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Jesus Guy, The (2007)





Director: [Sean Tracey](#),
Starring:
Length: 67 minutes
Rated: NR

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Walk the Earth

by [Warren Curry](#)
reviewed: 2008-01-13

Anyone who walks around the country barefoot, wearing nothing but a robe, preaching the word of the Bible to those he meets on his travels is destined to arouse suspicion. Sean Tracey's documentary, "The Jesus Guy," is about the journey of an enigmatic individual who has essentially forsaken his own identity in the name of what he believes is much a larger cause. He rejects anything in the form of financial help, only accepts aid (like food or a bed to sleep in) when it is offered and, confusingly, goes by the name "What's Your Name?" National media coverage (he's appeared on "20/20") has made him something of a minor cult figure. Predictably, he has as many opponents as advocates.

Aside from its captivating subject, "The Jesus Guy" is most memorable for the impressively even handed approach of its director. Tracey takes a completely non-judgmental view of his subject, content to unobtrusively observe and let the story tell itself. What at first glance looks like little more than a novelty piece turns out to be a challenging profile of a confounding individual. It's difficult to leave the film with any sort of definitive opinion about this person, which is why it sticks so well.

The documentary covers a period What's Your Name? spent on the east coast of the United States. If you can get past the initial reaction to his appearance, this man proves himself to be humble, articulate and likeable. He exudes a calm and warmth that might make the intensely skeptical at least willing to converse with him. Only once do we see him get agitated, when he fields an insulting question from a student at a Catholic school. He's even remarkably patient when one town's local police try to make his stay in their jurisdiction brief and uncomfortable.

Interviews with two women who have taken What's Your Name? into their home for extended periods reveal that he's reticent to forge close ties with others. One woman laments that he simply disappeared one day without a word after accepting her generosity for several months. She also re-iterates that he's a person who staunchly refuses to ask for help, more than willing to suffer than openly seek assistance.

On one hand, it's easy to respect this man for leading a lifestyle that's beyond selfless. As far as we can glean from this documentary, he harbors no ulterior motives for his actions. And obviously, it's not hard to understand why his presence is troubling to many, and he has run into opposition from religious organizations. Perhaps one important distinction to make is that he doesn't believe he's Jesus, but is rather attempting to live like Christ. It doesn't seem possible, however, for our naturally cynical culture to accept that what you see is maybe simply what you get with this man, which isn't to imply that taking a critical

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see is maybe simply what you get with this man -- which isn't to imply that taking a critical position is a bad thing. Our cynicism isn't unfounded, after all.

Sean Tracey explores this figure about as closely as one can expect given his secrecy (even an unexpected reunion with his father late in the movie doesn't clear things up much). And it's this inability to entirely comprehend who this man is that plays such a big role in making the "The Jesus Guy" so perplexing and, ultimately, rewarding.

Warren Curry

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