

Christlike Man, A Walking Reminder

By Jack Bray, Guest columnist Published Thursday,
March 20, 2008 5:34 PM

When I first saw him, I thought I was seeing things.

"Please tell me," I half-jokingly whispered to my friends,
"Jesus has not suddenly appeared in our midst."

Well, it wasn't a vision, but a wonderful surprise and a nice story for Lent. This guy was not some unkempt, street-corner raving prophet that I saw when I lived in New York. His name is Carl James Joseph (call him James) and he was barefoot, clean and clutching a Bible in one hand while holding a clean white blanket over his shoulder with the other. He was wearing a long, clean, white robe and had flowing hair with a full beard. He looked exactly — and I mean, exactly — like Jesus Christ as he is typically depicted.

What to make of this guy? I found out when I interviewed him that he's not a local looney tune. He takes no money. He has, however, accepted the kindness of strangers who offer food, lodging and sometimes travel. He's intelligent, soft-spoken, sincere and unassuming. He lives in complete trust that the Lord will provide. Oh, yeah, he's the real deal.

For me, the burning question was "why?" Why, in the name of God, is he doing this?

Well, obviously, he's doing it in the name of God.

It all started when he was a teenager in Toledo, Ohio. He felt "drawn to saints such as Francis of Assisi and the way they lived." (In religious circles this is the "call to holiness."). So, one day he did it. He bought a long white robe, blanket and Bible and took off, with no shoes and no money. Hard to imagine.

He has been to 13 countries and 47 states (including Florida) while walking barefoot. Early on, he discovered that his likeness had a great impact on those he met.



[Special to the Times]
For nearly 17 years, Carl James Joseph has lived his life as Jesus told his disciples to.

It was in Hazelton, Pa., where he walked in those first months, that his Christlike appearance caused an "explosion of publicity," as he put it. It was then that he realized his mission was more than just living the life. It was sharing the faith with others who came to him because of who he resembled.

The crowd he drew attracted some reporters, who filed a story on the Associated Press wire that was picked up by news outlets, and the rest, as they say, is history.

Some history. He's been on *20/20*, in *Time* magazine, the *Wall Street Journal*, numerous other newspapers, and is the subject of a new documentary film.

Now, because he wanted to visit St. Bernard Abbey, he's staying here in Cullman, Ala., where I live now. Lucky for me.

James is a walking reminder that life is simple if lived simply. God doesn't expect us to emulate James by getting rid of all our possessions and leaving home as barefoot apostles. Of course not. But as James will tell you, God expects us to keep our priorities in order, to remember what's important in life. It's really that simple.

None of us can possibly imagine how he felt as he walked down the road on that memorable day almost 17 years ago. He told me that he trusted the Lord to provide and he's "never been disappointed."

"I knew," he said, "that God would be my food, my drink, my strength."

For more about this strange yet inspiring man, visit www.thejesusguy.com. If and when you ever see him, you'll agree he really does look like the image of Christ. Yet he thinks each of us really looks like Christ.

Aha! There it is. If we see Christ in each other, then Christ is in our midst.

Jack Bray is a former resident of Dunedin. Guest columnists write their own views on subjects they choose, and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of this newspaper.