

# Jesus Changes Everything

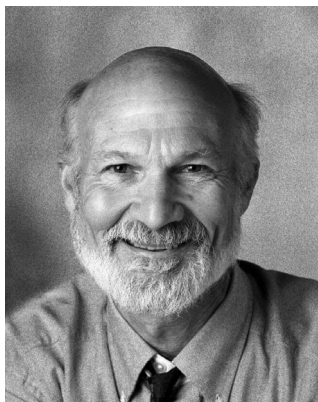
*A New World  
Made Possible*

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**STANLEY  
HAUERWAS**

*Edited by Charles E. Moore*

*Introduction by  
Tish Harrison Warren*



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# Jesus Changes Everything

*A New World Made Possible*

**Stanley Hauerwas**

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Plough

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*The theologian's task is to make it difficult to be a Christian. It is also to make it equally difficult to be a non-Christian, that is, to present an account of Christianity that shows the difference that being a Christian makes and how that difference may intrigue and challenge those who are not Christian.*

*—Stanley Hauerwas*

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# Introduction

Tish Harrison Warren

STANLEY HAUERWAS feels larger than life. He's funny. He's insightful. He grew up a blue-collar kid in small-town Texas, which lends a grit and plainspokenness to his theological work that keeps us all on the hook. For him, theology is not an abstract game, a jostle amid the experts with their jargon and fashionable truisms, a way to score points against others, or a way to bend the Christian story to fit our preferences. Instead, it is learning the story that teaches us to live.

Because of this, Hauerwas's work has had an unusually important, even intimate, impact on people's lives. I know more than one couple who decided to have children after reading Hauerwas (and I wonder how many men and women Hauerwas will meet in the resurrection who will thank him for inspiring their parents). I – a descendant of dyed-in-the-wool Texans whose



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ancestral home had an heirloom war rifle hung over the mantel – became a pacifist because of Hauerwas. I have friends who went to seminary to study theology because of Hauerwas’s work. His words change people.

Hauerwas is provocative, but not for provocation’s sake. Instead, he calls us back to the disruptive words of Jesus, and to the church – to a community of ordinary people who are meant to learn to follow Jesus in the concreteness of our lives in a complex world. He is clear that following Jesus will always come at a cost and will disassemble most of our expectations about how our lives should turn out.

I FIRST CAME ACROSS Stanley Hauerwas’s work sometime in the late 1990s, when I was in college. Reading him brought about something like a tectonic shift in my soul. His work changed the landscape. It changed how I saw the world.

I had grown up in a progressive city, Austin, Texas, in the nineties. I was also a Christian who knew about the so-called “moral majority” committed to taking back “family values.” In other words, I knew about the culture wars. And I was very cynical about all of it. I certainly never thought God was a Republican or a Democrat. But I didn’t know where that left me, and I didn’t know how to faithfully navigate American society as a Christian. I had little interest in devoting myself to the political left

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or right, but I was also uninspired by the idea of being a stubborn moderate trying to walk a centrist tightrope, which seemed antithetical to how Jesus lived his life. (Very few moderates are tortured and executed by empires.) In short, I lacked a Christian political theology and was skeptical of the options the culture (including church culture) seemed to offer.

Hauerwas's insistence that the first social task of the church is to *be* the church oriented me like a lost hiker who discovers a trusty compass. The notion that the church is an alternative community that embodies a different sort of kingdom, and that allegiance to that kingdom is our truest political and social responsibility, came as a breath of fresh air.

Over the twenty years since, as I've grown older, been ordained, and continued to seek to follow Jesus, I've come to see that what it means for the church to be the church is a pretty complicated question. This is why Hauerwas's voice is needed now more than ever. This is why this collection of his writing feels pressing, urgent, and vital. Because Hauerwas's voice is one that helps the church recall who she is and learn how to be the church, even now.

The misguided days of decades past with "moral majority" Christians seem almost quaint now, given the way American politics have metastasized into a vitriolic, quasi-religious conflict. Many Christians see those on

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the other side of the aisle as their mortal enemies. Yet both the right and the left seem to tacitly agree that the radical calls in the Sermon on the Mount to meekness, mourning, turning the other cheek, and loving enemies are outdated. Some Christians explicitly say that turning the other cheek doesn't work anymore, that we have to fight back now.

But Hauerwas makes clear that turning the other cheek has never “worked,” if by “working” we mean creating a nice life for us or for our children that is free of suffering and sacrifice, a life that fits neatly into the cultural expectations and political categories of our moment.

The call of Jesus to, for instance, turn the other cheek and love our enemies only makes sense if it is embodied by a community dedicated to being an embassy of the kingdom of God in wider society. And this will mean that we are, as Paul says, “aliens and strangers.” And, whatever else that means, it implies we will never feel quite at home.

For me, Hauerwas is at his most bracing when he says that to deprive Christians of suffering is to tell them that they cannot follow Jesus to the cross. The church today is weak, he says, because of “sentimentality,” our unwillingness to allow ourselves or our children to suffer because of our convictions. We use whatever means necessary to avoid the cross.

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Hauerwas also reminds us that, regardless of political party, any attempt by Christians to grasp control will inevitably give way to a worldliness that devolves into pride and violence. As he says in these pages, the sacrifices required by war and violence are both “counter-liturgies” to the sacrifice of the altar. Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross and our participation in that once-for-all sacrifice every time we receive the Eucharist deem the human sacrifice of violence false and idolatrous.

We can be “disciples” of Jesus – rather than mere “admirers” of him – only insofar as we recognize that the story that forms us insists that Jesus is already in control. We don’t have to prove this in a show of power or through political means. Instead, we, as a church, are to live into the story of what he’s already accomplished on the cross. Jesus – not us or America or the West or democratic politics – has brought the kingdom. Indeed, he *is* the kingdom enfleshed, and he demonstrates this, surprisingly, through his utter vulnerability.

All of this is profoundly countercultural. It’s even transgressive. And Hauerwas is, in the best sense, transgressive, not because he’s saying something novel but simply because he dares (and dares us) to take the scriptures seriously enough to be disturbed by them. Most of us Christians, particularly in the West, often contort the teachings of Jesus to fit into our own quest for the “good life.” We make God our ally in

self-actualization and realizing the American dream, and buffer ourselves against the stark consequences of his teachings.

But if transgression in our culture is seen mostly in terms of individuals being “true to themselves,” Hauerwas clearly calls people away from individualism and to a specific community. Nothing else Hauerwas says will make sense unless we believe that the church really matters. How we view the church matters. “The church does not have a social ethic,” Hauerwas argues; “the church *is* a social ethic.” Our ability to welcome the vulnerable, the disabled, and children; to speak truth; to practice generosity; to honor the limits and holiness of human bodies; to live “out of step” with the world; and to love our enemies is the embodiment of an ethic birthed out of the resurrection. This kind of discipleship isn’t a strategy for winning an election, having a picture-perfect family, or getting a raise. It is, however, as Hauerwas says, living “with the grain of the universe,” and is therefore the strange way of abundant life.

The way the church embodies this ethic is contextual and improvisational. While in some ways “being the church” is a universal and perennial call to all generations, the details and practices of this call will change according to the needs of our neighbors and the failures or strengths of a particular church at a given time. Of

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course, all of this must be discerned through the power of the Holy Spirit.

What it means for the church to be the church, however, is not to pick a side in the culture wars; nor is it to suss out some moderate position; nor is it to be apolitical or quietist. Instead, we learn together, in conversation with the church throughout time, to embody an alternative community that can approach all of life in a different way, a way shaped by the story and practices of creation, fall, redemption, and consummation.

When Christ came into the world as the king of a kingdom that is not of this world, a kingdom based in truth and not in power, neither Rome nor the Hellenistic civilizations around the church had any categories with which to understand this. Early Christians had no interest in directly supporting or upholding the empire, and they did not participate in the pagan temple sacrifices. In some ways, then, they may seem to have been apolitical.

But, as Hauerwas writes here, the refusal of Christians to kill is what required the church to be political. The early church was interested in a radically different sort of peace than was offered by allegiance to any earthly cause. And this strange political community ended up seeding the world with the gospel.

We, like the earliest Christians, are still called to resist the political categories, assumptions, and demands of our day. What the church does jointly when it gathers

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for worship is its foremost political action. Proclaiming “Jesus is Lord” has profound (though nonpartisan) political ramifications. We are citizens of another kingdom, called to demonstrate the ethics of that kingdom.

HAUERWAS BOLDLY CALLS US to this vision and charts a path of what it may look like in our own moment and culture. He dismantles Christian nationalism, which seems to be as rampant as ever, yet he also rebukes Christian progressivism and the ways it seeks to make the gospel more palatable to our culture. He calls all of us into something completely different: a community shaped by the cross of Christ, a community that welcomes others without losing itself, a community that makes no sense to this world, because it is formed by the Spirit of God.

Hauerwas also reminds us that as a church we must be formed by a story. In other words, he reminds us that theology matters – that, as he points out, poorly trained Christian pastors and leaders can do as much harm as poorly trained surgeons. In one talk he gave recently, I heard him skewer the oft-repeated truism that “people don’t care how much you know till they know how much you care.” The church and the pastoral office are being dumbed down so that the pastor is simply a nice counselor or therapist, and the church’s job is mostly to make everyone feel happy and uplifted.

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Hauerwas has no time for this kind of benign faith. (If one is primarily after agreeable spiritual uplift, I'd recommend avoiding Hauerwas.) He insists that we think theologically: that our minds and our whole lives – and our approach to every part of life – be deeply and meaningfully shaped by the story of Jesus. Sit with his words long enough and they become something like a solvent for clichés and platitudes. And this is needed now more than ever. People today often want to reduce the Christian faith to a debate that can fit into a hashtag. But true theology, as Hauerwas brilliantly says here, makes believing in Jesus “more difficult.” He understands that we have to struggle to be shaped by the story of Jesus and that if we do not, we will inevitably be shaped by other, lesser stories. Poor theology, then, isn't just some kind of spiritual faux pas. It deforms the church as a community. It produces cruelty and makes the development of Christian virtue impossible. Bad theology makes us into admirers of Jesus, not disciples.

What Hauerwas does well is bring to light the deep logic that is often shared between those who seemingly hold divergent, partisan views. He challenges things we usually take for granted, things like individual autonomy and rights, the idolatry of the nuclear family, the importance of personal identity, and the sentimentality of romance. And, for that matter, the sentimentality of “faith” as well. In challenging the deep logic held by all



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“sides” in our culture, Hauerwas defies easy thinking and explodes easy answers. He instead insists that Christianity demands a rigor in thought and speech that makes truth-telling possible. Whatever else the words of Hauerwas do, they always make me think – and they teach me to think differently.

HAUERWAS IS IMPOSSIBLE to categorize theologically. He is a Catholic-Anabaptist-Anglican. Sort of. But this is not because he is noncommittal or haphazard about the need for a local church. It’s because what Hauerwas offers is the kind of catholic faith that is shaped by a broad tradition of Christian thinking. His vision for the church, then, will challenge everyone.

Hauerwas reminds me that Jesus came to create a people, a polity, on earth. This is part of the gospel. The church is part of Christ’s continuing story in the world. And Hauerwas also reminds us that it is always possible – even now – for the church to repent and be reborn. In fact, as he says in this book, this post-Christendom age, when the church is quickly losing status and favor in the West, may be the best time to rediscover what it means to be Christians.

My husband and I often describe our society now as “post-Christendom *and* pre-Christian.” This suggests, with hope, that people may be able to hear the gospel

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anew. It means that God is still after our hearts and the hearts of our neighbors, friends, and fellow church members. As the delusion of an erstwhile “Christian West” fades, and as the number of those reporting no religious affiliation rises, disciples of Jesus may seek to proclaim and practice the gospel without the trappings of respectability, power, political captivity, and nationalism that have so long defined and malformed it. This is a big project, one big enough that it is worth giving our lives to. And in this project Stanley Hauerwas continues to be a key voice helping us chart the way of Jesus – to be the church Jesus created and loves.

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Tish Harrison Warren is a priest in the Anglican Church in North America and the author of *Liturgy of the Ordinary* and *Prayer in the Night*, among other books. She was formerly a weekly newsletter writer for the *New York Times*. She lives with her husband and three children in Austin, Texas.

# Who Is Stanley Hauerwas?

Charles E. Moore

IN PREPARATION for this book, I asked Stanley Hauerwas if I could look through some of his correspondence. He sent me to the main archives at Duke University and told me, “You can have access to anything. Just tell the librarian I sent you.”

When I arrived, the resource librarian told me I needed special permission, which I assured her I had, and that I needed to know that Dr. Hauerwas’s papers were extensive and not completely sorted. “Where would you like to begin?” she asked. I thought the years 1985 to 1998 would be a good place to start. Four days later, I had combed through forty file boxes worth of correspondence. Eighty more awaited me if I chose to read further. Hauerwas wanted to know what I had found. I shared a few snippets with him. In feigned astonishment he replied, “I said that?”

*Who Is Stanley Hauerwas?*

Hauerwas is known for saying things that catch people off guard. It's not that he tries to be provocative, or that he gives new answers to old questions. His desire? To "foment a modest revolution by forcing Christians to take themselves seriously as Christians." That is what this book is about, to challenge Christians about their Christianity by shaking them out of their customary ways of thinking and living, so they can be more faithful to Christ.

In Hauerwas's experience, his writings have often kept people from taking him seriously. "People think my claims are so exaggerated they couldn't be true." Take, for instance, the following statements in this book:

The gospel is about Jesus Christ, not about love.

The worst kind of unkindness is to rob others of their right to suffer.

Some marriages are miserable not because people are not committed to marriage, but because that is their only commitment.

To be rich and a disciple of Jesus is to have a problem.

Following Jesus is never safe.

If we are honest, we find Judas appealing.

The wealth of the church is the poor.

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War is but the desire to be rid of God.

The whole point of Christianity is to produce the right kind of enemies.

Christians are revolutionaries, but we believe the revolution has happened and we are it.

If the above declarations don't catch your attention, or at least make you curious enough to wonder what Hauerwas means, this book is not for you. Though hardly dour, Hauerwas is dead serious. Jesus changes everything! He is not nice, because he actually saves us from ourselves.

BORN ON JULY 24, 1940, Stanley Hauerwas grew up in a working-class home in the small town of Pleasant Grove, north Texas. Starting at age nine, he worked summers with his father, a bricklayer, though he says he never knew he was poor until he left home. He went to Southwestern University, then Yale University, where he received a PhD. He began teaching at the University of Notre Dame before moving to Duke Divinity School and Duke Law School. In the course of his career, he wrote over fifty books. Some, particularly *Resident Aliens*, co-authored with William H. Willimon in 1989, had an impact far beyond academia, changing the way many Christians viewed their role in society.

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Though he has been a prolific author and sought-after speaker, Hauerwas is more than an academic. A committed father of one son, for years Hauerwas quietly carried his first wife's burden of severe mental illness. He treats his students as friends, even jogging partners, and many have indeed become lifelong friends. His commitment and service to his local Episcopal church is unassuming but real. He loves to invite people to midweek Eucharist followed by going out to lunch. His love of life and his laughter are contagious, as is his love of baseball and travel. One can find him working around the house or just walking on campus with students or with a fellow faculty member. Behind the scenes, he visits the sick and sends notes of encouragement to people he knows.

For those unfamiliar with Hauerwas's life and writings, one-liners like the ones I highlighted above may come across as simplistic or overly confrontational. It is true that Hauerwas engages in polemics. But most of his writings are not pithy. In fact, the opposite is the case: they usually consist of extended essays that thoughtfully engage the writings of others at length. Hauerwas is a complex thinker, and to fully appreciate him one needs to read not only his books but also what he has read. If you do, you will find yourself traversing extraordinarily broad intellectual terrain, ranging from

political and moral philosophy to theology and practical church issues.

Any attempt to make Hauerwas's work appear more systematic than it is would be a mistake. In this sense, taken by itself this book might be misleading. Hauerwas is indeed forthright, but he is still sometimes hard to pin down. We can see Protestant, Catholic, and Anabaptist influences. This can be frustrating, especially for anyone who wants to "locate" his thought. But it does not mean he doesn't take any clear stands. This book clearly indicates otherwise. It simply means that Hauerwas eludes categorization. He is neither conservative enough for conservatives nor liberal enough for liberals. He is profoundly committed to fundamental Christian convictions while at the same time articulating a socially radical, unnervingly Christian ethic. He is an avowed pacifist and yet sometimes an outright thorn in the flesh.

Despite these juxtapositions, those who read Hauerwas will see repeated themes: the importance of the virtues for understanding the Christian life, the significance of the story of Jesus in determining what it means to be a Christian, the necessity of keeping Christian ethics Christian, the priority of the church as a community necessary for living truthfully, the necessity of nonviolence as an essential mark of being

Christian in the world, and the deleterious effects of accommodating political arrangements.

On this last point, Hauerwas is most trenchant. His approach to such matters as abortion, euthanasia, war, the death penalty, sexuality, and marriage is a welcome corrective to so-called Christian ethics that are actually guided more by liberal ideals of universal freedom and reason than by Christ. The attempt to do ethics objectively, from “nowhere,” has eroded the church’s ability to bear faithful witness. “What has to end is the habit of Christians asking non-Christians to do what we cannot get Christians to do.” For him, the church, not philosophy, determines what we have to say about Jesus and whether we have anything ethically relevant to show.

According to Hauerwas, the modern story is that we should have no story except the story we choose. We have not only separated ethics from character, but Jesus from the church, pitting Jesus’ person against his work and Jesus as teacher against his crucifixion. One can now be a “Christian” without having to become Jesus’ disciple. This is like trying to “have the results of the gospel without Jesus.” If Jesus had espoused some universal ethic, if his teachings were meant to be attractive to all, he would never have been crucified nor raised from the dead. Any so-called universal ethic is



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always someone's ethics disguised for *anyone*. Such an ethic either leaves Jesus out or ends up making Jesus, as Kierkegaard described, into our hobbyhorse.

So, what does it mean to bear witness to the Jesus of the Gospels? Certainly not taking control or pushing some "Christian" agenda. Attempts to Christianize the social order in the name of furthering God's kingdom or being politically responsible lead the church to sanctioning war and becoming a perpetrator of injustice. This insight is at the heart of Hauerwas's polemics. That doesn't mean he thinks following Jesus is a matter of holding certain beliefs that are personal and private and religious, or a matter of inner piety. No, following Jesus is "a public affair, with cosmic consequences." To worship him is itself a politics, a politics that subverts the status quo. God has created a world in Christ that otherwise would not exist. That world is called the church.

IT IS TEMPTING to conclude, as one critic has, that Hauerwas's understanding of discipleship demands that we be "sectarian, fideistic tribalists" removed from the world. Hauerwas not only bemoans this mistaken notion but has worked tirelessly to refute it. He is clear that the options before the church are neither sectarian withdrawal nor establishment respectability. Jesus is the

kingdom of God in person. He is God's eschatological reality made present, giving rise to a new social possibility called church. On the cross, the principalities and powers of this world are defeated. The cross bears witness to the fact that we don't have to make the world turn out right, nor do we have to follow the dictates of prosperity and power. On the cross, God incarnate refused to save the world by coercion. And neither should we try to. By enduring suffering, God gave us an opportunity to live in the world without killing those who would kill us.

The difference between the world and the church, therefore, lies not in a different set of values or even a different set of means. The difference, simply put, is Jesus. And that is why the first task of the church is to be the church, to be a people that bears witness in its life to God's new creation in Christ. That is not a doctrinal move; it is a political one. "Since Christians cannot kill, politics is a necessity." But this isn't just any politics. It is a politics of hospitality toward the other and toward the stranger, of patience and longsuffering with one's enemies, of caring for the injured and oppressed, and of a peaceableness that is truthful.

Is there anything else this politics of Jesus entails? For one thing, in a world that now lives amid the shards of Christendom, Christians are now free to be Christian.

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Hauerwas says:

One of the good things that is happening today is precisely the loss as Christians of our status and power in the wider society. That loss makes us free. We as Christ's disciples ain't got nothing to lose anymore. That's a great advantage because as a people with nothing to lose, we might as well go ahead and live the way Jesus wants us to. We don't have to be in control or be tempted to use the means of control. We can once again live like the first Christians.

And how did the first Christians live? They didn't merely confess Jesus' name but bore witness to Jesus as Lord. That changes everything. They embarked on an apprenticeship to a master through which they learned the skills that made them capable of narrating and instilling the virtues of God's peaceable kingdom – skills that reconcile enemies to God and to each other. This is what enabled the early church to display the kind of world God intends, a world in which there is no longer slave or free, Jew or Gentile, rich or poor, friend or foe. It was a community that in its liturgy and very materiality faithfully told, heard, and enacted the story of God's coming kingdom: the new creation.

To live in *that* kind of world looks strange and, yes, may even appear threatening. Faithful Christians, Hauerwas reminds us, have always been resident aliens.

*Who Is Stanley Hauerwas?*

And yet they have also always been bearers of good news – not of success or respectability but of the possibility of an alternative society that rejects the dictates of the market and the mechanisms of injustice, power, and violence. This new possibility eliminates the dynamics that pit us against one another – whether politically, economically, or socially – and seeks to fulfill God’s will on earth as in heaven.

HAUERWAS USUALLY WRITES dialogically, in conversation with others. This book is different in that respect. It is more straightforward and has a single focus: discipleship. Readers familiar with Hauerwas’s work may recognize some of the selections, but he and I have edited them down to get at the heart of what he thinks about following Jesus in today’s world.

Be forewarned: this book will quite likely bother you as much as it will inspire you. Stanley Hauerwas and his writings were a large reason why, thirty years ago, I left a professorship at a seminary and moved two thousand miles with my wife to join the Bruderhof, a Christian community that shares possessions in common in accordance with the Sermon on the Mount. Disillusioned with the Christianity we had known, we wanted to live like the first Christians, where no one was in need and everyone belonged.

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The danger for any follower of Christ is not that we do not believe, but that what we believe does not make any difference, for the church or the world. Hauerwas, both as a person and as a writer, has certainly made a difference. I trust this book will as well.

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Charles E. Moore is a writer and contributing editor to *Plough*. He is a member of the Bruderhof.

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PART

I

# Following Jesus

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Spirit of Truth, direct our attention to the life of Jesus so that we might see what you would have us be. Make us, like him, teachers of your good law. Make us, like him, performers of miraculous cures. Make us, like him, proclaimers of your kingdom. Make us, like him, loving of the poor, the outcast, children. Make us, like him, silent when the world tempts us to respond in the world's terms. Make us, like him, ready to suffer. We know we cannot be like Jesus except as Jesus was unlike us, being your Son. Make us cherish that unlikeness, that we may grow into the likeness made possible by Jesus' resurrection.

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# I

## Come, Follow Me

*Then Jesus said to Simon, “Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people.” When they had brought their boats to shore, they left everything and followed him.*

LUKE 5:10-11

WHEN JESUS CALLS Simon and Andrew, James and John, they are doing their trade: fishing. Yet they immediately leave their nets and follow him. In Mark’s Gospel, it says that James and John even leave their father (Mark 1:20) – an act signaling the sacrifices that the disciples will have to undergo in order to recognize who it is they follow, for the kingdom born in this man, the kingdom of David, requires a transformation that all his disciples must undergo. The new King David is not one whose purple is immediately evident, but rather his power, unlike the devil’s offer, can be found only in his crucifixion and following him there. It will take new eyes and ears to see and hear the truth proclaimed by Jesus.



## Jesus Changes Everything

The Gospels are unsparing in their description of the incomprehension of the disciples, but the disciples do follow Jesus. In this respect, they are different from the crowds. Jesus goes throughout Galilee teaching in the synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and curing those afflicted with diseases or demons, as well as epileptics and paralytics (Matt. 4:23–25). Great crowds begin to follow him, even from beyond the Jordan River. They are often in awe of Jesus and express amazement at his teaching. In the end, however, they will shout, “Let him be crucified!” (Matt. 27:22–23). Unlike Jesus, they give in to the devil’s temptation.

Even so, early on in the Gospels, we see what is required if we are to be followers rather than admirers of Jesus. The difference between the two is clear. Following Jesus requires repentance, turning away from the familiar to a training called discipleship. There is a change. That change is not a new set of beliefs plus a new set of behaviors. We are not Christians because of what we believe, but because we obey the call of Jesus: “Come, follow me.”

A story that theologian James McClendon tells about Clarence Jordan, the founder of Koinonia Farm, an interracial Christian community in Georgia, wonderfully illumines the difference between being a disciple and an admirer of Jesus. It is said that in the

early 1950s, Clarence asked his brother, Robert Jordan, who would later be a state senator and a justice of the Georgia Supreme Court, to represent Koinonia Farm legally. Their conversation went something like this:

“Clarence, I can’t do that. You know my political aspirations. Why, if I represented you, I might lose my job, my house, everything I’ve got.”

“*We* might lose everything too, Bob.”

“It’s different for you.”

“Why is it different? I remember, it seems to me, that you and I joined the church the same Sunday, as boys. I expect when we came forward the preacher asked me about the same question he did you. He asked me, ‘Do you accept Jesus as your Lord and Savior?’ And I said, ‘Yes.’ What did you say?”

“I follow Jesus, Clarence, up to a point.”

“Could that point by any chance be – the cross?”

“That’s right. I follow him to the cross, but not on the cross. I’m not getting myself crucified.”

“Then I don’t believe you’re a disciple. You’re an admirer of Jesus, but not a disciple of his. I think you ought to go back to the church you belong to, and tell them you’re an admirer, not a disciple.”

“Well now, if everyone who felt like I do did that, we wouldn’t *have* a church, would we?”

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“The question,” Clarence said, “is, ‘Do you have a church?’”

To become a follower of Jesus is not a matter of a new or changed self-understanding, nor a matter of becoming spiritual or going to church, but rather it is affirming with one's life that Jesus is God's Messiah – the Son of God who is the Lord. It means becoming part of a community that reflects the one we profess, the one who is our high priest and king to whom we give our allegiance. To live such a life is to undergo a fundamental change (2 Cor. 5:16–17), to be transformed so as to walk in the light of the new age inaugurated by Jesus.

This is good news. Jesus, God incarnate, invites us to enter into God's history, a story that both disrupts our world and reveals how God is reconciling the world. The stories of Jesus' life don't just display his life and recall his teaching; they train us to situate our lives in relation to him who is the inbreaking of God's new world.

