

(Additional responses posted in the online version of the article)

God refuses to be God without us

by *William H. Willimon* (Duke Divinity School)

November 4, 2011

We asked God to say something definite and God, getting personal, sent Jesus Christ. We were surprised. God was other than we imagined. We can't make God into whatever we please. Jesus demonstrated that God is better than omnipotent, omniscient or any other high-sounding abstraction. God is love embodied: nonviolent, relentlessly seeking, convening, suffering love. Human happiness is life lived in response to the God we've got. It's good news: Because God really was in Jesus Christ, reconciling the world to God, we can be with God.

God is love: This is no joke

by *Kathleen Norris* (author)

October 26, 2011

We use flippancy and irony (see above) to shield ourselves from feeling. We relegate love to the realm of the romantic and sentimental, and dismiss it. But gospel love brings us to our senses. The love epitomized in Jesus Christ is serious and demanding, merciful and not judgmental. It is life-giving and self-sacrificing. It is love that sees and tells the truth, whatever the cost. In Jesus we find the love of God.

To dwell in possibility

by *Stephanie Paulsell* (Harvard Divinity School)

November 1, 2011

When my daughter was confirmed in the Christian faith last spring, I gave her Emily Dickinson's poem, "I dwell in Possibility." I wanted her to remember that, in God's house-- "More numerous of Windows--/Superior--for Doors"--there is room to turn and be changed, to choose mercy over revenge, to give away everything we have and follow Jesus. Within God's possibility, even death is not the last thing to be said about us.

Wisdom become flesh, spirit roars, life transformed

by *Leo D. Lefebure* (Georgetown)

December 23, 2011

God's all-encompassing love enters the world in the person of Jesus Christ, through the power of the Spirit. This love heals and forgives us, renews the cosmos and calls us to a conversion from sinful attitudes and practices to share in the divine life. In Jesus Christ God gives the gift of Godself, offering light amidst darkness and inviting a response of faith, hope and love. The Spirit comes to dwell in our hearts, empowering our response.

God enters history; renewed covenants promise salvation

by *Max L. Stackhouse* (author)

December 20, 2011

Jesus Christ revitalizes, personalizes and universalizes God's covenants with the people of Israel. He calls us now to form communities of witness, commitment and service, to resist the powers of evil and to become agents of God's grace. God in Christ sends the Spirit, empowering us to enter every sphere of the common life and to make it an instrument of loving relations and just institutions throughout the world—even beyond the existence we now know.

Everybody gets to grow and change

by ***Lillian Daniel*** (pastor, author)

November 11, 2011

But not everyone *will* grow and change. On many days, I'm the fly struggling and stuck to the kitchen counter, in a spot of jelly that seemed like the ideal sweet landing spot at the time. It'll take a miracle to get me unstuck. By following Jesus, I join a long line of sinners who want, but do not deserve, much more out of life than the sum of our own actions. By ignoring him, I'm stuck in my own results.

Once dead. Now alive. Christ reshaping people.

by ***Peter W. Marty*** (pastor, publisher of *Christian Century*)

January 12, 2012

A common tendency among believers is to think of Jesus Christ in the past tense. He's the guy we study in the Bible that some taxidermist must have mounted on a wall, much like that elk head above the cabin fireplace. He is present, and his eyes follow us around the room, but he is not really alive and active in our lives or in the world. Nothing could be further from the gospel.

Christ offers new life for all

by ***Grant Wacker*** (author)

January 4, 2012

The gospel is the good news that Christ's death and resurrection—mediated through scripture, tradition, and the sacraments of the church—offers new life for all who embrace it. It requires repentance for sin inherited and sins committed. It provides the ability to love God, other people and the created orders of society and culture and nature. The gospel manifests itself in song, worship, justice, peace and joy, both now and in the world to come.