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Come to Me

BY REV. CHUCK MIZE

“Do your best to come before winter.” II Timothy 4:21

I've always had older friends. In Grade School, my older friends were the school custodians: Don, Louis, and Willard. In Junior High and High School, Rev. Victor Frohne and his family were our neighbors. Victor is 25 years older than I am. He and I built Heathkit electronic kits together, including two color TVs! The extended Frohne family, especially Victor's father, is the reason that I'm in ministry. In Green Bay, Jerry Kuehn, a retired Lutheran pastor, was my walking partner for sixteen years. Jerry was 26 years my senior. Sometimes these two clergy friends felt like my older brothers. Sometimes they felt like surrogate fathers. But, whether they were father or brother, they changed my life.

Timothy had a friend like that...a friend named Paul. Timothy met Paul in Lystra. And Paul was about 30 years older than Timothy. Sometimes Paul called Timothy his brother. Other times, he called him his son. Whether Timothy felt like Paul's brother or son...or whether Paul felt like Timothy's father or brother, the Apostle Paul was very clear about how dear Timothy was to him. In Philippians 2, he writes: I have no one like him...Timothy's worth you know, how like a son with a father he has served with me in the work of the gospel.

When Paul was arrested and put in prison in Rome, he knew that Nero wanted him dead. Timothy was working in Ephesus. It was summer and they were 900 miles apart. Paul desperately wanted to see Timothy one last time. So, at the end of his second letter to Timothy he wrote these seven words: “Do your best to come before winter.” Come before the weather will keep you from traveling. Come before winter, because my days are numbered. Most of all, just come!

There's an urgency in Paul's plea to Timothy: Come now! I need to see you. I need to talk with you. I need to be with you. one more time. But it's tempting for us not to come, isn't it? We have good intentions, but we're busy people. There are lots of demands on our time. And we can rationalize our inaction by noting that the people who expect us to come to them don't come to us. I have relationships with friends and family members where the road runs one way. I suspect that you do as well. But, to paraphrase Jesus: Where your time is, there your heart will be also.

One of the tragic things that we've done to our Christian faith and the Bible is to make them about tomorrow. We obey God today in order to earn our blessed place in glory tomorrow. We focus on a distant home in heaven someday instead of on an up-close heaven on earth today. Yet, for Jesus, the significance of today is not about how it will leverage our tomorrows. The significance of today is in its own grace and glory. As Jesus teaches us to pray: Give us this day our daily bread! It's all about how we come to Jesus, today!

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Come to Me cont.

Jesus' invitation lives in the irresistible urgency of the present: Come to me! Let me show you how wonderful life can be when you love one another as I love you. Jesus invites us: Come to me: not tomorrow, or next week, or next year! Come to me: today! Yes, today is the day! Jesus lives in the urgency of the present. Don't put off your response to His invitation. Because today is all we have. In the words of a song that Frank Sinatra made popular sixty years ago: Let's forget about tomorrow, for tomorrow never comes.

Jesus invites us: "Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest." --Matthew 11:28

And Jesus pleads with us to invites others: "Come to Jesus, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and He will give you rest." --Matthew 11:28, adapted

Jesus met a woman at Jacob's well near the Samaritan city of Sychar at noon. He had two compelling reasons to ignore her: she was a woman and she was a Samaritan. Nevertheless, He spoke to her and asked her for a drink. In their conversation her heart was opened. He was the Messiah! She was so excited that she ran back to Sychar, leaving her water jug behind, and invited everybody she met to come to Jesus: "Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?" --John 4:29

After Jesus found Philip and said to him, Follow me, Philip found Nathanael and said to him: "We have found him about whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus son of Joseph from Nazareth." Nathanael said to him, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip said to him, "Come and see." --John 1:45b-46

In his great hymn, Not Alone for Mighty Empire, William Pierson Merrill encourages us not to squander the opportunity of today: Standing in the living present, memory and hope between, Lord, we would with deep thanksgiving, praise thee most for things unseen.

In the living present, Jesus' relentless invitation is this: Come to me! When we do, our faith, hope, and love inspire us to invite others: Come to Jesus!

In the Garden

BY CHARLES A MILES

I come to the garden alone,
While the dew is still on the roses,
And the voice I hear falling on my ear
The Son of God discloses.

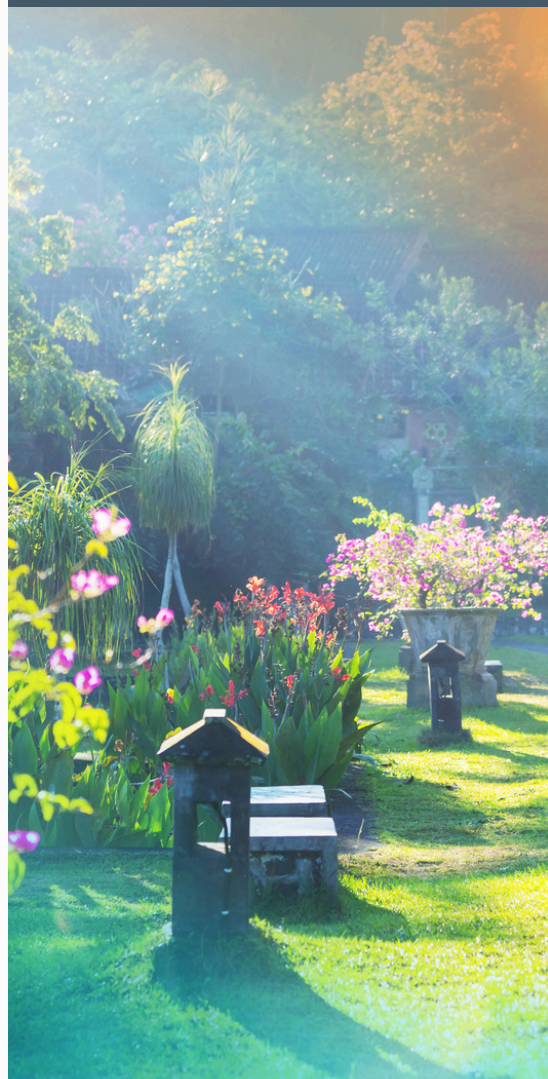
And He walks with me, and He talks with me,
And He tells me I am His own;
And the joy we share as we tarry there,
None other has ever known.

He speaks, and the sound of His voice
Is so sweet the birds hush their singing,
And the melody that He gave to me
Within my heart is ringing.

I'd stay in the garden with Him,
Though the night around me be falling,
But He bids me go; through the voice of woe
His voice to me is calling.

"Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

—Matthew 11:28-30





Bearing Fruit Together

I can't imagine a more counter-cultural and challenging vision of the Christian life than the one Jesus offers in this Gospel. "I am the vine, and you are the branches," he tells his disciples. "Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me, you can do nothing" [John 15:4-5]. If those words aren't blunt enough, he continues: "Whoever does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers; such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned" (v. 6). Burned? Gulp....

We are meant to be tangled up together. We are meant to live lives of profound interdependence, growing into, around, and out of each other. We cause pain and loss when we hold ourselves apart, because the fate of each individual branch affects the vine as a whole. In this metaphor, dependence is not a matter of personal morality or preference; it's a matter of life and death....

If God is the vine grower, Jesus is the vine, and we are the branches, what should we do? We have only one task: to abide. To tarry, to stay, to cling, to remain, to depend, to rely, to persevere, to commit. To hang in there for the long haul. To make ourselves at home.

But "abide" is a tricky word. Passive on the one hand, and active on the other. To abide is to stay rooted in place. But it is also to grow and change. It's a vulnerable-making verb: if we abide, we'll get pruned. It's a risky verb: if we abide, we'll bear fruit that others will see and taste. It's a humbling verb: if we abide, we'll have to accept nourishment that is not of our own making. It's a communal verb; if we abide, we will have to coexist with our fellow branches.

I can't imagine that there was ever a time when Jesus's followers found the metaphor of the vine easy to apply in daily life. But it's especially challenging to do so now. We live in bitterly divided times. We have good reasons to be cautious and self-protective, even within the church. It's hard in our self-promoting culture to confess that we are lost and lifeless on our own. That our glory lies in surrender, not self-sufficiency....

If only we would consent to see reality as it truly is. "I am the vine," Jesus tells his disciples. "You are the branches." It's a done deal. Whether we like it or not, our lives are bound up in God's and in each other's. The only true life we will live in this world is the life we consent to live in relationship, messy and entangled though it might be. The only fruit worth sharing with the world is the fruit we'll produce together.

Debie Thomas, *Into the Mess and Other Jesus Stories: Reflections on the Life of Christ* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2022), 144-146.

The Message of Jesus

"The plan is not that the Lord came to set us free from sin and bring us God's righteousness; He didn't come to start a new religion. He "came to start a political, social, religious, artistic, economic, intellectual and spiritual revolution that would give birth to a new world" (p. 4).

The kingdom, in McLaren's understanding, is here in some sense now yet needs to be further developed. Our agenda as kingdom people is to assist God in helping "this world become a place God is at home in, a place God takes pride and pleasure in, a place where God's dreams become true" (p. 203). The world is not going to be destroyed and recreated (or refashioned) by God; what will be destroyed is the "dominating powers that ruin creation" (p. 190).

McLaren is sure the kingdom is populated by people from all religions, not just Christianity. It is open to all but those who actively oppose it (pp. 163, 167). As a matter of fact it is possible that some Muslims, Buddhist and Hindus might "begin to 'take their places at the feast,' discovering the secret message of Jesus in ways that many Christians have not" (p. 217). Of course, "there is always hope that we Christians will not be the last to rediscover the truth that could change everything" (p. 217).

This secret message of the kingdom—what does it look like? In a word, "missional." It is a kingdom focused on injustice, poverty, education, integrity, the environment, hospitality, medical care, the healing of the earth, pollution, exploitation, greed, etc (pp. 84-89, 111, 141, 222-225). In McLaren's view this is what the kingdom is all about, not the redemption of souls.

Excerpt from book review of "The Secret Message of Jesus" by Brian McLaren





Belief or Discipleship?

Over the past few decades, our Christianity has become obsessed with what Christians believe rather than how Christians live. We talk a lot about doctrines but little about practice. But in Jesus we don't just see a presentation of doctrines but an invitation to join a movement that is about demonstrating God's goodness to the world.

This kind of doctrinal language infects our language when we say things like, "Are you a believer?" Interestingly, Jesus did not send us into the world to make believers but to make disciples [see Matthew 28:18-20]. You can worship Jesus without doing the things he says. We can believe in him and still not follow him. In fact, there's a passage in Corinthians that says, "If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing" (1 Corinthians 13:1-3, author's paraphrase).

At times our evangelical fervor has come at the cost of spiritual formation. For this reason, we can end up with a church full of believers, but followers of Jesus can be hard to come by.

One of the reasons that Francis of Assisi is so beloved is that he followed Jesus so closely. Francis did something simple and wonderful. He read the Gospels where Jesus says, "Sell your possessions and give the money to the poor," [Matthew 19:21] "Consider the lilies and the sparrows and do not worry about tomorrow," [Luke 12:24, 27] "Love your enemies," [Matthew 5:44] and he decided to live as if Jesus meant the stuff he said. Francis turned his back on the materialism and militarism of his world and said yes to Jesus.

Shane Claiborne and Tony Campolo, *Red Letter Revolution: What If Jesus Really Meant What He Said?* (Thomas Nelson: 2012), 9, 42.

Come to Me

BY SANDRA MCCRACKEN

Come to me
Walk with me
Learn the rhythms of my grace
Come to me
I have all you need
Learn to rest even while you are awake

Are you tired
Are you worried
Worn out from the day
Have you been in a hurry
I will slow the pace

"Follow me, and I will make you fish for people."

—Matthew 3:19b

