

Clearview Home Annual Gathering

Sunday, September 27, 2020

VIA ZOOM

*How do early followers of Jesus
speak to us today?*

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I'm so happy to be with you today. Please feel my virtual hug and welcome to everyone. We're talking about the early followers of Jesus and how their experiences may inspire us today.

Something happened in my upbringing or Sunday School experience that inspired me to want to be a follower of Jesus. I loved learning about Jesus, and I spent a while thinking about his teachings from the Sermon on the Mount and from his parables.

But the day came when I wasn't so sure I wanted to follow Jesus anymore.

- I'll tell you why in just a moment, but let's just get a feel for where we all are together, let's see how many of you at this moment, feel like you would want to follow Jesus better if you could or knew how? Let's see a show of hands.
- And for another show of hands: How many of you aren't really sure what it means—or even know how to answer the question, "Do I want to follow Jesus?"
- How many of you are pretty sure there was a time when you didn't want to?

I don't think it's an easy question to answer, because there are so many variables in it, and we have so many different life experiences.

I'll start with my story and then we'll move to Bible times—to help you think how your own stories fit in.

Here's what happened to my relationship to Jesus. This was when my high school daughter was going through a very rough time socially and emotionally. She decided to join a mutual depression society. All of her so-called friends were depressed. In fact, the more depressed they were, the more attention and pity they got from each other.

In my daughter's case, they all concluded that it was her mother and her mother's religion that made everything wrong. She ended up locking me out of her room—and her life. Until this time in her junior year in high school, she had been an honors student, and now she couldn't even get out of bed to go to school anymore.

I had been praying—praying with my whole heart, and I remember the day when I determined I was going to find the answer from God. I looked in the Bible for anything I could find about daughters and mothers. If any of you have looked this up yourself, you probably found what I did—there was very little there. In fact, there was not much about women at all.



I had been praying—praying with my whole heart, and I remember the day when I determined I was going to find the answer from God.

It didn't take long to find the passage in Matthew, chapter 10, where Jesus—my model and hero—said: (verse 34-36)¹

"Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to set...a daughter against her mother, and one's foes will be members of one's own household."

Wow! I couldn't believe that's what I was reading. At a time like this?? I read it again. Jesus couldn't possibly be saying that. But that's exactly what it said.

I was done with the Bible.

I threw my Bible across the room and decided I was no follower of Jesus! This was not what I was looking for. Mothers and daughters should have a loving relationship. Besides, I started to wonder why was I looking for guidance in such an ancient book anyway, when I needed answers right away for a modern situation.

In my frustration, though, I went and picked up the Bible again, just to read a little further and to see if there was any way Jesus could get off the hook with that one. Within a couple of more verses, I saw this:

"...and whoever does not take up the cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Those who find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it" (Matthew 10:38-39).

All that time I had wanted to follow Jesus, I had never really paid any attention to that call to take up my cross! And now I really had to think about it. Something serious was going to change in me.

At that moment I caught a glimpse of what I saw happening with Jesus' disciples, and this would become a major theme in my life from then on. It seems with each of the lessons they were learning from Jesus, they would have to make some kind of adjustment. Re-thinking things, getting over fears, changing their views about their way of life, finding new meaning with the kingdom of God. All this took *adjustment*.

This was no theory. No textbook learning. They had to put it into practice, to live it with their whole hearts. They absolutely had to *advance* forward with every new spiritual lesson.

So my new definition of a disciple became one who **ADJUSTS** and **ADVANCES**.

I was conscious that I was in a moment of decision. Was I really going to find some way to adjust to a new and spiritual idea? Was I willing to take action and advance? Or would I argue against this and keep on defending my position? Would I make the change, or would I keep waiting for everybody else to change?

Things had not gone as I had expected for my daughter. Here, my fun-loving, beautiful, intelligent daughter had been swallowed up by darkness.

Was I willing to *adjust* and *advance* at a time like this? What cross did I need to take up? I was willing to do anything at this point. What did I need to do? The answer was right there. Jesus said, "...I have not come to bring peace, but a sword" (Matthew 10:34).

I could feel my rebellion and thought carefully about what this meant. Suddenly I saw it: We were not going to make peace with this evil.

And now I was being called upon to use this sword myself—to sever my own clinging to all fleshly longing. To cut off, completely sever my relationship to an offspring born into mortal, flawed matter. She needed more than that. I wasn't helping by clinging to her for myself. Now it was time for me to sever the longing for a beautiful mortal to love *me*. That's a self-serving relationship, not love. This was a painful moment. The cross was plainly right in front of me.

It was time for *me* to make a big adjustment. Would I pick it up, or resist it?

I tried to envision how I really would take up this sword and annihilate my frantic human will, my desperate longing. It was a moment of a big decision for me.

When put in those terms, I could agree I wanted my daughter to be *loved* more

than my possessing her for selfish reasons. So, with all my heart, I turned her over to God. I wanted her true Mother-Father, who created her as the image of God, to guide her and care for her more than my personal plans or wishes. I knew this Mother-Father loved her unconditionally. This was the Mother she needed.

Just as I was making this disciple-like **ADJUSTMENT**, my daughter called me by phone from her bedroom. She asked me to come to her room and pray for her. You can imagine my humble gratitude to God.

Now it was time for me to **ADVANCE**.

That is, I had to be willing to live differently and move forward. I was not praying to go back the way it was before, but to advance in a new way. For us, this sweet healing came to pass within the week. She finally returned to school and caught up with all her work. We've been close and dear friends since that time. But she is still God's daughter in my mind, and we share a relationship of sisters-in-Christ.



So my new definition of a disciple became one who **ADJUSTS and **ADVANCES**.**

Now the life of the disciples made so much more sense for me. They were modeling for me what it meant to “adjust and advance.” Jesus—or Christ—was always there, instructing them to repent, to change, and then to move forward.

The big test for them, of course, came just after Jesus’ crucifixion. Nothing went the way they expected.

Jesus had taught the coming of the new kingdom, which was about to come. But not only did the Roman empire continue to oppress, but now the Roman soldiers actually killed their leader! This was the exact opposite of their hopes and expectations.

As a side bar, I want to just pause here a little bit with some biblical history. There are parts in the Bible that certainly imply that the Jews had Jesus killed, and that Pilate was basically an innocent bystander. But that’s very misleading, and we need to be clear that those verses were written much later, and at a time generations later, when the new Jesus followers wanted to separate themselves from their Jewish origins. They did so by shifting the blame for Jesus’ crucifixion to their own people who didn’t ‘get’ what Jesus meant.

But at the time of Jesus’ crucifixion, there was no organized Christian group. Jesus was a Jew his whole life. He never became what was later called ‘a Christian,’ because there weren’t any during his lifetime. His crucifixion—and the fear of the disciples having it happen to them—was during the period when Romans were methodically crucifying Jews. Thousands at a time.

All of Jesus’ followers were Jews, too. They were devastated that this new vision of an enlightened form of Jewish thinking had been so abruptly silenced.

We’re not having to deal with Roman invasions

and mass crucifixions today. But we can probably empathize with the feeling that things weren’t going the way they had expected. I think we could safely say that trying to figure out life during a pandemic was not the plan we had made for 2020!

Let’s stop and ask a couple of questions here, too.

- How many of you had made big plans for something in 2020 that did not happen? I don’t think any of us could say that 2020 did not go according to plan.
- I heard many news organizations repeat the refrain: we don’t have any blueprint plans for how to deal with such a pandemic. How many of you found dramatic challenges to the way things are done in your own vocation—whether you are or were in business, the service industry, travel, education, entertainment?

Jesus left no instructions on how they were supposed to carry on after he was gone. Needless to say, they were crushed. But it was more than that. It was a truly scary time, because they knew they were targets for persecution just as Jesus had been.


The Gospels of the Bible

All of the Gospels tell us some unique perspective on the way the disciples ended up dealing with Jesus’ departure. Each one sheds just a little more light on how they adjusted and advanced. Let’s take a look.

The Gospel of Mark

We’ll start with the Gospel of Mark, since this is considered by almost all scholars to be the earliest one written.

Interestingly, most modern Bibles indicate that the Gospel actually ends at verse 8 of chapter 16 (instead of verse 20). Scholars generally agree that the last 12



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verses were added on much later. Whoever made the addition probably wanted to make it have a happier ending. As it stands, the real Gospel of Mark, ending with verse 8, tells of the young man at the tomb explaining to Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome that Jesus was raised. He wasn't there. Go tell the disciples that he's going before them to Galilee, he told the women. Verse 8 says: "So they went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid."

That's actually the end of the Gospel of Mark, and remember this was the first gospel written.

So, where's the resurrection? What happened?

The best answer I've heard is that there was a custom during this time that the inscription on a tomb was the means for staying connected with the dead. But here in this case, the body was gone, which signified the loss of any connection with him. That's what was horrifying to them.

So *this* Gospel, the first ending of Mark, was written to resurrect the memory of Jesus.

It was a direct response to the Roman purpose of crucifixion, which was specifically designed to shame and destroy the memory of someone.

The agony of the empty tomb was even further fulfillment of Roman interests—to force his followers to completely lose track of him.

No wonder these women were frightened and upset. No wonder they chose not to tell anyone of this further effort to destroy the memory of Jesus.

The purpose of the gospel written by Mark was to make a memorial for Jesus. To resurrect the memory of Jesus. Mary Baker Eddy astutely noted that "Those who slew him to stay his influence perpetuated and extended it" (*Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures*, p. 43).

In the Gospel of Mark, Jesus' followers—women and men—had to *adjust* to finding a solution to the Roman acts of shaming and destroying the memory of Jesus. And of course, the *advancement* took place when someone wrote his story as a memorial.

Now, what about the second ending of the Gospel of Mark? It has a very different message. This one completely reverses the struggle facing the disciples. Now the focus turns to believing in the completeness of Jesus' mission.

Those who believe it will have the authority of healing and preaching. In this second ending, Jesus had appeared this time to Mary alone who is *not* frightened. Then he appears to two others in "another form" (verse 12); but the focus here is on recognizing the authority given to those who believe. This is what enables people to advance with the authority of healing and preaching.

The Gospel of Matthew

The author of the Gospel of Matthew probably drew on much of Mark and other sources to write his story. But he has yet another perspective on how the disciples would ADVANCE.

In his account, Mary Magdalene and the "other Mary" are found outside tomb when an earthquake rolls the stone. Then an angel speaks: I know you seek Jesus; he's not here; he's risen. Filled with joy, they run and tell the disciples. (See Matthew 28:6-8.) Matthew's message seems to be an encouragement for the safety and wisdom to advance. He promises he will be with them through anything. "I am with you always," he said, "to the end of the age." (See Matthew 28:18-20.)

The whole Gospel of Matthew is all about making disciples. He reminds them of this again at the end: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them... and teaching them to obey... Remember: I am with you always, to the end of the age."



The whole Gospel of Matthew is all about making disciples.

The Gospel of Luke

Then the Gospel of Luke also appears to have drawn on the same sources as Matthew. He probably read the Gospel of Mark and another source that Matthew used (because they say the same thing in some places). But even with these same sources, the author of this gospel brings us yet another perspective on how to deal with the adjustment of losing Jesus and finding the way to advance.

He also struggled with the meaning of the empty tomb. What does that mean? In his account, the women who had followed Jesus during the burial came back after the sabbath and found the stone already rolled away, and the body was gone. They were perplexed, but two men suddenly stood beside them, and then they were terrified. The men said, "He is not here, but has risen." (Luke 24:5).

So the women ran off to tell the men (unlike their actions in the Gospel of Mark). But when the men heard it, they thought it was an "idle tale." Later, two other men—not from the usual twelve—were walking toward Emmaus, about 7 miles from Jerusalem. (See Luke 24:13-32.) Their conversation was also on this subject. What do we make of the crucifixion of Jesus? He suddenly appears during this conversation and explains just what they needed to know. Jesus had already fulfilled the scriptures. And when this dawned on them, as the Gospel tells us, their hearts were burning. They felt within themselves the adjustment they weren't expecting.

Although they had dinner together, these two men scurried all the way back to Jerusalem later that night and told the 11 disciples all about it. And then suddenly Jesus appeared with all of them, back in Jerusalem—just when they were trying to adjust to what this meant.

Why are you doubting? he asks them. Why can't you believe that I have fulfilled all that is needed? (See Luke 24:38.)

Jesus asks them, what do you need for proof? It was

now clear what they needed in order to advance. They were ready to stop doubting the good that had already been accomplished.

The Gospel of John

And then, we have the Gospel of John, probably the latest of these four. It's another gospel that has two stories. There is no clear-cut consensus on how many authors wrote parts of the ending of this gospel. But there appear to be two or maybe even three different endings. They are interwoven—with obvious contradictions—kind of the way the early chapters of Genesis work. In the Gospel of John, the first two stories show Mary doing two opposite things.

In one story, Mary Magdalene comes alone, sees the empty tomb, and then runs to tell Peter and the other men. Then Peter and John enter the tomb. They also saw it empty.

But in the other story, Mary stays, standing outside the tomb and weeping. When she looked inside the tomb, she saw two angels who asked why she was weeping. When she turned around, a man asked her why she was weeping also. But he called her by name, Mary! And she recognized him as Jesus. Then he told her, "Don't touch me, because I haven't ascended to my Father yet." (See John 20:17.)

It was as if he was instructing her: "Don't touch me and try to feel who I am through your physical senses." LET ME GO, AND YOU WILL SEE HOW TO ADVANCE, YOURSELF.

Then, probably hearkening back to the first story in the Gospel of John, Jesus returns to meet up with *all* the disciples, and here he helps Thomas who is having a hard time adjusting to what has happened. Unlike what he told Mary, he instructs Thomas to "reach out your hand and put it in my side" (John 20: 27). He's helping Thomas make the adjustment *he* needs—which is to believe that Jesus' mission has not ended. Now *Thomas* is also ready to advance, to act on what he can believe.



**Things had not
turned out the way
they expected.**

Finally, the Gospel of John offers one more story. It tells a vivid account of adjusting and advancing. Some of Jesus' disciples had gathered on the beach and tried to figure out how to move on without him—a typical story by now.

Things had not turned out the way they expected. Peter's first suggestion for how to adjust was getting back to their fishing to make a living. Thomas, Nathanael, James, and John agreed. But after an unsuccessful night of fishing, Jesus appeared again, showing them a better way.

No doubt, this was part of the adjusting that was taking place for all of them.

It was *after* breakfast that the time for the complete adjustment and advancing was going to take place. Jesus approaches Peter, using his old name Simon. "Simon," he asks, "do you love me more than the others?" Peter sort of half-answers. "Yes, of course, you know I love you." "Then, OK," Jesus replies. "Take care of my lambs" (This is and the rest of the section is a paraphrase and interpretation of John 21:15-17.)

Peter stops to consider more deeply: "Have I really been willing to make that adjustment to caring for others above myself? Jesus doesn't sound like he's very convinced. So he asks me again. 'Simon, son of John, do you really love me?' This question is pressing pretty hard by now. Jesus has been crucified. He is not going to lead us anymore. I still have everyday life to lead."

And now, face-to-face with Jesus' second call to tend to his sheep instead of heading out to fish, "I know this is a life-changing question I'm dealing with. It's not just a change of vocation. It's an entirely different worldview.

"A battle is raging within me. If I love Jesus above everything else in my life, it means I love God with my whole being. It means I prefer helping others above any kind of selfish ambition. It means I get my approval from God, not the opinions of others. I trust God with all my heart, with my life.

"I answer Jesus bravely, 'Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.'

"Jesus answers again, 'Tend my sheep.'

"But—he asks me again, the third time, 'Simon, do you love me?' This time, the question stings. 'I can't do it. I'm not good enough, and I know it. I hear the pain each time I review why I denied *him* three times that awful night when they tried him. I denied that I knew *him*—three times. I can't bear my inadequacies. I can't do it! I start to turn. But here he is, right in front of me. Will I deny him again?'

"Suddenly I realize something. He's still with me, because he believes in me. He saw me when I was terrified during the storm. He knew I doubted when he told us to feed the multitude with only a little bread and fish. He knows I'm impetuous. But he wouldn't be here if he didn't believe in me.

"I've seen his humility and his love. I know I can be humble enough to admit I have what I need to truly love him, too—to admit I do not need to indulge in my own reactions. I am able to love because I have been loved.

"So, trying with all my might to look him straight in the eye, I answer: 'Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.' I am willing to make the adjustment you're asking me to make.

"He tells me again to feed his sheep.

"And now—now, I know I am ready to advance—to take the course of action he has asked of me."

Introduction to Extracanonial Texts

You may not be too familiar with them, but there are quite a few other gospels and other texts that address this question too. These are not in the Bible, but they add more information and living color to some of the stories we know better in the Bible. I'm going to focus on two of them this afternoon: The Gospel of Mary—which some of you may know. And the Letter of Peter to Philip—another extracanonial text, but one that is even less known than the Gospel of Mary.

It's likely that most of you are not too familiar with these other texts, so I want to share a little video with

you that introduces them in such a way that we can make use of them.

Video of Journey Through Forgotten Scriptures LINK:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-OMikIVS768>

Ok, so it's our turn to dig in to these ancient forgotten texts.

The Gospel of Mary²

Let's start with the Gospel of Mary. The story opens with Jesus and some disciples who are gathered and listening to some of Jesus' final teachings. The first six pages of the Gospel are missing, so it begins near the end of Jesus' teaching, and then he leaves. The remaining part of the Gospel shows that Mary is comforting the other disciples, because they're afraid of what's going to happen after Jesus has left them.

This scene, of course, is what has caught the attention of so many scholars and feminists. Here's Mary—a woman acting as not only one of the disciples, but actually the strongest of them. It's good to note here that the idea of "Twelve Disciples" is not a fixed set of people. Remember that Paul considered himself an apostle, and there were evidently lots of others who were followers of Jesus and became leaders in different ways. And Mary was not the only woman either.

At any rate, back to the story. After Jesus leaves them, the disciples get into an argument about why Jesus gave Mary special instructions about spiritual life. This is part of figuring out how to move forward without the authority of Jesus right there. And it boils down to how they dealt with their intense feelings at this point. Jesus' departure was not the plan!

The bulk of the story is how they wrestled with this *adjusting* part after Jesus left them, which they knew was for the last time. The text says:

"But they were distressed and wept greatly. How are we going to go out to the rest of the world to announce the good news about the kingdom of the Son of Man?" Other translations say "...announce

the good news about the reality of the child of True Humanity" (Gospel of Mary 5:1-2)?

The point is, they were really scared and didn't know how to proceed. They had good reason to be scared. The text goes on: "If they did not spare *him*, how will they spare us?" (5:3). That is, if the Romans would take *him*, how could his followers ever feel safe? Part of the reason they were drawn to Jesus in the first place was that he confronted the bullying of the Roman empire with a promise of another realm, another authority. But without him, what hope did they have?

Where do we go from there? Mary shows us a level of strength that can inspire us today. She stood up at this point and greeted each one tenderly, and said, "Brothers and sisters, do not weep, do not be distressed nor be in doubt. For his grace will be with you sheltering you. Rather we should praise his greatness, for he has united us and made us true Human beings" (5:4-8).

That last phrase is a little hard to translate: "made us true Human beings." One translator uses a capital H to designate a special kind of human being. We might think of it as a spiritual being, or perfect being, or an image and likeness of God. At any rate, Mary thinks that the gift from Jesus was his ability to awaken in them their true wholeness that wasn't subject to the abuse of the Roman oppression.

But this caused a stir. Peter asks her to tell them more about what Jesus had told her in private. But after hearing some of it, the men aren't so sure they like this wisdom coming from a woman. Andrew said, "I do not believe the Savior said these things, for indeed these teachings are strange ideas" (10:2). Peter agrees: "Did he speak with a woman in private without our knowing it? Did he choose her over us" (10:3, 4)?

Now, Mary begins to weep. "My brother, Peter, do you think I thought up these things by myself or that I'm telling lies about the Savior" (10:5,6)? Then Levi jumps in: "Peter, you've always been a wrathful person! If the Savior made her worthy, who are you to reject her" (7)?



Mary shows us a level of strength that can inspire us today.

There are hurt feelings everywhere, right when they're supposed to be figuring out how to move forward without Jesus there to guide them!

I think this is often the way adjustments take place. We bring out from the darkest corners the things we're most afraid of, the things we're most jealous of, the things that blind us to our worth and God-given purpose.

The same thing happens to the disciples at this point that had happened to me. I gave it all up to God. Levi saw the whole picture differently. He says, basically, who are we to dispute with the Savior that he made her worthy. "Rather, we should be ashamed. We should clothe ourselves with the perfect Human, acquire it for ourselves as he commanded us, and announce the good news" (10:11).

I love the way Levi found the alternative right from what Jesus had taught them. They were ready for the adjustment.

"Clothe ourselves with the perfect Human." What a vivid image of our adjusting in any situation. "Clothing ourselves" implies a complete willingness to present to the world an entirely different image. In fact, we are clothing ourselves with the perfect Human. Where do we find this perfect Human? Jesus had just explained to Mary, as she conveyed it to them, that in the struggles with forces of opposition, you can say to the enemy, "You do not really see me, nor do you know me. You mistake the garment I wear for my true self. And you cannot recognize me" (9:4-6).

The garment of our true selves refers to our original roots in God's realm. This garment keeps us protected from the tactics of our enemies. And we have all we need to proceed, as long as we remain in this garment of our true selves.

What I love about this story of Mary is the way these disciples—who had just spent three years right with Jesus—still struggled with fear, doubt, and jealousy. And yet when things got tough, and didn't go as they expected, they had what they needed.

They knew how to clothe themselves with the perfect Human. It was the same kind of adjustment I needed to make when I had to let go of all my human will, pride, and fear regarding my daughter. I knew what to do, and I had what I needed to do it.



What I love about this story of Mary is the way these disciples—who had just spent three years right with Jesus—still struggled with fear, doubt, and jealousy. And yet when things got tough, and didn't go as they expected, they had what they needed.

So, do you know what this little band of Jesus followers ended up doing? What was their act of advancement? After Levi spoke, "they started going out to teach and to preach" (10:14).

The Letter of Peter to Philip³

Then there's one more story we ought to consider. Let's take a look at the Letter of Peter to Philip. This one is from the *Nag Hammadi Library*. The fact that there are so many stories about the disciples' struggles after Jesus left them just highlights the fact that this was a huge deal to his followers. It was such a shock.

Here's the backstory for this letter. Remember that this letter—along with all the other gospels we've read—were written much later than the events they're talking about. None of them are intended as accounts of history, but rather they're stories

focusing on learning something. Don't be confused by the conflicting historical accounts. Just listen to the message they're bringing us.

This text, the Letter of Peter to Philip, starts off in the form of an imaginary letter to Philip who had left the other disciples and branched out on his own. Peter and the other disciples were growing increasingly afraid of the situation with the Roman oppression, and the situation kept looking worse, instead of better.

So Peter wrote to Philip, begging him to come back and join them. It was imperative to stick together during this period of oppression. They gathered together at Mt. Olivet, where they used to be together with Jesus "when he was in the body."

And then this is the rest of the story. The letter isn't the point anymore. It's about how they deal with their dire situation.

First, they pray:

"Son, Christ of immortality, our Redeemer, Give us strength, because they are searching for us to kill us" (134).

And then a voice responds: "Why are you looking for me? I am Jesus Christ, who is *with you forever*" (134).

I'm going to paraphrase their response:

"Why are we stuck in this place of violence? How do we get out?" (134-135).

Paraphrasing Jesus' explanation for the cause of the violence: "The arrogant (false) god assigned powers to mold mortal bodies, misrepresenting the true God."

And Jesus guides them: "You are detained in this situation because you are mine. When you strip yourselves of what is corruptible, you will become luminaries in the midst of mortal people" (137).

Then they ask: "How do we fight against these rulers over us?"

The voice replies: "These rulers fight against the inner person. You must fight against them like this: come together and teach salvation in the world with a promise (137) ...Don't be afraid. I am with you forever, as I already said to you when I was in the body" (138).

What?! Fight back against the rulers who attack the inner person, by coming together and teaching salvation? Yes, they got that right.

The voice returns: "I often told you that you must suffer. You must be brought to synagogues and governors so that you will suffer" (138).

That's a rather tough message to hear! It reminds me of the way I heard Jesus say he was coming to bring a sword to my family, not peace! But now we can see that these darkest moments create the place where the adjustment takes place. They have heard Jesus telling them to go forward, to fight to protect their inner selves, so that they could provide light for the world.

But wow! I don't think I've ever heard this message preached in churches, in self-help books, or even among friends! What to do in the face of violence? Jesus' response to their prayers is that the cause of the violence and injustice was not going away any time soon. But his followers are to not be afraid. They are instructed to come together, teach salvation, and heal.

Their true mission is to make the world a better place. It would be worth the sacrifices.



It was imperative to stick together.

This is the hard part, but also the encouraging part, because it rings true. Jesus never promised we would gain utopia by being his followers.

He gave us what we need to confront the darkness, whatever form it presents to us. We need to do this for ourselves. And for our children. And our children's children. This is where the serious part of adjustment comes in. To be willing to give up our own plans, willfulness, fear, arrogance, and to let God's way work its blessing for everyone.

So, not surprisingly, as Jesus' followers made this huge adjustment to their own plans to hide, escape, or overpower their enemies, the story continues this way:

"...the apostles rejoiced greatly and went up to ... the temple and taught salvation in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and they healed a crowd" (139).

They boldly stepped forward and advanced to just where Jesus had guided them. I think it's extraordinary that by advancing out of their fear and gloom, they went with joy and *each one performed healings*. How did they do that? It seems to me they were showing us what true discipleship is about. They struggled, but succeeded in adjusting to a new way of seeing

life's purpose. Then they advanced just as Jesus had instructed them to do.

What an unusual way to respond to fear, violence, and injustice! To heal!

Conclusion

What's my take-away from these stories of Jesus-followers and the aftermath of Jesus' crucifixion? Things didn't go according to plan—or to *human* plans. But Jesus taught all they needed to know—and all we need to know—in order to take that sword and sever our longings with earthly pleasures. Jesus left for the world all we need, so that we are able to adjust in any way God calls us, and then we're free to advance in our calling. God is the light shining through. A true

follower of Jesus is *able* to adjust and advance *because* each one is so thoroughly and deeply loved by God.

¹Bible references are from the *New Revised Standard Version*

² King, Karen L., *The Gospel of Mary*, Santa Rosa, CA: Polebridge Press, 2003.

³Robinson, James, M. ed., *The Nag Hammadi Library in English*, San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1990, pp. 434-7. (The reference numbers refer to chapter numbers within the text.)

A video recording, including slides and visuals, of this talk may be found on our website.



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