to do *greater works* than Jesus; and that's a commission for all of us to pursue the same mystical relationship with God which Jesus has.

We need to pray together ...a lot. We need to abide in God's presence together and alone...a lot. That was the core of Christ's spiritual life, and from that mystical intimacy with God, everything else followed. By kindling the love of God first and foremost, we will also kindle our love of others, which leads to social action and changing the world, and living the Golden Rule out of every pore of our being.

We are a church, and God is in the middle of everything we do. We need to center our shared life in God. We need to pool our talents and resources to find thousands of ways to abide in God's love. The rest will follow.

Amen.

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<sup>3</sup> John 10:30.

<sup>4</sup> John 14:12.



**John 10:22-30**

<sup>22</sup>At that time the festival of the Dedication took place in Jerusalem. It was winter, <sup>23</sup>and Jesus was walking in the temple, in the portico of Solomon. <sup>24</sup>So the Jews gathered around him and said to him, “How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly.”

<sup>25</sup>Jesus answered, “I have told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in my Father’s name testify to me; <sup>26</sup>but you do not believe, because you do not belong to my sheep. <sup>27</sup>My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me. <sup>28</sup>I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one will snatch them out of my hand. <sup>29</sup>What my Father has given me is greater than all else, and no one can snatch it out of the Father’s hand. <sup>30</sup>The Father and I are one.”