

What Does Following Jesus Look Like?

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Forever Changed: The Women Who Met Jesus Series

Luke 1:26-55

There is a story that comes out of the 1500's in Scotland. The Protestant Reformation was just beginning in Scotland and the leader of the Reformation there was named John Knox, who was violently anti-Roman Catholic. When John Knox was a young man, he was taken prisoner and forced to row in a French galley ship for almost 2 years. Here is an incident from John Knox's journal. He writes:

Soon after the arrival of the ship [in France] a glorious painted image of Mary was brought in to be kissed and was presented to one of the Scottish men [me] then chained. I gently said, "Trouble me not; such an idol is a curse; and therefore I will not touch it." The soldiers with two officers, having the chief charge of all such matters said, "You shall handle it" and they violently thrust it in my face and between my hands; who seeing the emergency, took the idol, and advisedly looking about I cast it in the river and said, "Let our Lady now save herself: she is light enough; let her learn to swim!"

For much of the last 2000 years the Christian church has swung wildly from one extreme to the other concerning how we are to regard Mary, the Mother of Jesus. On the one hand, we have what some people would call "Mariolatry" – a devotion to Mary bordering on idolatry. Mary is claimed to be the woman clothed with the sun in Revelation 12. And she is said to have a crown of 12 stars over her head. Mary has been called "the Queen of the Universe." Mary has been called the "perpetual virgin." There is a belief in the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Church that she had no children after Jesus and she remained a virgin throughout her life. Roman Catholics believe that she was immaculately conceived; that is that she was born without the stain of original sin. And it has been said that she was bodily assumed into heaven; that is she was taken body and soul into heaven after she died without seeing any corruption.

In the Middle Ages the beliefs got so extreme that they really did border on idolatry. Mary was portrayed in many paintings as placating her stern son with milk from her breast. That's why Mary's milk, supposedly preserved in relics throughout Europe, was so highly valued. In the Middle Ages Mary was seen as one who intervened with Christ on behalf of sinners. Mary became the mediator with the mediator. And so various texts of scripture were rewritten with a slant towards Mary. For example, 1 Corinthians 15:22 in its original, reads:

1 Corinthians 15:22 (NIV)

22 For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive.

But in Marian devotion the text was changed to read:

As in Eve all die, so in Mary shall be made alive.

And the famous John 3:16 text was changed to read:

For Mary so loved the world...that she gave her only begotten Son...

The Lord's Prayer, itself, was changed into:

Our Mother, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name...

In thousands of churches around the world, the fact of the matter is that Mary figures more prominently than Jesus.

But is the alternative the other extreme? That is, to do what John Knox did, throw Mary overboard. That's pretty much what you find in most Protestant and, certainly, most Evangelical non-denominational churches. Like that painting that John Knox tossed off the ship, in order to not be accused of Mariolatry, the idolatry of Mary, or the replacement of Christ, we throw Mary overboard.

In most evangelical churches we argue about what Mary was not. We do not pray to Mary. She was not a perpetual virgin, or she was not assumed bodily into heaven, or she is not the mediator with the mediator. But we don't talk about what Mary was. And so today I want to talk about what Mary was. And what we find in the gospels is that Mary was a follower of Christ, her son. As the early Church Father, Augustine, said:

It was for her a greater thing to have been Christ's disciple than to have been his mother, and she was more blessed in her discipleship than in her motherhood. Hers was the happiness of first bearing in her womb Him, whom she would obey as her Master.

This summer I'm going to do a series titled "Forever Changed: The Women Who Met Jesus." It struck me this past year that I have regularly done series on various men in the Bible. I've done a series on the life of David, a series on the life of King Solomon, Moses, Daniel, the Apostle Paul, and Abraham. I fully expected that those male Bible characters were not just examples for the men in our congregation, but also for the women. Women, as well as men, would learn leadership lessons, or lessons in faith, or lessons for developing a heart for God from this Bible character who happened to be a man.

But it has been rare in my preaching that I've done a series on women in the Bible. Admittedly, women figure less prominently than men in the patriarchal ancient world. But I want you to know at the outset that as we examine women who were transformed by Jesus over the course of the summer, I'm not simply speaking to women here. These female characters are presented to us in scripture as models not just for women, but for me as well. So, today in this first message in my series we're going to look at the first woman who encountered Jesus – Mary, his mother – in a message titled "What Does Following Jesus Look Like?" Let's pray.

Before we turn to scripture, I just want to say at the outset that this series is not primarily going to examine the appropriate roles for women in the church or the home. I've written extensively on this subject. You can pick up the newest book that I co-wrote with Insoo Kim, one of our pastors here, titled Both-And.

Book Cover of Both-And by Rich Nathan and Insoo Kim

We have an extensive chapter on women in leadership in our book. Here at Vineyard Columbus women we believe roles are determined by giftedness not by gender. Women are free to serve in any role that a man can serve in. Women are free to preach, to pastor, to church plant, to be missionaries, and to be small group leaders. Our church's position on this can be found by looking back at the writing I've done on this subject over the last 15 years. You can check out my papers online at:

www.richnathan.org

...or by reading my book, Both-And.

So, this summer we're not going to be talking about appropriate roles; this summer we're going to look at women as models for us of what happens when Jesus encounters a human being whether female or male. And we are looking at Mary today. Let's look at Luke 1:26-38:

Luke 1:26–38 (NIV)

26 In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, 27 to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary. 28 The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you."

29 Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. 30 But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. 31 You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. 32 He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, 33 and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end."

34 "How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?"

35 The angel answered, “The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God. 36 Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be unable to conceive is in her sixth month. 37 For no word from God will ever fail.”

38 “I am the Lord’s servant,” Mary answered. “May your word to me be fulfilled.” Then the angel left her.

Who was Mary? Bible scholars believe that Mary was probably around 14 years old at the time of this encounter with an angel. She was very poor. We know this because when Mary and Joseph went to the Temple to have Jesus circumcised according to Jewish law, the offering they made was the one prescribed for the poorest of the poor. In the Hebrew Bible, if you were extremely poor and you wanted to make an offering, you offered two little birds. That’s what Mary and Joseph did. Mary is a poor teenage, peasant girl, living in a small town in a place called Galilee, who became one of the most famous people in all history.

But what Mary so great was that she became the prime example of what it means to follow Christ. Let’s look again at Luke 1:26-29:

Luke 1:26–29 (NIV)

26 In the sixth month of Elizabeth’s pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, 27 to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin’s name was Mary. 28 The angel went to her and said, “Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you.”

29 Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be.

What do we learn from this text?

Followers of Christ struggle with Christ

In what way did Mary struggle with Christ? She struggled with Christ’s words.

She struggled with Christ’s words

You know, many people think that if you are a follower of Christ, you will never have a struggle with faith. Followers of Christ must find it easy to believe in all the things we find in the Bible and all the things Jesus said. And if you are one of those people who does struggle with faith, if you have doubts, if you read stuff in the Bible, you read the words of Jesus and you really wrestle with them, if you have lots of questions – there must be something wrong with you. So many folks say, “I’m not the religious type. I guess it must be my training in science, or in philosophy.”

But look at Mary. The very thing we discover regarding Mary, this model follower of Christ, is that she wrestles with the conflict between what she was hearing from the angel and her own reason. Here is what we read in v. 29:

Luke 1:29 (NIV)

29 Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be.

The word “wondered” is not really a great translation here. As you know, the Bible wasn’t written originally in English. The Old Testament was primarily written in Hebrew and the New Testament was written in Greek. The Greek word for “wondered” in this verse is the word:

Deologistioco = use logic, to reason with intensity

Mary is trying to figure out how the angel’s message could be true. We often distance ourselves from people living in the past. We say, “We’re scientific people. We use logic. We use reason. We use science. We ask questions. We require empirical evidence unlike the ancient people.” The implication is those people back then were superstitious. They had no problem believing. They expected to meet angels every day. This happened all the time to Mary.

We’re so arrogant. We’re so snobbish as it comes to those who lived 100 years ago, or 1000 years ago, or 2000 years ago. My favorite author, CS Lewis, speaks about modern people as suffering from something he calls “chronological snobbery” because it’s recent it must be wiser, more intelligent. There is the assumption that we’re so much smarter than our ancestors.

But here we see Mary, this model follower of Christ, struggled. She reasoned. She used logic. What she heard didn’t make any sense. Mary was a Jew. The message she was hearing was that God, who spoke to the Jewish people at Mt. Sinai, was somehow going to become a little baby and be born through her. This was simply impossible for Mary. She experienced this major conflict between her reason, what her mind told her based on her culture, her upbringing, what she knew about life, and the Word of God.

I’m not saying that Mary had the same issues with God’s Word that we do living in 21st century America. I’m just saying that Mary and people throughout the ages have had their own issues that were just as big for them as the issues we face. It was just as hard for Mary to believe because of her cultural lenses, because of her expectations as it is for us to believe because of our cultural lenses and our expectations. Faith has never been easy for anyone at any time.

Christian faith challenge every worldview. It challenges every culture. The challenge is different at different times. But it is always a challenge. And faith is always a struggle.

The fact that you struggle, friends, to believe; the fact that you have doubts, that you wrestle, that you reason, that you find all these conflicts and tensions; the problem is not that you're not the religious type. There is no religious type, at least there is no type that finds faith easy, because faith is not natural; it is a gift. It is a grace. Working through all of the particular cultural stories that we have, all the things that have been pounded into our heads, all of the paradigms about what life is really like, what is possible and what is not, how the world works – all those things have to be wrestled with.

Mary was willing to wrestle. She was willing to take on her doubts. That's what makes her a model follower of Christ.

See, there are two things we can do with our doubts. We can use them as a wall, as a barrier, and say, "Well, I guess I'm not the religious type; I'm not the kind of person who easily believes." We can shrug our shoulders when we find scientists, philosophers, professors, attorneys, doctors, otherwise really intelligent people who do believe, and say, "That makes no sense to me at all," and never inquire further. Or we can be honest about our doubts and use them to compel us to ask more questions and to seek answers. With the questions you have and the doubts that plague you, dig in, reason, investigate, think. Don't use your doubts as an excuse to exclude yourself from the hard work of faith.

And if you do use your doubts to keep yourself from the hard work of faith, don't imagine you're doing it because you are so smart, because you are so courageous, and are willing to say, "I'm willing to boldly admit my unbelief as if that is a bold move, because you aren't the religious type, as if there is a type that easily believes. Say about yourself, "You know what, if I'm honest, I just have to admit that I'm too lazy to really investigate this thing called Christian faith that so many say has led them to a fulfilling, satisfied life. It is easy for me to throw up a few walls of doubt. I don't want to do the hard work of looking for more information, of listening to good arguments, of finding great reasons for faith."

But the struggle of faith isn't confined to those first few moments at the beginning of this journey of finding Jesus. It is not as if once we get over that initial hill and we decide to trust in Christ, then everything is really easy. The walk of faith is a hard walk. And it remains a hard walk all of our lives. It is hard to follow Christ. Sometimes we think, "Gosh, if I just had some amazing supernatural experience. Mary, at least, saw an angel. If I could just see an angel, that would make it easier and it would solve all my problems."

Mary is a model follower of Christ because we see that no matter how dramatic the supernatural experience was, the journey of faith always proceeds along a steep road. Mary's life was a struggle with faith. Consider with me Luke 2:41-46.

Luke 2:41–46 (NIV)

41 Every year Jesus' parents went to Jerusalem for the Festival of the Passover. 42 When he was twelve years old, they went up to the festival, according to the custom. 43 After the festival was over, while his parents were returning home, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but they were unaware of it. 44 Thinking he was in their company, they traveled on for a day. Then they began looking for him among their relatives and friends. 45 When they did not find him, they went back to Jerusalem to look for him. 46 After three days they found him in the temple courts, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions.

What was the struggle here?

She struggled with Christ's absence

I'm really struck by Luke 2:44,

Luke 2:44 (NIV)

44 Thinking he was in their company, they traveled on for a day. Then they began looking for him among their relatives and friends.

Isn't it the case that we followers of Christ often assume that the Lord is with us; that if we meet him and we turn we'll easily find him. And here Mary and Joseph assume Jesus is with them. When they turn to find him, he's no where around. They call out for Jesus, but he doesn't respond.

Is this not the experience of every follower of Christ? Where are you, Jesus? I thought you were right here next to me. The experience of the seeming absence of God when we need him is the experience of the people of God throughout the ages. Read through the laments in the Psalms.

Psalms 10:1–6 (NIV)

1 Why, LORD, do you stand far off?
Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble?

2 In his arrogance the wicked man hunts down the weak,
who are caught in the schemes he devises.

3 He boasts about the cravings of his heart;
he blesses the greedy and reviles the LORD.

4 In his pride the wicked man does not seek him;
in all his thoughts there is no room for God.

5 His ways are always prosperous;
your laws are rejected by him;
he sneers at all his enemies.

6 He says to himself, “Nothing will ever shake me.”
He swears, “No one will ever do me harm.”

Psalm 13:1–2 (NIV)

1 How long, LORD? Will you forget me forever?
How long will you hide your face from me?
2 How long must I wrestle with my thoughts
and day after day have sorrow in my heart?
How long will my enemy triumph over me?

Where are you, Lord? Why are you hiding yourself? Why aren’t you drawing near?

Of course, Mary’s experience of the absence of God pointed ultimately to Jesus’ experience on the cross where the Father withdrew his presence and Jesus cried out, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”

But Mary didn’t use her experience of the Lord’s absence as an excuse to walk away. She is a model follower of Christ because she didn’t collapse in the road. She searched for Jesus and sought him until she found him. And when she found him, she said, “Why have you treated me this way?”

We can do the same thing with Christ. Seek him until we find him. And when we find him, we may complain to him. But we have to keep seeking, until we discover him again.

So, Mary struggled with Christ’s words; she struggled with Christ’s absence, and as a model follower of Christ,

She struggled with Christ’s behavior

Read with me John 2:1–4 (NIV)

John 2:1-4

2 On the third day a wedding took place at Cana in Galilee. Jesus’ mother was there, 2 and Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding.
3 When the wine was gone, Jesus’ mother said to him, “They have no more wine.”
4 “Woman, why do you involve me?” Jesus replied. “My hour has not yet come.”

Now interpreters for nearly 2000 years have tried to soften the impact of Jesus’ statement. He literally says, “Woman, what do I have in common with you?” or “What do I have to do with you?” The NIV softens it to “Dear woman...” There’s no “dear” in the Greek. It is just “woman.” Some translators say, “Lady.” The only time I’ve ever heard “Lady” used as a direct address in contemporary culture is in New York where you

will hear a store clerk say, “Hey Lady, are you going to buy something, or are you just going to waste my time?”

I don’t think Jesus’ response is rude, but it is sharp. And we ought not to diminish the sharpness of his response to his mother. “Woman, what do I have to do with you?” What is going on here is that Jesus is asserting his independence. He is saying, “My agenda, what I am going to do, is dictated by my Father in heaven.”

Do you know what happens when Jesus comes on the scene? He sets the agenda. We may not approach Jesus Christ with a set of demands. “Listen, Jesus, you’ve just got to do this.” “You have to.” “You must.” It is unbelievably frustrating for us human beings to encounter the sharp rebuke of Jesus, the same sharp rebuke that he gave to his mother, “Listen, I don’t have to do anything. You do not control me.”

In our struggle of faith, we try a million things, a million techniques to get Jesus to do what we want him to do. That’s why books that tell you how to get what you want from God are unbelievably popular. People scooped up the Prayer of Jabez by the millions because they thought they had finally discovered the formula for us getting from Christ what we want.

Over the ages there have been all kinds of formulas. Some people have said, “Well, go to Mary, Jesus’ mother. Jesus always listens to his mother.” No he doesn’t. Read John 2:4.

John 2:4 (NIV)

4 “Woman, why do you involve me?” Jesus replied. “My hour has not yet come.”

Or, “I am free from your demands, mother.”

People said, “Go to the saints. He’ll listen to the saints before he’ll listen to you.” Some people today say that you need to banish from your thoughts all thoughts of doubt, just think positively when you pray. Just say over and over again, “I know that you are going to give me what I’m asking for” or “if I fast for a day, then I’ll get what I’m looking for from Jesus” or “if I fast for 2 to 3 days, then he’ll give me what I’m looking for because it will show how serious I am.”

Like Mary, the need is so obvious to us. “Jesus, this couple needs wine.” In our case, we say, “Jesus, we need a healing. We need a job. We need a spouse. We need this person’s heart to change. We need a rebellious child to turn around, to repent. It doesn’t make any sense, Jesus, to allow this situation to continue as it is. Isn’t it obvious to you that chronic pain doesn’t make any sense? It hurts. It doesn’t make any sense for me to have a sick child and not have them get well. It doesn’t make any sense for me to be unemployed when I want to work.”

Listen, prayer about any need is never inappropriate. We may always pray. What we may not do is presume that because of our special relationship with Jesus Christ, he must do what we're asking. There was no special place reserved for his own mother. There is no special status reserved for you or me because we are children of God and we've served Jesus so faithfully for 2-5-20, or 50 years. Some people come to Christ and presume to hand him a bill.

"Listen, I've been serving you faithfully. You're the one who called me to this particular task. Now you must come through for me."

And Jesus sharply responds to that kind of presumption as he did with his mother, "Listen, woman, [listen, man] you have no special claim on me. I set the agenda, not you."

Do you know, friends, that the freedom of God distinguishes the true God from all of the idols in the world. We read in Psalm 115:

Why do the nations say, "Where is their God?" Our God is in heaven. He does whatever pleases him. But their idols are silver and gold, made by the hands of men.

Our God is in heaven. He does whatever he pleases. With an idol, you can move them around and manipulate them. That's why people like idols so much. Idols of work, money, sex, drugs, and alcohol – we can demand from our idols that they give us what we are seeking, and to some degree they do. But we can't demand of Christ that he meet our need. In Christ's loving freedom, he determines whether he will answer our prayers. He is the agenda-setter.

And in Christ's loving freedom, he determines when he'll answer our prayers. We read in v. 4, *My time has not yet come*. Literally, "My hour has not yet come." He sets the time of his answers.

We always have to remember that when we don't get an immediate answer to prayer, it doesn't mean that we'll never get an answer. Christ said, "My hour has not yet come." You can underline those words, "not yet" in v. 4. Christ's "not yet's" do not mean not ever. Often the Lord says to you and me, "Wait, it's not my time for answering. It's not my hour. Wait. Not yet." Keep praying for a loved one, keep praying for someone's salvation. Never give up. He determines whether he's going to answer, and he determines when he's going to answer.

Let's read on in Luke 1:34-38:

Luke 1:34-38 (NIV)

34 "How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?"

35 The angel answered, “The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God. 36 Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be unable to conceive is in her sixth month. 37 For no word from God will ever fail.”

38 “I am the Lord’s servant,” Mary answered. “May your word to me be fulfilled.” Then the angel left her.

What we discover here in the model of Mary is that:

Followers of Christ surrender to Christ

I like the old King James Version of v. 38 which reads:

SLIDE

Behold the handmaiden of the Lord, let it be unto me according to Thy will.

The famous Beatles “Let It Be,” was a song that John Lennon hated because he believed his fellow songwriter, Paul McCartney, was talking about Mary the Mother of Jesus when he said:

*When I find myself in times of trouble
Mother Mary comes to me
Speaking words of wisdom, “Let it be.”*

As an atheist, Lennon didn’t want to hear those words about Mother Mary, “Let it be.”

Followers of Christ surrender to Christ. People often ask the question, “If I become a Christian, does that mean I’m going to have to give up having sex with my girlfriend or boyfriend?” “If I become a Christian, does that mean that I’m going to have to leave my job?” “If I become a Christian, does that mean I’m going to have to tell my parents about it, or my friends?” “Will I have to stop doing this or start doing that?” What people often want to engage in is as they consider taking that step of becoming a follower of Christ is folks want to engage in sort of a cost benefit analysis. I want to know exactly, what is this going to cost me and what am I going to get out of it?

It is appropriate to some degree to count the cost. Jesus tells us that there is a cost to discipleship, a cost to following Jesus. But here’s the deal. We’re never told at the front end what specific things Jesus is going to require of any of us. The only thing Jesus does tell us is that the life of faith is a life of surrender. We give up the right to determine for ourselves what the cost is going to be. It’s not, “Well, Lord, if you ask this of me, well that’s OK, but not if you ask that.” To authentically follow Jesus is to give up the right to determine for yourself what the cost will be.

At the front end of choosing to follow Christ, the only thing that Mary knew was that she was surrendering her life to God. She had no idea what was going to come; what God would require of her. She had no idea that 33 years in the future she would stand there and helplessly watch while the son she brought into the world and nursed at her breast, the one she loved, publicly humiliated, stripped of his clothes, beaten violently, spit on and nailed to a cross.

We never know what costs God will require of us when we say to the Lord, "I surrender." 40 years ago on Good Friday, following a Passover dinner in which I heard the gospel clearly explained, and I believed for the first time in my life that Jesus was the Jewish Messiah; that he was sent by God into the world to save me. I went outside at night and just opened my heart and my hands and said, "Lord, I don't know very much about you, but I do believe that you sent your Son into the world to die for me and I want to give you my life," I didn't know what that meant. I didn't know what it meant to say, "I'm a servant of the Lord, may it be done to me according to your will," that as a result of that simple decision to surrender I would get fired from one job at a law firm, and I would voluntarily give up another where I was teaching at Ohio State, in order to become a pastor. I didn't know what God would ask when I surrendered my life to Christ.

And none of you do either. It may mean that God may want you to turn a substantial portion of your bank account over to the Lord's work. It may mean that God asks you to break up with your boyfriend or girlfriend. It may mean that God asks you to choose a certain major in college, or to follow him to another city. But whatever God asks of us, surrendering your life means to give up the right to determine for yourself what the cost is going to be.

There is a spiritual discipline that has been known in the church over the last thousand years. It is called the discipline of submission. Here is how Richard Foster, in his wonderful book, *The Celebration of Discipline*, defines the discipline of submission:

It is the ability to lay down the terrible burden of always needing to get our own way. The obsession to demand that things go the way we want them to go is one of the greatest bondages in human society today. People will spend weeks, months, even years in a perpetual stew because some little thing did not go as they wished. They will fuss and fume. They will get mad about it. They will act as if their very life hangs on the issue. They may even get an ulcer over it.

Mary is a model of laying down the terrible burden of always having to get our own way. She says, "Let it be. I didn't choose this path for my life. But since you did, Lord, let it be." Mary's "let it be to me according to your will," is the same as Jesus' statement in the Garden:

"Not my will, but yours be done."

Do you know, friends that your happiness and my happiness does not depend on getting what we want out of life – getting the job you want, living in a certain type of home; getting the recognition you feel you deserve; being married; having children, having your kids succeed the way we want. One of the best kept secrets to happiness is this: We can be happy even if life doesn't go according to our plans. We can be happy even if life doesn't go according to our dreams. We can be happy even if we don't get our own way. Mary discovered the secret to happiness. The ultimate secret to happiness is surrendering your will to Christ: May it be to me, Lord, according to your will.

Finally,

Followers of Christ are subversive like Christ

Luke 1:46–55 (NIV)

46 And Mary said:

 "My soul glorifies the Lord

47 and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,

48 for he has been mindful

 of the humble state of his servant.

 From now on all generations will call me blessed,

49 for the Mighty One has done great things for me—
 holy is his name.

50 His mercy extends to those who fear him,
 from generation to generation.

51 He has performed mighty deeds with his arm;
 he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts.

52 He has brought down rulers from their thrones
 but has lifted up the humble.

53 He has filled the hungry with good things
 but has sent the rich away empty.

54 He has helped his servant Israel,
 remembering to be merciful

55 to Abraham and his descendants forever,
 just as he promised our ancestors."

Mary had a dream, a dream that all Jews in her day had, a dream that came from the old Hebrew prophecy that one day God would do what he promised – all nations would be blessed through Abraham's family. The only way that blessing was going to come was if those in power were toppled and those who were being bullied and kicked around would be lifted up. Mary says, "My soul rejoices because God has taken the slave masters and the powerful and thrown them into the dirt. And God has taken those who are weak and enslaved and he's set us free. He's going to do that through my son."

The word “subversive” means to overthrow, to overturn, to topple. That’s what Jesus did. He overthrew the powers, the things that keep people enslaved, sin and Satan, the fear of death, the idols that we give ourselves to, the addictions – Jesus overthrew those powers and threw them in the dirt so we could be free.

Part of being a follower of Jesus is following his way of being subversive, overthrowing oppressive powers and freeing people to be who God made them to be.

Let me close with this story. It is by Nicholas Kristof. He says in the muddy back allies of Pakistan, outside the city of Lahore, there is a woman named Saima Muhammad, who used to dissolve into tears every night. She is a round-faced woman with black hair tied under her head scarf. She has barely a rupee to her name. She had a deadbeat husband, who almost never worked. He was always angry and frustrated and took his frustrations out on Saima beating her mercilessly every night. Her house was falling apart.

Saima had to send her daughter to live with an aunt. There wasn’t enough food to around. Her sister-in-law used to make fun of her saying, “You can’t even feed your children.” She said, “My brother-in-law used to beat me up.” My mother-in-law told my husband to get another wife because “this one will never give you a son.” She had a debt of more than \$3000 that her husband had accumulated and it seemed like that debt would hang over their heads for a generation.

Well, Saima signed up for a tiny loan from a Pakistani micro-finance organization that helps women start businesses. Typically, loans are made to women who are in a group of 25. The women guarantee one another’s debt and hold one another accountable. They meet every two weeks to make payments. They discuss issues like schooling for their children. Saima took out a \$65 loan. She used the money to buy beads and cloth which she made into beautiful embroidery which she sold to the merchants of Lahore. She used the profits to buy more beads and cloth and soon had an embroidery business. She made enough money to bring her daughter back from her aunts and began paying off her debts.

The merchants asked for more embroidery than Saima could produce on her own. She paid her neighbors to assist her. Eventually, she had 30 families working for her. She even put her husband to work under her direction. Saima became the tycoon of her neighborhood and paid off her husband’s entire debt. She put her daughters in school and renovated her house. She had water connected to their home.

Now, everyone who used to make fun of her complements her. Her mother-in-law says that she has a wonderful daughter-in-law. She no longer talks about the husband taking a second wife. Her mother-in-law is grateful that Saima is providing for her. Her husband praises her. Saima just had a third child, another girl. Her husband doesn’t

criticize her. He now says, “Girls are just as good as boys. They can do anything a boy can do.”

Followers of Jesus turn the world upside down. That’s what Mary the subversive did. That’s what we’re called to. Let’s pray.

What Does Following Jesus Look Like?

Rich Nathan

July 12-13, 2014

Forever Changed: The Women Who Met Jesus Series

Luke 1:26-55

- I. Followers of Christ struggle with Christ
 - A. She struggled with Christ's words
 - B. She struggled with Christ's absence
 - C. She struggled with Christ's behavior
- II. Followers of Christ surrender to Christ
- III. Followers of Christ are subversive like Christ