

# When the Voice is Heard

**“Go to the heart.”**

**John 8:1-11**

*Last in the series: Redemption (how Christ can change a life)*

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## **Good**

9:00 on a Saturday morning. There must have been about 300 people from United Methodist churches all over the east side of Detroit area went to church. On a Saturday.

The preacher was Faith Fowler, a daughter of this congregation as well as her mother's daughter, Florence. She's known all over the country for the work she does in the Cass Corridor.

It certainly wasn't her main point, but in the middle of her sermon she said, "You all must be Christians because you're here on a Saturday morning when you could still be in bed." Then she turned to our District Superintendent and asked, "Just once couldn't you schedule one of these things later?" Faith...has a way about her.

*9:00 on a Saturday morning.* Just like 9:15 on a Sunday morning; or 11:00 when you have to get sleepy kids dressed or drive to another home to give someone a ride: *you* must be Christians.

Sometimes you'd think that would be enough. Why mess with us beyond this?

Yesterday after lunch I saw a few of my friends who were also pastors, talking with one of the workshop presenters. They had hooked onto the idea that there should be a night that clergy serve dinner to the Pontiac poor at the Baldwin Center. One of my friends had just been talking about how much work he had to do; but said, "I feel like I need to do this. I really need to get my hands in it."

When does God stop messing with you? 9:15 in the morning; 11:00: how far do you need to go?

## **Faithful**

Since Mother Teresa of Calcutta was a Roman Catholic sister I read her bio on the official Vatican website. I'm not sure what I expected – maybe something like a middle

class girl completely insensitive to the love of God and miles removed from the plight of the poor turned suddenly to faith and compassion for the underclass. It wasn't much like that.

Mother Teresa's brief description of herself goes like this: "By blood, I am Albanian. By citizenship, an Indian. By faith, I am a Catholic nun. As to my calling, I belong to the world. As to my heart, I belong entirely to the Heart of Jesus."<sup>1</sup> She was born in 1910 and raised in a devout family; received her First Communion at the age of five; and was confirmed in November, 1916. Her father died when she was eight and, in financial straits, her mother made do as a single parent, raising the children with loving firmness. She was a spiritual influence nurturing Teresa toward a vocation in the Church.

At age 18 she joined the Sisters of Loreto in Ireland. Two months later she left for India and became a missionary. She became a teacher and, a few years later, a principle at a school for girls in Calcutta.

Mother Teresa lived a life of prayer and devotion. What more could God ask?

How much is enough?

In the past few weeks we fished with Jesus' disciple Peter, whose hot air was changed into the fire of leadership. We walked with Paul, whose arrogant intellect was turned to humble wisdom and servant-hood.

I believe that Jesus Christ can change a life. Any life.

But what about a life like Mother Teresa's, who already loved God with quiet leadership and life-long service in a foreign land?

Does God need to mess with *everyone*?

In 1946, two years after becoming principal of St. Mary's School for girls in Calcutta, 8½ years after her work in India began, she was on her way to Darjeeling for her personal retreat when she was inspired by the first of several waves of visions – receiving her "*call within a call*." She was moved to a deeper love for Jesus and an overwhelming sense of compassion for the poor. This was something more that she had to do: carry Jesus' love to the neglected poor.

Two years later, Mother Teresa was sent to carry Jesus' light to the poorest of the poor, establishing the Missionaries of Charity community. She visited families in the slums of Calcutta, washed the sores of children, cared for the sick lying on the roads, took in old women dying of hunger and TB. She was soon joined by some of her students and together they went to serve "the unwanted, the unloved, the uncared for."<sup>2</sup>

All this: because after Mother Teresa had already devoted her life to ministry, God was not yet done messing with her.

Jesus Christ can change a life. Any life.

Jesus was in the Temple teaching when the scribes and Pharisees came with a woman they caught committing adultery. It's a famous story. They did this to test him. They said, "The Law of Moses says that women like her should be put to death by stoning. What do you say?"

There they were, so learned and religious: absolutely dedicated to a life serving God; and so above those who apparently didn't. And they wanted to put Jesus on the spot. If he said she should be put to death he'd be going against his gospel of forgiveness. If he said they should let her go, he'd be ignoring God's Law and standards.

So high above the woman. So high above...Jesus?

The next part of the story is a puzzle that's left everybody guessing. Jesus started writing in the dirt. He did that, I guess, for a very long time before he said anything. It seems like everybody needs to figure out what he was writing, like whether it was a list of the sins he knew that the accusers had committed or something. Maybe it was.

But maybe *what* he wrote wasn't the point. Maybe the point is that Jesus was getting into the dirt. That's it. Like he wasn't going to be high above the woman or the rest of the world that struggles with failure or illness or being separate from God's love.

Maybe *being in the dirt* with the rest of us was his point.

Right there in the dirt of the world in order to redeem the world.

Maybe he was really messing with them –calling for more, to join the woman and help her rather than staying above to condemn.

When he said, “Whoever is without sin: throw the first stone,” maybe it wasn’t just a judgment on them or a way to out-trick them. He said it then he started writing we-don’t-know-what in the dirt again: maybe it was an invitation to come down and join him in the dirt. And maybe when they went away, it wasn’t just because they got outsmarted... but that they weren’t willing to come down and go deeper.

How far does God expect you to go? Mother Teresa did not walk away. She joined Jesus: in the dirt where redemption is needed most and where she discovered a deeper meaning of her own redemption.

Even though the special inspirations never recurred and she wondered if absence of the mystical presence of Christ was a matter of being separated from him. She called it “the darkness,” the “painful night” of her soul. Yet that lack of feeling led her through her years and drove her to the interior desolation of the poor.<sup>3</sup>

That is right where Jesus will be found, you know: where we can meet him and stay with him. Deeper. Right in the dirt where we can get our hands in the Faith.”

### **Driven**

Up and at ‘em on a Sunday morning? You must be Christian. But there might be more. God’s not done with you yet.

Probably, God will never be done.

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<sup>1</sup> “Mother Teresa of Calcutta (1910-1997).

[http://www.vatican.va/news\\_services/liturgy/saints/ns\\_lit\\_doc\\_20031019\\_madre-teresa\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/news_services/liturgy/saints/ns_lit_doc_20031019_madre-teresa_en.html)

<sup>2</sup> Ibid

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.