

Valued Followers of Jesus

Have you ever been picked last, not asked to the party, or just felt overlooked and left out?

When Jesus walked this earth, women in the society of the Ancient Near East were overlooked and left out, often seen as property to be owned. Every Jewish man was obligated to recite three blessings daily, expressing gratitude for one's station in life:

I thank God that I am not a gentile, a woman, or a slave

And yet it was these very people who that world marginalised and devalued who were the very people to first experience the resurrection of Jesus. The event that was to change everything was first announced by women.

In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning but didn't find his body. They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels, who said he was alive. Then some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but they did not see Jesus." (Luke 24:22-24 NIV)

Jesus often called those who were marginalised in his society, and he challenged attitudes to them. This was true of women but also of others - tax collectors, prostitutes, lepers, those with physical disabilities, the divorced, the adulterer.

God gives an extra special place for the marginalised. The lowly and the downcast. The peripheral, the insignificant, the unseen, those not counted equal. In the sermon on the mount, he challenged the typical ideas of those who were blessed or favoured – it was the poor in spirit, the meek, those who mourned, those who were persecuted.

So who are the marginalised of our modern societies? The asylum seeker? those on benefits? those with addiction? those isolated and lonely? the elderly? the learning disabled? How are we relating to them?

Why does God call the marginalised? Because they know they are not perfect, they know they need to change. A key to discipleship is knowing that we need to change. Knowing that we need to be transformed. That we have not got it all sorted.

If Jesus reached out to the marginalised of his time, if he placed such value on those that the society of his time did not value, then as followers of Jesus we must do the same. As disciples of Jesus, we must let him deal with us so that we become more like him in this way.

What will that mean for us? If we are ready to change then it will mean something.

Disciples who are ready to change listen

If we are too comfortable, too self-satisfied, we are more likely to look down on the unfortunate of our time

*⁵ Those who are at ease have contempt for misfortune
as the fate of those whose feet are slipping. Job 12:5 NIV*

Often, in our attempts to prove ourselves we can look down on others, separate from them, judge them. If we are insecure in our own identity, we tend to easily blame and criticise others. We stop

listening with an open heart, and just roll our eyes at them *Isaiah 37:23 NIV*. If we are prepared to change, we will keep listening to what God wants to teach us.

Disciples who are ready to change keep their heart soft

We will realise that there is so much for us to learn, that there is so much compassion for others he still wants to impart to us. We will want to become more like Jesus, by being soft and malleable like clay in the potter's hand *Isaiah 64:8 NIV*

We will want his fingerprints on our lives, to release our potential and make us the most useful for the plans and service he has for us.

Disciples who are ready to change lean on Jesus

5 Trust in the Lord with all your heart

and lean not on your own understanding;

6 in all your ways submit to him,

and he will make your paths straight. Proverbs 3:5-6 NIV

We are told here not to lean on our own understanding. Instead, we lean on our Lord. You can hear people much better when you lean in. You can feel their heartbeat much better when you rest yourself on someone. You can follow them much more easily if you are leaning in to see their every move. So lean in and talk to Jesus, find the truth, listen to his voice, obey him and be prepared to pay the cost.

The blessing of identity from the Jews we started with said "thank you lord that I am not...". Let's be rather those who thank God for who we are. And look again at that verse about the women

In addition, some of our women amazed us Luke 24:22-24 NIV

Let us be open minded enough to see the potential of all to be transformed. May the marginalized amaze us. May we be open to them being the ones God uses in incredible ways. Let's open our minds, our hearts, and our homes - and be prepared for the cost it takes to care.