

ECCLESIA

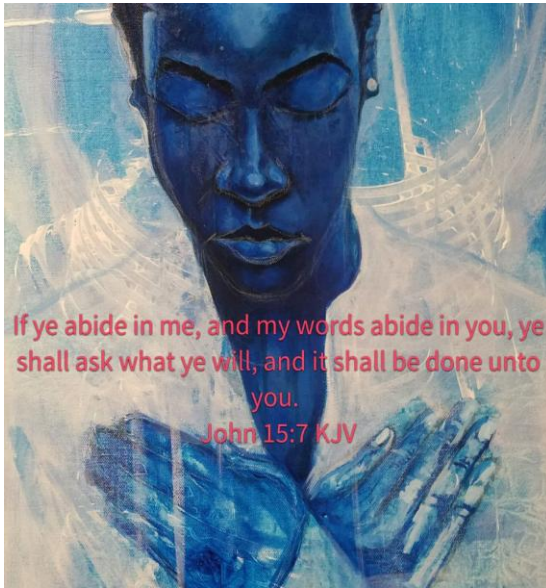


“Called Out”
Body of Believers

REB

Cover art: Courtesy of Rex Deloney

CHOSEN



“You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide; so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you.”

John 15

You did not volunteer.

You were chosen.

Why were you chosen?

Was it your intelligence and good looks?

Or the Lord’s sheer mercy?

Chosen for what?

...”that you should go and bear fruit

... and that your fruit should abide.”



And what kind of fruit is the Lord talking about?

Love, joy, and peace?

Or fruit from seed sown on good soil---kingdom fruit?

Fruit that lasts.

Disciples. Women, men, children who are drawn into the kingdom by watching what you do and hearing what you say.

“But Lord, I don’t even know how to begin.”

.... “so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you.”

The Lord who chose you keeps telling you to pray.

So do it!

“If you abide in me and my words abide in you, ask whatever you will, and it will be done for you. By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be my disciples.”

John 15



Prayer: Lord how beautiful and humbling that you chose us. You choose us, you appoint us to bear this abiding fruit. Lord, help us to keep our hearts ever open to you, to truly abide in you and to keep your words so alive in us that, yes, others can't help but be drawn into the kingdom as they watch us and listen to us. We admit we cannot do this without you, so we ask you to help us to glorify you, to bear good fruit, and prove to be your loving disciples. Amen.

April 2021

Featured Artist: Courtesy of Rex Deloney

THEY WALK WITH GOD



***He who says he abides in him ought to walk
in the same way in which he walked.***

I John 2

REB March 2021

Art: Courtesy of Jane

Spencer

They are out there.

Men and women who walk with God.

Amid all the confusion, hypocrisy, conflict and deceit,
they just keep walking with God.

They never break the bruised reed or quench the
smoking flax.

They wave no flags, blow no trumpets.

They serve in the place where God puts them, with humility and grace.

The Spirit of the Lord Jesus sustains them as they pour out their lives with holy joy.



When we look at these people we see Jesus.

When we listen to them speak we hear the Master's voice.

There is but one thing unique about them:

They walk with God.

They are the true Body of Christ.

They are the Kingdom of God.

God grant that we may be found among them!

REB March 2021

Art: Jane Spencer... The Secret Place found on Facebook

LITTLE CHRISTS



A stranger comes to your fellowship trying to find out whether Jesus Christ actually exists.

"I've heard about Jesus Christ, and I've read about him, but I want to find out whether he is real. So I've come to you folks who claim to know him."

He sits and listens to us sing our praises to Christ.

"That's very nice," he says to himself, "but how do these people know that they're not imagining these things?"

He hears us pray in the name of Jesus. *"What a wonderful thing!---if it's true,"* he sighs.

The teaching describes to him what Jesus Christ will do. And again he is moved. *"But how can I be sure that all these things are really so?"*

There is only one thing that will prove to this stranger or anybody that Jesus Christ really exists.

It is not the way we pray --- it is not the way we sing --- it is not the way we preach.

IT IS THE WAY WE LIVE.

Suppose somebody came up to you and said, *"I've got a big brother who's a giant twelve feet tall. My big brother can pull up trees by the roots. He can hold an automobile in one hand."* Would you believe this person if he himself were only four feet tall? But if this enthusiastic stranger were himself eight feet tall, then you'd say, *"Show me your brother!"*

The only way you can prove to anybody that you are the little brother, the follower, the disciple of Jesus, the Messiah...

.... is to carry his nature, to live the way he does.

The reason Christianity has so little authority in the world these days is because in too many places Christianity is nothing but talk.

- They talk brotherly love ... but to taste some of their brotherly love, you've got to belong to the right social level, have the right income, and the right shade of skin.
- They talk faith..."Faith will do anything".... but their lives are saturated with worry. They worry about losing their job, getting sick, about the impression they're making in the eyes of other people.
- They talk forgiveness ... but their churches are torn by strife, envy, jealousy, resentment.

People out in the world are sick and tired of religious talk.



They want to see the real thing.

- They want to see the nature of Jesus Christ in you.
- They want to see brotherly love in your living.
- They want to see your faith in action.
- They want to see a forgiving heart.

I don't care when you say you were saved. I don't care how many visions you've had or how many times God has spoken to you ...

They won't believe your testimony until you live like Jesus Christ.

Martin Luther says that when a man or woman becomes a follower of Jesus, that person is a "little Christ" ... a miniature of his Master. They may not be perfect as the Lord, but they bear a family likeness. There is something about them that tells you that they are really related to Jesus Christ.

Now the secret of becoming a "little Christ" is wrapped up in a single word:

LOVE.

"By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." (Jn 13:35)

"By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers." (1 John 3:16)

"Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love."

(1 John 4:7-8)

"Isn't it enough that I'm living a moral life?"

- The person who is looking for Jesus Christ doesn't have to come among us to find people who live moral lives. There are thousands of people outside the Body who are living moral lives.

"Isn't it enough that I give to charity and help in the community?"

- Fine! But this doesn't prove to the stranger that Jesus Christ is alive. Thousands outside the Body give to charity and help in the community.

"How about the fact that I read my Bible and say my prayers?"

- Keep it up! But remember that there are thousands of people who read their Bible and say their prayers but fail to manifest the life of Jesus Christ.

Here's the question, and we must be very honest:

**Can someone who is looking for Jesus Christ
find that love in our fellowships?**



The love of Jesus Christ is different from natural human love in three ways:

- 1. It is a love that goes out of its way and never looks for something in return.**
- 2. It is a love that is sensitive to the broken-hearted.**
- 3. It is a love that thrives on the impossible.**

ANY STRANGER WHO COMES INTO A FELLOWSHIP AND FINDS THESE THREE THINGS WILL FIND JESUS CHRIST.

It is a love that goes out of its way and looks for nothing in return.

The Samaritan was on his way to Jericho. He was trying to get there early so he could sell his wares in the market. He had a family to support

and obligations to meet. But when he sees this wounded Jew by the side of the road, he changes his plans completely.

He forgets about all the things he had planned to do and devotes himself entirely to this half-dead soul. Not only does the Samaritan lose a night's sleep and a day's work, he reaches into his pocket and pays the bill for the afflicted man who belongs to a race that despises Samaritans.

Notice, too, that when the Samaritan goes on his way, he doesn't leave a note saying, "Here's where I live. When you get well, if you want to reward me just send it here.""Here's my phone number. Some day you can do something for me." When the wounded man woke up, he didn't even know who saved his life. And it didn't matter.

- That's the kind of love that Jesus Christ has for us.

We'll go out of our way too if it looks like there may be a reward, or if he may be in a position to pay me back some day, or at least if he'll show some appreciation. Oh but how difficult to go out of your way to help a person who won't even say, "Thank you."

This is the love that will convict hearts and reveal Jesus as Lord

It is a love that is sensitive to the broken-hearted.

Every day of your life is like a trip on the freeway. There are hundreds of cars ahead of you and behind you moving along at maximum speed. Every so often you see a car by the side of the road, disabled, left behind. Who cares?

On the freeway it may not be legal to stop every time you see a stalled vehicle. But in life, this is exactly what we are commanded to do. We are to turn aside from our own way and minister to the broken-hearted consistently.

"I have come to heal the broken-hearted," said our Lord at the outset of his ministry.



**This is what he did.
And if we are his disciples, we will do the same.**

That lady down the street from where you live whom nobody likes. She walks to the grocery store with her nose in the air and people say she's a snob. But if you have the love of Jesus Christ in you, you will immediately recognize that beneath her aloof exterior she is hiding a broken heart.

- You will not despise her.

There's a man where you work who's forever bragging. Nobody likes him. If you have the love of Jesus in you, you will recognize that his bragging is simply a means of concealing a broken heart....

- And your attitude will be different.

There's a kid at school who's really weird. Everybody laughs. If you have the love of Christ in you, You will weep with him in your heart because you know the anguish that he experiences behind that expressionless face.

- You will not laugh. You will weep with him.

It is a love that thrives on the impossible.

Notice how often the word "compassion" in the Bible is connected with an impossible situation.

"I have compassion on the multitude because they have now been with me three days and have nothing to eat."

What's the sense of having compassion when the people are hungry?

What can you do for them?

...Then he takes five loaves and two fish.

A woman is bringing the corpse of her only son to burial and she is weeping. Jesus had compassion on her and went to her and said, "Weep not." What good is compassion in a situation like this? "Young man, I say to you, arise!"

A leper cries to Jesus, "if you are willing, you can heal me and make me clean." And Jesus, moved with compassion, reaches out and touches him... "I am willing," he said. "Be healed!" And the man is healed.

When we are faced with an impossible situation....We "conserve" our love, we hold it back.

*Why waste it?
That guy's hopeless!
She'll never change!
He's too far gone!*

The love of Jesus Christ is at its best when things look impossible.

The more hopeless a person appears, the more you love him.



Don't just pretend to love others. Really love them.

Let your love be genuine.....

Let your love be like Christ's."

---Let it!

You don't have to make it ... just let your love be like your Lord's. Your love will be like his, if you want it to be, because Jesus Christ is alive and at work in you.

And he is in our midst, as we serve together in his name.

- To help us to think like he thinks.
- To form us into his very likeness.
- To send us back into the world as "little Christs."

Tell him in your heart right now that you want to be transformed into his likeness.

"Lord, I confess to you that I have been calculating and cold in my love. I've been selfish. I've held my love back from others. I've given it only to certain select people. But I want to be like you. I want to be able to go out of my way and look for nothing in return, to be conscious of the brokenhearted people I brush by every day. And to be able to love those who seem so helpless to me."

If you are willing to let his compassion rule your heart, the Spirit of the living Jesus, who loved you and gave himself for you, will transform you indeed into a "little Christ." Your heart will burn with a love which does not come from you.



And people simply by dealing with you in daily life, will know that Jesus Christ is real, and that he is alive in you.

Message and Prayer: Richard E. Bieber 2015
Featured Art: Courtesy of Rex Deloney at rexdeloney.com

THY PEOPLE SHALL BE WILLING



As the day of his power approaches, darkness spreads over the earth.

Institutions crumble.

Truth lies dead in the streets.

Once-thriving churches are empty shells.

Wars and rumors of wars, famines, earthquakes, and crazy weather plague the planet.

Through all this the Lord is raising up....

A people.... who are willing.

Willing to do more than argue over doctrines or pursue political goals.

Willing to turn away from the latest “Christian agenda” and pay attention to Jesus alone.

"Do not think that I have come to bring peace on earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; and a man's foes will be those of his own household. He who loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and he who loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; And he who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for my sake will find it. He who receives you receives me, and he who receives me receives him who sent me." (Matthew 10)

Jesus did not come to establish a new religion.

Jesus did not come to bring us a new set of beliefs.

Jesus did not come to "make this world a better place".

Jesus came to bring God's World to a sick and troubled humanity.



To drain away our guilt.

"Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world."

To give us a chance to enter God's World.

"Come to me all you who labor and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest."

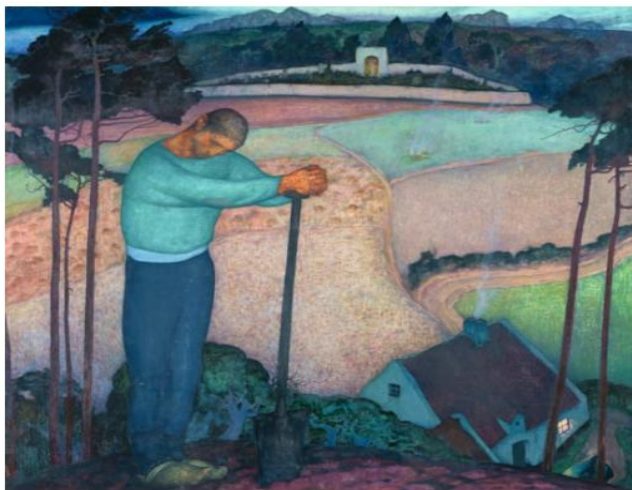
To conquer death as the Firstborn of the New Creation.

"I am the resurrection and the life."

To judge the living and the dead in the day of his power.

Your people will offer themselves freely on the day of your power, in holy garments; from the womb of the morning, the dew of your youth will be yours.

Psalm 110:3



As the day of his power approaches the Lord of heaven and earth is raising up a people who laugh at danger and trample under foot the devil's lies.

"Then they will deliver you up to tribulation, and put you to death; and you will be hated by all nations for my name's sake. And then many will fall away, and betray one another, and hate one another. And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray.

And because wickedness is multiplied, most men's love will grow cold. But he who endures to the end will be saved. And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached throughout the whole world, as a testimony to all nations; and then the end will come."

Matthew 24

Even now the refining fires are moving through the Body of Christ....

.... Raising up a people who are willing.

.... Preparing them for the dawn of a new day.

God alone knows who they are.

Even now he searches their hearts, getting them ready.

Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power.



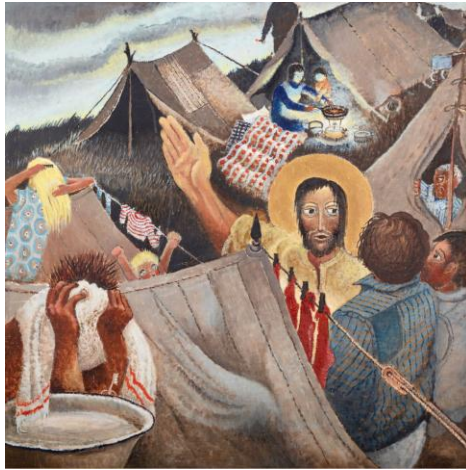
God grant that we may be among them!

Prayer: Yes Lord, grant that we are a willing people; willing to lay down our divisions, our doctrines, our political agendas, our favorite Christian celebrities and so-called prophets calling us to arms. Make us willing to lay down these ugly swords and to pick up your harvesting tools instead, to pick up our crosses. Make us willing to bring your healing to this very troubled world rather than accusing voices and raised fists. Disarm us, prepare us so we are willing and ready to carry the broken, the blind, and the lost instead of kicking them, binding them, and dragging them through the mud. Clothe us with holy garments, with your very presence.... so our love for you and others doesn't grow cold as wickedness and chaos increase in the world. Give us the courage and the faith to do your will, to gladly and bravely stand against darkness. Open our hearts to receive you completely so we may endure to the end, so we are able to bring the gospel of your kingdom, of your peace, of your mercy, and your redemptive power to the whole world. Amen.

April 2021

Featured Artist: Anto Carte (1886-1954) France

WHAT HAVE I GOT TO LOSE?



When Jesus comes along and says, “Follow me,”

I ask myself, “Am I really ready for this?”

He’s calling for more than joining a church.

“Getting saved” is easy enough, but “Follow me!”

--- am I up to it?

If I do this, what will become of me?

“Follow me.”

As they were going along the road, a man said to him, "I will follow you wherever you go."

And Jesus said to him, "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man has nowhere to lay his head." To another he said, "Follow me." But he said, "Lord, let me first go and bury my father." But he said to him, "Leave the dead to bury their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God."

Another said, "I will follow you, Lord; but let me first say farewell to those at my home." Jesus said to him, "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God." (Luke 9)



Don't Look Back

What have I got to lose?

When Jesus called Matthew from his tax office, Matthew got up and followed.

No questions. No conditions.

He dropped everything and went.

Matthew did not say to himself, “Am I really ready for this?”

He saw the Master’s call as the best thing that ever happened to him!

“What have I got to lose?” said Matthew.

Whatever he lost was nothing compared with what he gained.

When Peter, Andrew, James and John left everything to follow Jesus, it was the best day of their lives.

They did not ask, “Am I ready for this?” They said to themselves....

“What have we got to lose?” and followed with joy.

No regrets. No second-guessing.

“Impulse disciples”

Then there are those who answer the call on impulse.

They never last.

Like the seed sown on rocky soil, these people soon dry up.

Now great multitudes accompanied him; and he turned and said to them, "If any one comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple.

Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me, cannot be my disciple. For which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost, whether he has enough to complete it? Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation, and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, saying, 'This man began to build, and was not able to finish.'.... So therefore, whoever of you does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple". "Salt is good; but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored?"

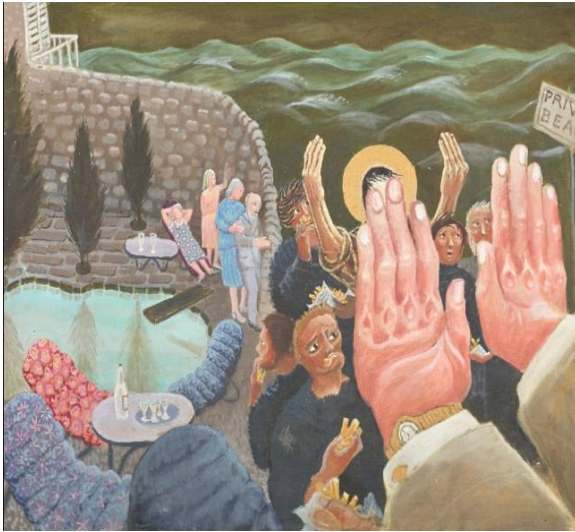
Luke 14

No conditions

“Let me first bury my father.”

“Let me first say goodbye to the folks.”

“I’ll do it when the kids are grown.”



When Jesus says, “Follow me,” he means, “Now”!

We begin where we are.

He always shows us the next step....

Maybe it’s Burger King.

The bus stop.

The guy next door who needs a wrench.

Uncle John in the nursing home.

Those crazies who hit the bars with the gospel.

“Wait a minute, Lord. I’m not ready for that!”

“Of course you are!”

It will be a challenge, wherever he leads



But what have I got to lose?

Prayer: Yes, Lord as you call us to follow you, may our attitude be, “what have I got to lose?” Even if we feel this is beyond us and too challenging, help us to know without a doubt that you are with us, you will lead us, and will always show us the next step. And because you are with us, and because you are who you are, we will be ready. We will begin right where we are. And we know the joy before us is so much more than we would ever lose. Amen.

June 2021

Featured Artist: Eularia Clarke from her series Gospel Illustrations

THE KINGDOM AND THE CHURCH



It's staring us in the face, and we don't see it.

It's spreading fire over the earth and we ignore it.

It's shaking the nations with a thousand signs, and we're too busy fund-raising to notice.

The one thing Jesus revealed with every parable, every healing:

The kingdom of God.

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

"The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field...."

"The time is fulfilled. The kingdom of God is at hand! Repent and believe the good news!"

The kingdom of God was Jesus' single focus. It still is.

When will we open our eyes?

The kingdom and the church

While Jesus is focused on the kingdom, it seems we Christians are focused on the church. True, Jesus says, ***"On this rock I will build my church"***.

But Jesus' church is not a religious institution with pompous men walking around in fancy robes.

With millions in the bank.

And tons of real estate.

Jesus' church is not a religious club for like-minded people who hold "Christian values".

Jesus' church is simply the *ecclesia*, his followers, gathered around his Name.

The *ecclesia* is Christ's Body on earth.

The *ecclesia* is the doorway to God's kingdom.

Wherever people are truly gathered in Jesus' name, there is the *ecclesia*---the church.



But Jesus did not preach about the church.

He preached about the kingdom.

Only twice in the gospels do we hear the word "church" (*ecclesia*) on Jesus' lips.

His focus was always the kingdom.

The kingdom of God.

***"The time is fulfilled, the kingdom of God is at hand.
Repent and believe the good news!"***

Mark 1

The kingdom is simply God's World.

Where God is known and loved.

Where there are no lies.

Where truth rules.

Where sickness and death are no more.

Where love is supreme.

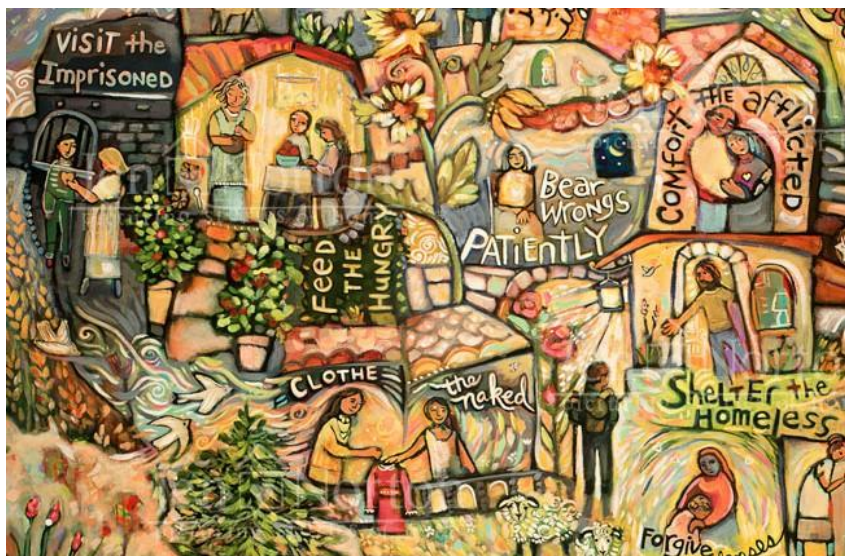
And joy has no end.

The kingdom of God is already here---in part.

Wherever Jesus is known and loved, there is the kingdom.

Wherever men and women show mercy to every neighbor, and love even their enemy, they have found the kingdom.

Wherever leaders are down on the floor washing feet, and the greatest are the least, there is the kingdom.



But that's only the beginning.

We are awaiting the kingdom's arrival in its fullness.

Waiting for Jesus to return and take charge.

No more wars.

No more lies.

No more pain, sickness and death.

Just glorious peace.

Isaiah was given a vision.

Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you.

For behold, darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples; but the LORD will arise upon you, and his glory will be seen upon you.

And nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising.

Lift up your eyes round about, and see; they all gather together, they come to you; your sons shall come from far, and your daughters shall be carried in the arms.

Then you shall see and be radiant, your heart shall thrill and rejoice; because the abundance of the sea shall be turned to you, the wealth of the nations shall come to you.

A multitude of camels shall cover you, the young camels of Mid'ian and Ephah; all those from Sheba shall come. They shall bring gold and frankincense, and shall proclaim the praise of the LORD.

Isaiah 60

Daniel received a glimpse.

Then I said, "O my lord, what shall be the issue of these things?" He said, "Go your way, Daniel, for the words are shut up and sealed until the time of the end.

Many shall purify themselves, and make themselves white, and be refined; but the wicked shall do wickedly; and none of the wicked shall understand; but those who are wise shall understand.

Daniel 12

The Apostle John was taken to the edge of glory and shown the kingdom's arrival.

Then he showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.

There shall no more be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and his servants shall worship him; they shall see his face, and his name shall be on their foreheads.

And night shall be no more; they need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they shall reign for ever and ever.

Revelation 22

It's time for us to see the church for what it is, and the kingdom for what it is.

The church

... Is the Body of Christ on earth.

It is not an institution ruled by religious professionals.

It is the creation of Jesus alone.

**Wherever people are gathered around Jesus only....
.... there is the church.**

**Wherever the kingdom of God is revealed on this earth...
... there is the church.**

The kingdom

... Is God's World penetrating this world with truth.

Preparing for the day when the world, as we know it, will be no more.

Calling all who have ears to hear to come into the light. Until Jesus arrives and takes the throne.

Then Gabriel's prophecy to Mary will be fulfilled.

"And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there will be no end."

Luke 1



Prayer- Holy, perfect Lord rise upon us and reveal your wonderful kingdom to us. Draw us to your light so we can know you and love you with all we have... so that faith, obedience, mercy, and love purify us as we seek your kingdom. Cause us to shine as we find your kingdom and live your kingdom now. Amen.

July 2021

Featured Art: Kind permission of Jen Norton details from the piece "Works of Mercy" also "Heart to Heart" and "Amen". [Jennortonartstudio. Com](http://Jennortonartstudio.com)

SOUR ATTITUDE IN A SWEET VINEYARD



"I don't mind working in this Vineyard. But why has the Master stuck me in this boring corner?"

It's slim picking here.

It's lonely.

No one seems to appreciate what I'm doing.

I'm not sure how long I can go on in this desolate place."

And if the Master moved you to a more "interesting" and "challenging" part of his Vineyard, would you do better work---with a better attitude? Chances are your attitude would turn any part of the Vineyard into a dry place.

"If you abide in me and my words abide in you, ask whatever you will, and it shall be done for you. By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be my disciples. As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you; abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.

John 15:7-11

Whatever work you have been given to do,

Wherever you have been placed by the Lord's mercy,

He will accomplish through you an eternal work....

.... if you abide in his love,

.... if you allow his joy to rule your heart.



Where he places you is up to the Master.

How you function in that place is up to you!

"Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I go to the Father. Whatever you ask in my name, I will do it, that the Father may be glorified in the Son; if you ask anything in my name, I will do it."
(John 14:12-14)



Prayer: Lord, help us to let go of these sour attitudes that make us bitter, that hinder our work, that hinder our vision, and that separate us from you. Draw us close so we can abide in your love and be filled with joy and vision about what we can accomplish even in the darkest, driest, and loneliest of corners. Help us to take up the work with sweet attitudes, with faith, with gusto, and with fervent prayers fully expecting our work to bear fruit because you are there with us. Amen

REB 2007

Art: Courtesy of Michael Cook at Hallowedart.co.uk

HOW TO BE A WELCOME MAT



Let's say there's this person who walks all over you. Takes advantage of you whenever they need you, and then forgets all about you until the next time they want to use you. This goes on for a long time... but it happens once too often. One day you wake up and say to yourself, "I'm not going to be their doormat anymore. That's it!" So the next time this person comes along and wants to use you as their little doormat, you smile and say, "Sorry, I'm not available."

Then one day the Lord comes by and says, "Yes, you've been a doormat long enough for people who have their own agenda... but Now I have a job for you. I want you to be a welcome mat for my kingdom."

**Not a doormat.
A welcome mat.**

A place where people can meet me and find their way to the Father's house. You are going to be a welcome mat for the kingdom of God."

"For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you salute only your brethren, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect."

Matthew 5:46-48

When our daughters were in high school, they began spending time with some Jesus Freaks. Jean and I could not deny that good things were happening in their lives. But we wanted to be sure that they weren't being drawn into a cult. So one Sunday night, with their permission, we went to one of their meetings. Wall-to-wall young people, crammed into this house on a cold winter night, praising God and studying the Word. Awesome.

But the thing that impressed us most about these kids was the way they welcomed everybody who came. No exceptions. No matter who you were, or what you looked like, "Welcome! Come on in!"

It was like the angels welcoming newcomers to heaven. You stepped in the door, and it was like the heavenly Father saying, "Welcome home!" through whatever servant happened to be nearby.

"For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you salute only your brethren, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect."

"You must be perfect."

Jesus is not talking about "sinless perfection," a life without flaws.

**He's talking about the Father's perfect welcoming love.
His offer of life to all.**

"Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"

Everybody's sin! He died for everybody!

Of course he won't force you to come into his Banquet Hall. If you don't want to come, he won't drag you in against your will. But he wants you to know that you are welcome. "Come on in! All that is mine is yours"!



That's his word to each of us, as we read these words.

"Welcome home! I've been waiting for you to get here. Come on in. Hey! bring the best robe and put it on them! Put a ring on their finger, shoes on their feet! Kill the fatted calf! We're going to celebrate"!

That's how the God of the universe looks at you and me as we come stumbling into his Banquet Hall with humble hearts.

You wonder why those people would drop what they were doing, stuff some bread in a bag, and chase off to the hillside to be with Jesus of Nazareth---thousands of them!

Yes, they came for healing. They were drawn by his powerful words.

But there was something more.

Jesus made each of these souls feel the welcome of heaven. No one was turned away. No one was put down. "This is the kingdom of God, this is the vestibule of Heaven! Come on in!"

And they came.

And this is still how it works. When the Spirit of the Lord Jesus is alive in a fellowship, people are drawn. Just like they were drawn to those hillsides of Galilee. I've seen it happen with my own eyes. And I'm sure it's happening at this moment in many, many places---perhaps where you are.

If the Lord Jesus is alive in our fellowship, and we allow him to have his way with us, we will see people being drawn.

Without gimmicks. Without promotion.

They'll just come.

Men, women, young people, old people, children.

They themselves won't be able to figure out what's pulling them. They'll be drawn like those fish swimming into the net after Jesus told Peter to let down his nets for a catch.

And the power of the cross which draws them, ("And I when I am lifted up [on the cross] will draw all people to myself.") will express itself in one simple way: the Father's welcome. Where people are gathered around Jesus, it is one place where nobody is rejected, nobody is bypassed.

"Come on in! This is the Doorway to Heaven!"



"You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect."

The Lord Jesus is calling each of us to be the Perfect Welcome that draws people into his kingdom....

....The Welcome Mat that draws people to the cross and heals them.

And to be that Welcome Mat for the Kingdom, there are only two requirements:

1. Know that you yourself have been welcomed. Know this!
2. Be that welcome for everyone God sends across your path.

First: know that you yourself have been welcomed by God.

"Come to me all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me; for I am meek and lowly of heart, and you shall find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

Tucked in the back of so many minds, is this idea that if you get too close to Jesus, your fun days are over. He's going to rob you of your joy. He's going to transform you into a religious creep.

This is understandable, when one considers the abundance of "religious" types who cloud the room with gloom as soon as they enter.

But that's not how it's meant to be.

The man in Jesus' parable who found treasure hidden in a field did not become a gloomy cloud. He didn't stand there and weep, "O, if only I had the money to buy this field!"

In his joy, the man goes out and sells everything he has and buys the field!

The life Jesus gives you, when you let go of your old life, is a thousand times better than anything you ever had before.

Yes, you will carry a cross.

Yes, you will put in a good day's work in the Vineyard.

Yes, some of your friends may turn away from you.

But you will have a life like no other!

Peace which this world cannot give.

Joy no one can take from you.

You're royalty walking down the street.

You're a daughter, a son of the King.

You are under a cloud of glory by day, and a pillar of fire by night.

You have a heavenly Father watching over you, as you walk in his mercy---showing it to others---and as you breathe the breath of his Spirit day and night.



You are living under the welcome of heaven all the time.

Never forget it!

Secondly: Be that welcome for everyone God sends across your path.

The life we live under that cloud of glory is very simple: We are to be the Welcome Mat for everyone God sends our way.

"For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you salute only your brethren, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect."

If you have abandoned your life to the Master, he says to you: "You are the light of the world!" He doesn't say, "Try your best to be the light."

He says, "You are the light!"

God himself shines through you! You are a walking, talking invitation to the Banquet of Heaven.

Don't hide it under a bushel. Let it shine!

"As the Father has sent me, so I'm sending you".

"Just be there in my name. You don't need a sales pitch! I'll give you the words you need. I'll give you the power you need. Just be there for the people I send across your path.

Your job is to welcome them to my Banquet Table by letting my peace, my healing, my forgiveness, flow through you to them."

Some time during the next few days your phone will ring. Your heart will sink when you hear the voice on the other end. No, Lord! Not them! But then it hits you that this is not a coincidence. This phone encounter was set up by God.

So you lift your heart to the Father and cry for help and direction.

Or perhaps you're in the supermarket. You look up and see coming toward you the last person on earth you want to see. In a flash of heavenly insight you realize that this is a God-appointed meeting.

So you yield. You soften. You hold still within and trust God for help.

Nothing dramatic seems to happen. No bells ring. No trumpets sound.

But because you accept this encounter as set up by God, something does happen. This person receives from God, through you, exactly what they need. They have been drawn one step closer to glory.

God is not looking for hot shots to revive his church.

God doesn't need smooth talkers or wonderworkers to get the job done.

He's looking for welcome mats.

People like you and me, who know that we have been welcomed....and who are willing to be there with open hearts for the souls God sends our way.



**Just be that Welcome Mat.
And God himself will do the rest.**

Prayer-. Lord may we be the welcome mats from heaven that you call us to be. May we offer the same perfect welcoming love to others that you give to us. May the joy of your welcome to us bubble up with such joy within us, with such awe and thankfulness, with such a burning light that it can't help but touch the hearts of those you send to us. May your love shine so strongly within us that others will know they are welcomed to your wonderful banquet table. Amen.

Message: REB 2011

Featured Art: Anne Cameron Cutri at anncameroncutripixels.com

FROM DEAD BONES TO LIVING PEOPLE



Among all the people who claim to be followers of Jesus there are really only two kinds:

There are those who burn with the life of God...

....and convey that life to people around them.

And those who are full of religion—

.... religious insight, religious jargon, religious convictions –
but produce only the aroma of death.

And here's the mystery:

The people who convey God's life are continuously offering themselves up to death;

And the people who convey the aroma of death are forever clinging to their own life ...

their own point of view,
their own ego,
their own doctrinal position,
their own convenience.

The Lord took hold of me, and I was carried away by the Spirit of the Lord to a valley filled with bones. He led me all around among the bones that covered the valley floor. They were scattered everywhere across the ground and were completely dried out. Then he asked me, “Son of man, can these bones become living people again?”

“O Sovereign Lord,” I replied, “you alone know the answer to that.”

Then he said to me, “Speak a prophetic message to these bones and say, ‘Dry bones, listen to the word of the Lord! This is what the Sovereign Lord says: Look! I am going to put breath into you and make you live again! I will put flesh and muscles on you and cover you with skin. I will put breath into you, and you will come to life. Then you will know that I am the Lord.’”

So I spoke this message, just as he told me. Suddenly as I spoke, there was a rattling noise all across the valley. The bones of each body came together and attached themselves as complete skeletons. Then as I watched, muscles and flesh formed over the bones. Then skin formed to cover their bodies, but they still had no breath in them.

Then he said to me, “Speak a prophetic message to the winds, son of man. Speak a prophetic message and say, ‘This is what the Sovereign Lord says: Come, O breath, from the four winds! Breathe into these dead bodies so they may live again.’”

So I spoke the message as he commanded me, and breath came into their bodies. They all came to life and stood up on their feet—a great army.

Then he said to me, “Son of man, these bones represent the people of Israel. They are saying, ‘We have become old, dry bones—all hope is gone. Our nation is finished.’ Therefore, prophesy to them and say, ‘This is what the Sovereign Lord says: O my people, I will open your graves of exile and cause you to rise again. Then I will bring you back to the land of Israel. When this happens, O my people, you will know that I am the Lord. I will put my Spirit in you, and you will live again and return home to your own land. Then you will know that I, the Lord, have spoken, and I have done what I said. Yes, the Lord has spoken!’”

Ezekiel 37:1-14 (NLT)

You could say that this prophecy applies to the Israel of Ezekiel's day which was destroyed. The temple lay in ruins, and the people who weren't killed, or didn't starve to death, found themselves captives in a foreign land.

They were without hope. They said, ***“Our bones are dried up and our hope is gone.”***

Hence this prophecy through Ezekiel to Israel:

“The bones are going to be gathered together and they are going to be restored.

They are going to be given breath, and they are going to be brought back on the land. “

As we know, it all came to pass.

You could also say that this prophecy applies to the resurrection of the new Israel at the end of the age, the New Jerusalem that comes as history, as we understand it, has ended.

“And then I saw thrones, and seated on them was those to whom judgment was committed. Also I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their testimony to Jesus and for the word of God, and who had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life again and reigned with Christ a thousand years. The rest of the dead did not come to life again until the thousand years were ended. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is he who shares in the first resurrection! Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and they shall reign with him a thousand years.”

Revelation 20: 4-6

Between the prophecy that was given to Israel of Ezekiel's day and the prophecy that can be applied to the new Israel at the end of the age, there is another application of this prophesy which is aimed at us – if we have the ears to hear and the eyes to see.

The bones that are being gathered together even at this moment

That a people are being called out of Babylon into the new Israel at this very hour....

A people are being raised up with hearts circumcised to God....
Lives totally, utterly, and radically given over to God....

People who are being raised from death into life by the power of the Spirit of God.

So I prophesied as I was commanded; and as I prophesied, there was a noise, and behold, a rattling; and the bones came together, bone to its bone. And as I looked, there were sinews on them, and flesh had come upon them, and skin had covered them; but there was no breath in them. Then he said to me, "Prophesy to the breath, prophesy son of man, and say to the breath [or the wind, or the spirit], Thus says the Lord God: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain that they may live." So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood upon their feet, an exceedingly great army.

In the midst of wars and rumors of wars, of the present moment— in the midst of prosperity in one place and famine in another, and sometimes prosperity and famine in the same place—the bones are being brought together. Now, at this hour.

And they are being formed, and they are being in-breathed with the life of God.

And they are being raised up by the Spirit of God "an exceedingly great army "
in order to take the gospel of the kingdom out over the earth, perhaps for the last time.

And every person in this army walks this earth with power,
because each has been brought forth out of a grave.

We're not talking about "churchianity"
We're not talking about "Christendom"

We're not talking about respectable Christians living their innocuous lives

These men and women manifest the resurrection life of Jesus every day,
because they themselves have been lifted out of their graves.

Then he said to me, “Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. Behold, they say, ‘Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are clean cut off.’ Therefore prophesy, and say to them, Thus says the Lord God: Behold, I will open your graves, and raise you from your graves, O my people; and I will bring you home into the land of Israel. And you shall know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves, and raise you up from your graves, O my people. And I will put my Spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land, then you shall know that I, the Lord have spoken, and I have done it, says the Lord.”

I will raise you out of your graves.

I will fill you with life.

I will bring you into my Kingdom.

I will bring you back to me ...

Notice that the *initiative* belongs to God.

God is the one who brings the bones together.

God is the one who breathes life into them, sets them up on their feet and sends them forth as a vast army.

But God can't do any of those things until the bones are dead, and know they are dead...

“The Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.” And he said to all, “If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.”

Luke 9:22-23

“I am going to a cross to die. If you want to follow me, don't sit around and meditate; deny yourself, pick up your cross, and follow me--- to death!”

If you deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow me to death— you will be raised from the dead, not only in the next world, but right here, and right now.

God will take care of his part.

He will gather the bones.

He will bring them together and quicken them with his Spirit.

He will set them on their feet and send them forth,

....when we begin to do our part....

Our part is to die.



“Follow me to death,” says the Lord, “and I will then raise you from the dead with the power of my resurrection Spirit.”

***“If any one [any man, woman] would come after me,
let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.”***

What does it mean to deny ourselves, take up our cross and follow the Master?

You go out to the valley of the bones, where all the other dry bones are, fall on your face before God, and with an act of your will become one of them. You die to yourself.

When I go out to the Valley of Dry Bones, I don’t just take my ‘Sunday morning self’....

I take my dreams and they die.
I take my resentments and they die.
I take my bitterness and it dies.
And my fears ... and my possessions ... and my abilities ...and my
achievements ... and my ambition.

I fall on my face before the Lord and become a dry bone.

When we do this, there is a rattling and a shaking, and the bones come together. The resurrected bones find unity in the Lord.

It's easy to see who has been to the valley of dry bones and who hasn't.

Those who have been to the valley of dry bones are walking around free of themselves.

And those who haven't are still locked in their self prisons.

***If any man would come after me,
Let them deny themselves, take up their cross daily...***

Daily!

From now on!

Every day of our life begins out there in the valley of dry bones.

Every day of our life begins with offering ourselves up to death for the glory of the Father.

We roll out of bed, drag ourselves to the valley of the dry bones, and begin there again – each day.

“I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me; the life I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me.”

Galatians 2: 20

I die. He lives.

When someone hurts our feelings, or fails to give us proper recognition, we feel the Spirit nudging us with the reminder that we're dead. Dead to ourselves; alive only to God.

***"If any man would come after me,
let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me."***

Follow me!

Follow me through death into life.

"Follow me through the valley of dry bones into a life that is utterly committed to my lordship."

So now I begin the day committed to him. He's going to guide me. And I'm going to follow.

The things that aren't clear; don't worry about them.

Don't worry about whether God wants you to go to China four years from now.

If he wants you to, he'll let you know when the time comes.

In the meantime, there is the matter of getting right with your brother.

Repenting.

Giving to someone who is in need.

Speaking a word of encouragement to someone who needs to hear it.

There are specific things for us to do in obedience that the Lord will show each one of us,

if we are willing to go to the valley of the dry bones every day.

**And as we obey, awesome and wonderful life
begins to manifest itself.**

Each of us makes the decision to be obedient as an individual. But once we start walking in obedience, we soon find ourselves in company with other dry bones who have come to life.

Together with them, we become the body of Christ.

And *together*, as that *mighty army* raised out of that valley of dry bones, and filled with the life of God...we go forth to proclaim the kingdom with power, to heal the sick, raise the dead, give sight to the blind, to bring good news to the poor...

***“If any man would come after me,
let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.”***

If we are afraid, God will help us with our fears.

If we're confused, he'll clear things up for us.

If we're full of doubts, all we have to say is,.....

“I believe, help my unbelief,” and he will help us.

Because the life we seek, begins and continues forever, at a cross

– not only his cross – our cross.

Don't be afraid to take hold of your cross, pick it up and carry it.

Because when you do...

the power of his resurrection will flood you,
and guide you,
and anoint you,
and fill you,
and satisfy you, every day you walk this earth..

Prayer: Jesus, Lord, we follow you into the valley of dry bones because this is where we find you, precious Saviour. Open our graves, breathe into our dead bodies, bring us to our feet so that we may live again. Daily we follow you into this valley, falling on our faces and becoming dead to everything but your call. And daily put your Spirit in us and raise us up together as a mighty army burning with life for you. Amen.

1984 aka *Take Up Your Cross, Daily*

Art: *Dry Bones* (Ilse Kleyn), *The Narrow Way* (David Hayward)

PHYSICIAN HEAL YOURSELF



There was this little old broken-down church in a broken-down part of town with only a handful of broken-down people left in it. One Wednesday night prayer meeting they were especially dismayed. They prayed, *“Lord, you know we’re too old and too weak to go out there, into the streets with your gospel. If you want us to serve you here, bring to us some people who need the gospel.”*

The prayer was answered. Sunday morning as they gathered for their dry little service people started coming in off the street. That first Sunday there must have been fifty of them. But the weird thing about it was that every single one of the newcomers was sick.

- Some were on crutches,
- Some were talking to themselves,
- Some could hardly breathe,
- Some were drunk.

It looked like the emergency room of the city hospital.

“How can we preach the gospel to these wrecks, Lord? They’re too sick!”

A prophecy came forth in the meeting for the first time in ten years.....

“Heal them!”

“How can we heal them, Lord?” said the Christians, *“we’re too sick ourselves!”*

Then an old man with Parkinson's disease who had been going to that church for years stood up, his body shaking so violently it was a wonder it didn't fly apart, and he prayed,

"Lord, manifest your love to these friends who have come to us today."



Suddenly there was shouting in the back of the church.

"Thank you, Lord! I can see!"

"Thank you, Lord! I can walk again!"

"Thank you for giving me back my mind!"

When the service was over the little old man with Parkinson's disease was still shaking, but there wasn't a more joyful man in all the world than this trembling...servant of God.

As the weeks passed more and more sick people kept pouring into that place and found healing... and many of those who found healing opened their hearts to the healer and entered the kingdom of God –

---- and the little old man with Parkinson's disease kept right on shaking.



You could say that the platform from which the gospel of Jesus Christ is proclaimed with power is the platform of healing. There has to be some evidence that the river of mercy which started flowing on this earth at Calvary is still flowing. The call to proclaim the gospel is always a call also to heal. We've been ordained to a healing ministry just as surely as we've been sent to preach that gospel....but we tend to hold a shallow view of what this ministry involves and what it costs.

We look at the successful American physician with his status in the world, his power to make things happen for people..... *"We'll operate the day after tomorrow at 8:00"*..... his fabulous income. Or, perhaps we can look at men and women who have notable healing ministries and how the crowds are always waiting at the door of the auditorium hours before the meeting begins.

And then we look at ourselvesbogged down with problems.

- Problems in our circumstances,
- Problems in our relationships,
- Problems in our bodies, and even in our heads.

We may look normal enough on the outside, but inside we're so weighed down we can't even swim to the top of our own mess much less help anyone else's mess. How can I even begin to think about exercising a ministry of healing and help for others until I get this pain out of my own life? And so we wallow in our unhappiness and dream about the things we would like to do if ever this load is lifted from us enough to be able to help someone else.

But a valid ministry of healing in the name of Jesus bears no similarity whatsoever to the career of a successful surgeon or that of a celebrated healing evangelist. The model we have to look at is Jesus.... and when we look at Jesus what do we see?

And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up; and he went to the synagogue, as his custom was, on the sabbath day. And he stood up to read; and there was given to him the book of the prophet Isaiah. He opened the book and found the place where it was written, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor."

He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.”

And he closed the book, and gave it back to the attendant, and sat down; and the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. And he began to say to them, “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.” And all spoke well of him, and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth; and they said, “Is not this Joseph’s son?” And he said to them, “Doubtless you will quote to me this proverb, ‘Physician, heal yourself;’....

Luke 4:16-23a

That’s how his ministry began....and this is how it ended.

And those who passed by derided him, wagging their heads and saying, “You who would destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself! If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross.” So also the chief priests, with the scribes and elders, mocked him, saying, “He saved others; he cannot save himself. He is the King of Israel; let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him. He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he desires him; for he said, ‘I am the Son of God.’”

Matthew 27:39-43



***....despised and rejected of men.
A man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.***

Who, when he got to the real moment of healing for the world....broke the curse through his own agony and death, received no thanks or applause. All the world could say was,

“Physician, heal yourself!”

But it was this apparent defeat and all the pain and loneliness and disgrace that went with it which opened the healing fountain for us and for the world.

The fact that we're burdened with problems hurting in our own souls will never hinder us from healing others in the name of Jesus. In fact, these wounds within us may be just what we need to be effective.

But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, to show that the transcendent power belongs to God and not to us. We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies. For while we live we are always being given up to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus may be manifested in our mortal flesh. So death is at work in us, but life in you.

II Corinthians 4:7-12

Of course the sin in our lives that God has put his finger on has to go.

- The grudges we've been holding,
- The fantasies of self-pity or lust or revenge,
- The covetousness which keeps perverting us into takers instead of givers....

These things have to go. But....

the wounds,
the weakness,
the afflictions,
the pain....

**The things we have thought of as signs of defeat...
These can be turned into the very means**

.... by which life flows to others.

For while we live we are always being given up to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus may be manifested in our mortal flesh.

So death is at work in us, but life in you.

Each of us, individually and all of us as a body have been called to a healing ministry.

And the basis of our healing power is the cross... the place where God the Son was hung up to die

in weakness,
in agony,
in loneliness,
in disgrace.

Every healing Jesus ever performed came from that cross. And every healing that has ever taken place since, in his name, comes from that cross.

But we have to touch that cross of Jesus not just with our intellect. We have to touch it with our life. And the place where our life touches the cross of Jesus is the place where we are weak, where we hurt.

- These weak spots in our lives,
- These afflictions, hardships, and calamities,
- These things that keep us low...



Are the doorway to blazing communion with the crucified God.

And to keep me from being too elated by the abundance of revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan, to harass me, to keep me from being too elated. Three times I besought the Lord about this, that it should leave me; but he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." I will all the more gladly boast of my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities; for when I am weak, then I am strong.

II Corinthians 12:7-10

This weakness in my life drives me to the Master, and in a mystery, I come forth with healing life for others. *This pain in my soul* (or in my body) brings me down into fellowship with the afflicted of this earth and helps me to be the living link between their pain and the Lamb who bears away their sickness and sin.

**Until this sorrow came I was comfortable and blind.
But now I have some idea of the sorrow that afflicts this race.**

The sorrow in my own heart drives me to God for comfort and in a mystery gives me power to comfort other hearts... to heal them through the wounds and sorrows of Calvary which have now become part of my own life. *This frustration* that once drove me out of my mind has now become the death of Jesus dwelling in my mortal flesh...the very power of Calvary by which I can set others free.

Until the Lord comes back every one of us who follows Jesus will have a wounded thigh like Jacob, a thorn in the flesh like Paul --- something that limits us, holds us down, causes pain, keeps us weak.

And we have a choice:

- We can spend our lives wallowing in this thing, using it as the excuse for wrapping the gifts God has given us in a napkin and doing nothing with them.

- We can take this thing which keeps us nailed to the cross of Jesus and make it the doorway to daily fellowship with our Lord and the fountainhead of healing for the sick ones around us.

Satan will say to the wounded servants of the Lamb what he said to the Master through those sneering voices on Good Friday, “Physician, heal yourself!”

But the Lord says,

“Weak as you are, I send you forth in my name to heal the sick and raise the dead and bring the lost back to the Father’s house.”

***“My grace is sufficient for you.
My power is made perfect in weakness.”***



Prayer- Lord how good you are, how wonderful... that you find us in our defeat, our anguish, our shame, our pain, our loneliness and even in the midst of sneers and rejection. This is where you meet us. This is where you have been. This is where we cry out to you, where we draw close to you in our need. Alleluia. Lord, may we continue in our weakness and sorrow to be drawn to you for our comfort. And may this empower us, soften us, prepare our hearts to comfort others. How beautiful that we, as weak and wounded as we are, can be sent forth with your life and healing. And yes, yes, may we find your holy, beloved grace sufficient for us and may your power be made perfect in our weakness. Amen.

REB 1980

Featured Art: Kindness and courtesy of Ineke Hopgood ...with Rosalyn Field

A CITY ON A HILL



“You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hid. Nor do men light a lamp and put it under a bushel, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven”.

Matthew 5:14-16

There are two symbols which Jesus uses to describe the body of Christ on earth as it functions during the closing days off this age..

The one is the symbol of a shepherd going out after the lost sheep.

The other symbol is that of a city set on a hill that draws people to itself by its light.

Now every assembly of believers which has any vision of its purpose and any power from the Spirit of God will be an expression of these two symbols.

It will be that shepherd going out after the last sheep...Scouring the streets of this world for the poor, the maim, the lame, the obnoxious and the blind, bringing them to the banquet table of God. It will never give up looking. Nor will it never give up hope of finding that one that's still lost.

But an assembly of believers that is alive with God's life will also be that City on a Hill... that shines out into the darkness, and by its light draws people who are thirsty for God, who are looking for truth to itself.

Now, the symbol of the shepherd is really a description of our personal lives as followers of Jesus ... As we go about our business in this world every day we have our eyes open looking for that lost sheep. We're alert to recognize Lazarus at our gate, the woman at the well, anybody who is in any way ripe for the Gospel of God.

Tuesday morning, Ralph Hildebrandt and I were sitting in the office studying. A young man came in, sat down and began to weep. He said "the police just took my baby". And he's really upset. Then he went on to describe what happened to him as he was on his way over here to the church. He was walking along the street and a lady in a white Cadillac stopped and said to him, "young man, something awful has just happened to you". And she ended up telling him about Jesus and about the Kingdom. Now the woman in the white Cadillac was Pat Hernandez. Pat is driving along in her car and she sees this guy who is a lost sheep and she can see he's troubled.. It's just minutes after the police had taken his baby. Seeing his anguish, she pulled her car over to talk, reaching out to him in the name of the Lord.

And that's the Spirit of the Lord moving through a member of the body, reaching out as the shepherd looking for those lost sheep, and alert to that need when it's there.



But notice now where Alphonso goes, after this happens, he goes to church.

He comes to the city on the hill. He comes to a place where he had been only once before, again in a crisis. He sat down and he said, “I need to talk to somebody”.

And so Ralph and I listened to him. And then we prayed with him. And then tried to take care of some of his needs. And we sent him on his way, knowing that he had seen God in his mercy.

What was it that drew Alphonso to us? ...

A city set on a hill cannot be hid.

We don't want people coming to us because we have a program for every human itch. Churches these days are into programs, programs for everything. That's not what we want. Nor do we want people coming to us because we provide quick service for needs that can be met by any one of a dozen agencies in this part of town. We want people coming to us because in their brokenness and in their spiritual desperation, *they see light*.

You are the light of the world.
A city set on a hill cannot be hid.

Now the symbol of the city on the hill is a description really of our corporate life as the body of Christ.

Together we are the light of the world, together *we* are the city set on a hill. Not as individuals alone, always together.

When we believe this and understand what this means and live this way, light goes forth from us and draws these thirsty, hungry ones, the ones who are looking for some kind of truth, desperate for some integrity, looking for healing for their own life, searching for God, they will come.

Now I can't say “**I'm** the light of the world”. The only one who can say that is Jesus.

But what I can say, looking at myself as part of this, motley crew, is *we* are the light of the world. Because that's exactly what Jesus tells us we are.

If *we're* committed to him, if *we're* walking in him....

We are the light of the world.

What an awesome thing.

Now this episode, which happened with Alphonso is actually happening 100 times a day in the life of many flocks. This kind of shepherding is actually going on all over the place. And all the time awesome evidence of it shows up when people are serious about trying to practice this shepherding. Its not about some kind of structure, or some organization that looks into each other's dresser drawers and tells each other when we can mail letters. It's about reaching out to the people who are at that moment crying out in need and us being alert to that. That goes on in awesome ways when good shepherding is practiced.

Yet, out there in the darkness, is an army of people who are looking for truth, thirsty for reality, hungry for God and they will come among us when light goes forth from the city on a hill.

“You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hid. Nor do men light a lamp and put it under a bushel, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven”.

In these verses is a four-fold word from the Lord *to us*.

First of all, Jesus says *to us*...

Know what you are.

You are the light of the world.



This is not something you try to achieve.

This is not something you work toward.

You are this because I tell you that you are the light of the world.. you followers of me.

A City set on a hill cannot be hid.

If we are disciples of Jesus, if we are truly committed to him... we *are* that city.

That's why your phone rings.

That's why people at work come to you and tell you the secrets of their heart.

That's why total strangers often will reach out to you for a word of comfort.

And the rougher things get out there, the more brightly will shine the city on a hill.

Together, not as individuals, but *together* as a body, we are the city on the hill.

This is something which is already a fact.

Not something we're trying to achieve.

The second thing Jesus tells us is to...

Take off the bushel.

***Nor do men light a lamp and put it under a bushel,
but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house.***

Now, the thing that causes us to shine, that causes us to be light is our personal commitment to Jesus. But that's the very thing we are inclined to try to hide.

Nobody is going to give you a hard time because you believe in God. Nobody is going to be upset because you belong to a church.

But when they find out that you are serious about Jesus, they'll begin to wonder about you.

You really believe in Jesus?

You're a follower of Jesus?

But I thought you were intelligent.

You're going to get that. If you haven't already... we all get it.

And so we all often unconsciously develop a technique, a habit of concealing our relationship, of letting our relationship with Jesus be a low-profile thing.

What we're really doing is concealing it.

When we conceal it, what we're doing is putting our light under the bushel.

Because our light is our commitment to Jesus.

So, to take off the bushel is to acknowledge openly and frankly where our commitment really is.

It's to Jesus, Jesus himself. Clear cut, to Jesus. Don't try to dress it up. And don't try to water it down. Let it be openly known who you belong to.



**Take off the bushel.
Let your light shine.**

Let it be known who you belong to.

Let it be known why you live the way you do.

Let it be known *why* it is possible for you to still have such hope and still be cheerful when the world all over the place is falling apart.

The third thing Jesus tells us in this passage is to...

Let our light shine.

***Let your light so shine before men,
that they may see your good works
and give glory to your Father who is in heaven”.***

Not only are we to come out from hiding, take the bushel off, but we are to make the world see deeds and hear words which are a direct match of the words and deeds of Jesus himself. The entire discourse which follows this command to let your light shine, Matthew 5,6,&7, the Sermon on the Mount, is actually a description of Jesus own life, this is the way he lived.

He's the master, We're the disciples.

When we *together*... conform our lives, our actions, our behavior, our attitudes, the way we handle our money, the way we get along with each other, and all these things he talks about in Matthew 5-6 and 7, conform that to him...then the light shines.

Things begin to happen.

People can see this.

And when they see that light shine, the discouraged ones and the ones who have given up ever hoping to see anything that's true and reliable concerning God, will now take courage.. and they'll begin to glorify God.



Which brings us to the fourth thing he tells us in this passage...

He tells us to expect visitors.

***“That they may see your good works
and give glory to your Father who is in heaven”.***

How do they give glory to the father?

By coming to the city on the hill.

By coming to the place that gives them some hope.

Finding their way to the one place that gives them a reason to live

So this passage in Matthew 5 is connected directly with Isaiah 60:1-4... the same Lord inspired them both.

“Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you. For behold, darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples; but the Lord will arise upon you, and his glory will be seen upon you. And nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising. Lift up your eyes round about, and see; they all gather together, they come to you;”

Nations shall come to your light, and kings shall come to the brightness of your rising, they all gather together they come to you.



***Expect visitors.
The city set on a hill cannot be hid.
They will come.***

But the city on the hill, for all its light, has many an empty room. Each room has a name on it. And each room will be filled.

In the center of the city is a huge banquet hall. Where there is still many an empty seat.

Each seat has a name on it. Each seat will be filled.

Now, the thing which draws the ones who belong in those seats and in those rooms into the city is not the snappy music or the dynamic personality of the master of ceremonies, but the light...

**... the light which shines forth from these people.
This is what draws them.**

This is what draws people who haven't found their way yet, this light helps them to find their seat, to find their room.

Just the light coming forth from these people.

On the surface, the multitudes come and go, and we've seen this over the years and I'm sure it will go on and on. There will be times of gathering when the numbers increase and there will be times of sifting when they shrink. But beneath the surface, on the level of the Kingdom, the numbers increase steadily.



One by one they come.

**Until every seat is filled.
And every room is taken.**

And they come because they are drawn by light ...shining forth from people... Who together know what they are... the light of the world!

Who together, take off the bushel... of shame and self-consciousness and fear!

Who together let their light shine by living the light!

Who together welcome those homecoming children of the Kingdom with thanksgiving and joy.

You are the Light of the World.



“You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hid. Nor do men light a lamp and put it under a bushel, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven”.

Prayer- Holy Lord, draw us together to you...together may we seek you in such love and adoration that your light shining in us is inevitable. Together may we be that city on a hill that draws men...that draws the wounded, the broken, the lost...to your healing light. May our love for you keep us from concealing where the light from us is coming from...may the joy of it pour out of our lips in reverence of you. Oh Lord may our lives and our lips sing... “we belong to you Jesus, we belong to you”. May we shine, may we shine brightly! May many see our joy, our unity, our love and come to the light, to find the hope, the healing they need in these dark, sad and hopeless times. And yes fill every room, fill every seat as we your Body welcome all with thanksgiving and joy. Amen.

Message: REB 1988

Featured Art: Courtesy of Melani Pyke at melpyke.com

CHURCH OF THE ASSUMPTION



We were strangers in town, looking for a church to attend. And there it was, a sleek modern building with a sign out front:

CHURCH OF THE ASSUMPTION

It must be a Catholic Church, we thought, celebrating the Assumption of the Virgin Mary. Should we go in, even though we're not Catholic?

Why not? When we stepped inside it didn't seem like a Catholic church. There was no smell of incense. No long robes. The music was upbeat and familiar. It seemed just like any other evangelical church.

But why the name ***CHURCH OF THE ASSUMPTION***?

As the service progressed we began to understand. In this church...

...they make the assumption that, if you are sitting in these pews, you are saved.

...they assume that you are in tune with the Christian Agenda of the hour.

“In here we’re all believers. It’s the world out there that needs to get their act together.”

The word “repent” is never heard.
The weekly gospel is simply,

“God loves you.” “Jesus took care of everything.” “Let not our hearts be troubled,”

This church is no different from our church back home!

When I think about it, our church could also be called ***CHURCH OF THE ASSUMPTION***.

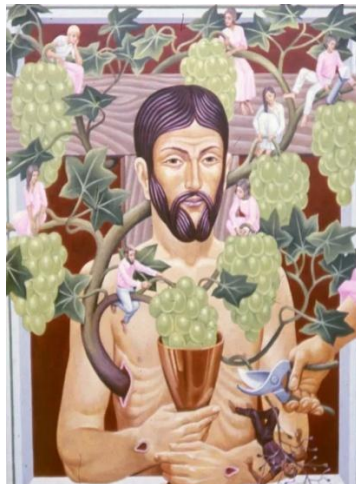
**We assume that everything’s just fine with us.
It’s that world out there that needs to repent.**

But if Jesus is the Vine and we are the branches, can we assume that everything is just fine?

Can we assume that our connection with the Vine at this moment is alive, strong, and pure?

Can we assume that the Vinedresser is happy with our fruit?

I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. Every branch of mine that bears no fruit, he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit.



So it's possible that a branch that belongs to Jesus could be cut away?

Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me....

***....If a man does not abide in me he is cast forth as a branch and withers.
And the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire and burned.***

It is indeed possible to be “cast off as a branch and wither.”



So when we look at this magnificent Vine with all those beautiful branches, we can assume nothing.

True, we are branches on the Vine by a miracle of grace.

But it's up to us to stay connected.

If we abide in the vine we thrive.... If we lose touch we wither.

Maybe it's time to lay aside our assumptions and pay careful attention to the Master.

I am the vine, you are the branches.

He who abides in me, and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit.

She who abides in me, and I in her, she is it that bears much fruit.

For apart from me you can do nothing.

John 15



Prayer: Yes Lord, help us not to assume that we can keep thriving and healthy if we aren't abiding in you. Rescue us from the assumption that we can just set ourselves on automatic pilot, going to church, going through the motions, playing the role of Christians... without drawing near to you, without calling to you, without needing you, without living wholly for you. Lord, apart from you, we can do nothing, we have no life, we cannot bear fruit. We repent. Help us to see our sickness, our emptiness, our need. Lord, keep us from withering, keep us from being cut away and destroyed. Help us to draw near you, to abide in you, to be filled with life from heaven, and to thrive again. Amen.

March 2021

Featured Artist: Courtesy of Peter Koenig at pwkoenig.co.uk

TIME TO STOP BEGGING



Begging them to give money.

Begging them to come to church.

Begging them to raise their hands and say, “Praise the Lord!”

Begging them to witness.

Should not these things happen spontaneously?

Do they have to twist our arms?

Jesus never begs.

He invites.

He commands.

But he never begs.

Once you hear the Shepherd’s voice, it’s up to you.

If you follow, he will guide you.

If you walk away, he will not harass you.

Once Jesus sets you free you can follow or refuse to follow as you choose.

The Kingdom Way



In Christendom begging is standard practice.

In the kingdom of God the door is open for those who choose to enter.

But there is no pressure, no manipulation.

In the kingdom we never beg for money.

If their hearts are moved by love for God, they will give.

If they have no desire to give, let them keep it all with God's blessing.

In the kingdom we never beg the slackers to come to church.

If their hearts are moved, they will come.

If they prefer the ball game, go for it, with God's blessing!

"But our churches are dwindling; they are in financial trouble. Shouldn't we try to build things up?"

If the life has gone out of the tree, all the props in the world will never save it.

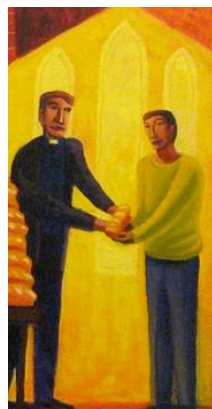
If the joy of the Lord is gone, maybe it's time to let the thing die.

While churches are shrinking and dying, the Body of Christ is as alive as ever.

While Christian institutions are cracking and crumbling, the Body of Christ is rising out of the ashes with a single focus:

**To follow Jesus.
To do things his way.**

**To spread the fire of the kingdom
to the forgotten ones of the earth**



They will come to the Banquet.

They will listen to the Master.

They will put the Christian scribes and Pharisees to shame.

"A man once gave a great banquet, and invited many; and at the time for the banquet he sent his servant to say to those who had been invited, 'Come; for all is now ready.' But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said to him, 'I have bought a field, and I must go out and see it; I pray you, have me excused.' And another said, 'I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to examine them; I pray you, have me excused.' And another said, 'I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come.'"

So the servant came and reported this to his master. Then the householder in anger said to his servant, 'Go out quickly to the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in the poor and maimed and blind and lame.'

And the servant said, 'Sir, what you commanded has been done, and still there is room.' And the master said to the servant, 'Go out to the highways and hedges, and compel people to come in, that my house may be filled.'

For I tell you, none of those men who were invited shall taste my banquet.'"

Luke 14



Prayer- Lord give us the vision and the heart to see and know that we do not need to manipulate or beg people into your Kingdom, or into our churches or beg for money to keep your Kingdom going. Give us the vision and the heart to know that the Kingdom and its needs are in your capable, loving hands... that all we need to do is to bring the leaven of the Kingdom with us wherever you send us... bringing your banquet, your life, your fire to the forgotten ones and by this your Kingdom will grow and flourish. Amen.

September 2021

Featured Art: Courtesy of James Janknegt bcartfarm.com

CHURCH- A TOMB OR THE DOORWAY TO LIFE?



Now on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene came to the tomb early, while it was still dark, and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb. So she ran, and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, “They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him.”

John 20:1-2

There is a very good reason why on Sunday mornings when you drive past flea markets the lots are loaded with cars. There’s a very good reason why in the summertime when we drive past Lawrencetown Beach on our way here, the place is already starting to fill.

It’s not that these people don’t believe in God!

If you were to ask these folks enjoying themselves at the flea market or the beach or a host of other places whether they believe in God, most would say, “Of course, I believe in God.” And if you were to ask, “Then why aren’t you in church?”, they’d laugh, “What has that got to do with it? Church? What makes you think you’re going to find God in church? Here at the beach, I can see blue sky, hear the waves...”.

For these people, and perhaps for many of us, going to church is like Mary Magdalene going to the tomb to look after a corpse.

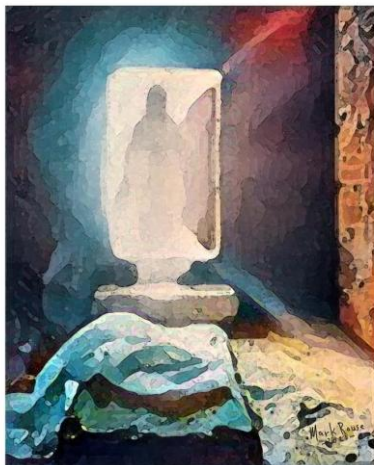
It’s a duty.

Somebody has to look after the corpse.

How long do you think the disciples of Jesus would have kept coming together if, when they got to the tomb that morning, Jesus' corpse was still a corpse?

The whole thing would have fallen apart in no time. Peter would have gone back to fishing. Matthew would have picked up where he left off at the tax office. Mary Magdalene and the women would have kept putting fresh flowers at the mouth of the tomb and that would have been it.

The thing that fired these men and women was that the tomb wasn't a tomb any more.



**They encountered Jesus, blazing with life...
and that life ignited their hearts, changed them.**

For the rest of their lives when they came together to break bread in His name, there was nothing tomb-like about it.

It was the high point of their week.

It was the source of their life.

They wouldn't think of missing it because here's where they got their strength.

The Holy Spirit came down upon them as they worshiped and brought Christ into their hearts afresh.

**They weren't coming to a tomb.
They were coming to the doorway of life itself.**

So what are our churches?



Are they tombs or are they doorways to the Risen Lord?

Now we have to conclude that the people who attend once or twice and never come back probably found them to be more like tombs.

A tomb is a place where you pay your respects to someone who's no longer around.

A tomb is a place where you comfort yourself with memories.

It's always a little depressing. People are trying to be cheerful and smile, "Well, I went. I suffered through it. I did my duty." And they leave the tomb, go home and have lunch.

Then one day someone comes into a gathering for the first time expecting it to be a tomb and, like Mary Magdalene, they get a surprise. In the midst of all the stuff going on they hear a voice...

Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away." Jesus said to her, "Mary." She turned and said to him in Hebrew, "Rabboni!" (which means Teacher).

John 20:15b-16

Alive from the dead - never to die again.

Speaking to this person.

Speaking to you.

That's what gathering together is all about.

Every time we gather together in his name, the Risen Lord comes among us and speaks.

When you hear Him, when you get even just a fraction of what He's saying to you, you discover that now *you're* the one rising from the dead.

Why is it that some people have this experience and others don't?
Why is it that sometimes we hear his voice and we recognize it and sometimes we don't?

What does it take for us to be able to discern the presence of the Risen Lord in our gathered fellowships?

The first person to see Jesus alive from the dead was Mary Magdalene. So, she's our guide. It's no accident that the Risen Lord came first to her.

There were certain things about Mary Magdalene that made this possible.

Healing

First of all Mary Magdalene had been healed of seven devils. Her mind was gone, her life was a mess, and then Jesus *delivered* her.

Most of us don't have to look very far into the past to find evidence of some kind of healing in our lives - healing from Christ.

Healing brought to us through someone's prayers.

Healing brought to us through the laying on of hands.

Healing brought to us through a spoken word that gave us hope.

If that hasn't happened to you yet, let it happen today.

Bring that need with you, that condition, that fear, that frightful secret, bring it to the rail, bring it to your prayer closet, bring it when you come for communion.

Ask the Lord Jesus to heal you and He will.



Submit to his Teachings

Secondly, Mary Magdalene had submitted herself to this man as her teacher. That's why the first exclamation out of her mouth was, "Rabboni!", (teacher).

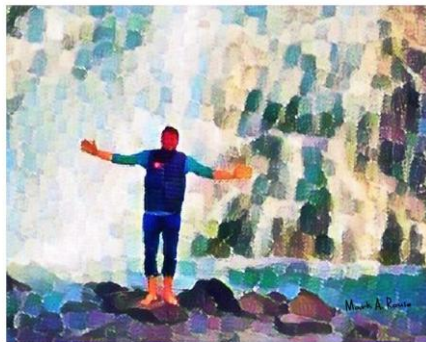
She'd been following him around.
Drinking in his teachings.
Applying them to her daily life.

In fact, all the people who saw Jesus alive from the dead were people who had soaked in his teachings.

Nobody else saw him.

In most cases, before you know him as your Risen Lord, you're first going to know him as teacher.

You're going to put yourself under the authority of his Word.



That's why the stress in any fellowship or gathering should be on the Word.

The Word incarnate in this man Jesus. Because the Word, and only the Word is the doorway to meeting him alive from the dead.

Committed to his Kingdom

Thirdly, Mary Magdalene had committed herself to his work.

Scripture tells us that Mary and some other women traveled around with Jesus and the disciples ministering to them out of their substance. In other words – paying the bills.

She wasn't just a spectator, she was a participant, she put something into it.



Maybe there was a time when she was into other things - perfectly legitimate things. But now, her heart is focused on the #1 priority.

She's committed to the work of the kingdom as Jesus makes it clear.

This is the focus of her life, and she has no regrets.

All the other stuff pales compared to the work of the kingdom.

Keep Drawing Near



Finally, Mary Magdalene was still making an effort to draw near to Jesus, even if all that was left of him, as far as she knew, was a corpse. She's drawing near in the only way she knows, and as she does, he draws near to her in resurrection power. "Mary!", "Teacher!"

That's how it works.

If you draw near to Christ in the best way you know how, he draws near to you.

You take that one step toward him, he takes 10 steps toward you.

There are plenty of people in the world today who think of church as a tomb and often they're right.

Who wants to keep going to a tomb?

But we are in the presence of the One....

... Who knows how to transform a tomb into a doorway to blazing life.

... Who has already touched many of us with his healing hand.

If we seek healing from Christ.

If we are submitting ourselves to him as teacher,

If we are committed to what he's about, his kingdom,

If we are serious about drawing near to him,

Jesus himself visits us through the Spirit, with power, every time we come together, and we leave our gatherings.....

**Knowing that we have been in the presence of the Risen Lord...
Recharged with the power of his endless life.**



May that be our experience each time we gather in his name.

Prayer- Yes Lord, may our gatherings be doors to blazing life instead of tombs filled with corpses and death. And Lord as we gather, come among us, speak to us, lift us from death. Heal us Lord, heal us. Help us to submit to your amazing teachings, your living and beautiful words. Help us to commit ourselves in every way to your Kingdom, making you the focus of our lives and our gatherings. Oh Lord, help us to draw near to you, to desire your holy presence as we gather. And may those who find their ways into our gatherings be surprised and pleased that we are not tombs mourning a dead body...but find us truly gathered around, imbued with, and worshipping your living presence and may their souls be ignited with your life and changed forever as they themselves turn from death to life, to you our Living God. Amen.

REB 2001

Featured Art: Mark Rouse at markrouseartpatternbyetsy.com, First photo monumental grave markers by Tony Mould, and Mary Magdalene by Chris Higham at builtonrock.org/uk

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THE LAMB
WHO WAS SLAIN
HAS BEGUN HIS REIGN