



LESSONS for LIFE

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8 LIFE CHANGING MESSAGES FROM JESUS AFTERWARDS....

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How many of you feel energized? How could you not feel energized when you realize that you, as a group of people, kicked out from various other churches, ridiculed, maligned, said there's no hope, there's no way; and yet here you are singing that you are a church on fire, something that only a specific group of Christians claim that they could be on fire for God. What a testament, what a story! (Randi then sings☺)

You may ask me why I serve my God, is it just for heaven's gate but to walk those glorious street of gold or to hear the angels singing. Is it just to drink from the fountain that never shall run dry or is it just to live forever, ever and ever in that sweet old bye and bye. But heaven never was promised to me, neither God's promise to live eternally, it's been worth just having our God in my life living in a world of darkness that brought me the light.

Let me sing that again:

If there were never any streets of gold neither a land where I'll never grow old, It's been worth just having my God in my life living in a world of darkness God brought me the light; living in a world of darkness God brought me the light.

That's part of my story. Our theme today seems to be stories and that song has been speaking to me for a little while and it's become to mean more and more and more and how powerful it is to have God's presence in our lives and working with us.

I want to talk to you about 'afterward', not 'after word' – that's different; that appears at the end of a book. This is afterward or afterwards as some people say. I don't think it means a great deal which word is correct, but if you are in certain circles you will know that people sit around and discuss the meanings of these words and whether or not it's singular or plural, but 'afterward' is a term, a word that we use often when we say, *I'll see you afterwards*; and if you're trying to make a move on someone you'll say, *Afterward we could hook up for coffee?* Or, if you've had an argument with your friend or your partner and you know that you're in the right, you say, *Afterwards he said he was sorry.* A story could read, *Afterwards a deep husky voice yielded a piercing shrill yell...* You see, afterwards is one of those words which could come at the beginning, the middle or the end of a sentence and either way it has to explain the situation. I pulled up some quotes and I'd like to share them with you. Oscar Wilde said, *People fashion their God after their own understanding. They make their God first and worship God afterwards.* Tyne Daly, an actress said, *A critic is someone who never actually does battle but who afterwards comes out shooting the wounded.* René Descartes, who all of us know is a great French philosopher, said *Every problem that I solve became a rule which served afterwards to solve other problems*; and then someone – who can get no credit because there's no name



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given, said, *Experience is a hard teacher because she gives the test first, the lesson afterwards.* Spanish philosopher Baltasar Gracian said, *It is better to sleep on things beforehand than lie awake about them afterwards;* and how could I not quote Marshall McLuhan *We shape our tools and afterwards our tools shape us.* How mind boggling and thought provoking these 'afterwards' comments are, but they make us think – think about us and how we interact with others and our world. But there is something else that is intertwined with the word 'afterwards' and that's the future. You cannot speak about afterwards unless you refer to the future or a later period, or later on, or something that's going to occur subsequently; and so I replace one of those words for the word 'afterwards' and it may read like this: *Experience is a hard teacher because she gives the test first and the lesson in the future.* Let us pray: *God, thank you for stories: our past, our present, our afterwards, our future. Amen.*

It seems like it was yesterday that we were celebrating the birth of Jesus and then, lo and behold – don't you like that? It's very scriptural. Four months later we acknowledge his death and celebrated his resurrection, whether symbolically or as an actual occurrence. But what happened after his death? Let me give you a good story: You want the beginning, you want the middle and you want the end and yet somehow our stories about what's happening at the resurrection seem to be missing something here. So, I'm going to try to clue you in and tell you a few stories. The first story is about Peter; Peter, a play on the Greek word for rock or *petra* was the name Jesus gave to him. He was told by Jesus that he would build his church on him. Peter also became a fisherman of people. He and Andrew his brother along with John and James, the sons of Zebedee, were engaged in apparently a large fishing business. These men were considered unlettered men in their day. We see Peter become one of the lead disciples and like us sometimes he spouted off and said things that he would later regret. We see him incredulously responding to Jesus when Peter is told he would deny Jesus before the rooster crowed three times. And as we are reminded by our lectors on Good Friday Jesus' prediction was accurate.

Now Peter, oddly enough, is said to be a model for Christians. This may appear strange at first because the gospels relate many examples of Peter's unfaithfulness: point in question – his three denials of Jesus; but due to the very traits ascribed to Peter, he is doubtlessly the most exposed and talked about character in the gospels. Peter's failings are treated as representing our state of humanity. But what happens after, when Peter denied Jesus? In fact, he gets so annoyed at some stage that he even swears at the person. I ask you to put yourself in Peter's place; the pressure; wanting to do what was right; trying to be supportive; going into the enemy territory where Jesus was being tried; and then afterwards, where did he go? He perhaps hid to get away from the other disciples. He felt ashamed, he felt disgusted, he had lied. He'd let Jesus, his teacher, down big time and more so he'd let himself down. Peter undoubtedly felt less than. Did he consider suicide? And this was afterwards. It is interesting to note that Mark's first version of the resurrection that the angel in the empty tomb tells Mary to go and tell the disciples and Peter. That's how the text reads: *Mary, go and tell the disciples and Peter.* Had it been assumed that Peter, due to his afterwards predicament, felt unworthy to be a disciple? Again, Peter represents us. Peter represents humanity with all of our faults, with all of our challenges and, like him, often we say and do things that we regret. Ah, but then the resurrection occurs and in the aftermath he is the one that does not believe immediately, according to Mary's account, yet in the end Peter the rock doesn't look backwards but forward to greater things. In the end there's a document named "The Gospel of Peter."



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The second story I want to tell you is about Barabbas. Apparently, according to the gospel, it was customary for the Roman authorities to release a Jewish prisoner during Passover. The Roman Governor Pontius Pilate tried to use this custom as a way to release Jesus, but a crowd in the courtyard demanded and shouted that another prisoner by the name of Barabbas be released instead. Pilate felt the pressure, despite the fact that his wife even had a dream and told him to release Jesus – a typical story of a married couple: the wife speaks and the man pays no attention! Who was Barabbas? He is often depicted as dreadfully evil and a criminal but scholars seem to think he was a freedom fighter and not just a freedom fighter but was actually one of the leaders. This could have been one of the reasons the crowd shouted to free him because they expected Jesus to fulfil this role and Jesus had let them down. But afterwards what happened after Barabbas was released? There's really no reference to him. We can assume that he was grateful for his freedom; we can assume that he sought his first family and then we assume he went to his children's family who despised Roman authority and we can assume that he began to plot again. He may have even gone and watched Jesus die on the cross at Golgotha. Some sources say afterwards that he was killed in another revolt against the Romans. What about Pontius Pilate, a Roman official who gave the final order for Jesus' crucifixion. He was appointed to the position of prefect or governor in A.D. 26 and he remained in office for ten years. His two main roles were to ensure that order was kept in his region, so he had something against Barabbas and probably something against Jesus but he also wanted to collect taxes. He's depicted by historian Flavius Josephus as stubborn and cruel. Jesus was brought before him and it was very apparent that Pontius Pilate was not happy. Jesus had been arrested that night and Pilate had to get out of bed early and hear a case that he didn't want to deal with. According to Matthew's account Pilate washed his hands in front of the crowd as a way of showing he disassociated himself from his decision. How did Pilate feel after Jesus was crucified? Who knows? I'll let you decide how you feel after being pressured to do something you don't want to do and people are watching for your ultimate decision. You can perhaps feel the pain of having assigned an innocent person to death; but imagine more the fear and the agony of a few days later – after being told that the man whom you'd assigned to die and the man who'd actually died is rumored to have risen!

There is a fourth century book called *The Acts of Pilate* where it is suggested that Pilate may have been a closet Christian. He died in 39 A.D. and supposedly committed suicide. Judas – how can we overlook him? We all know about Judas; there's little good that can be said about him. He was one of the twelve disciples with Jesus at the last supper. All four gospels, in a rare show of unity, depict him as agreeing to betray Jesus by handing him over to the chief priest to be murdered. The betrayal is sealed with a kiss and in return he gets thirty pieces of silver. A consistent answer as to why he did it is simple: according to scholars he did it because of greed. Judas took the money but afterwards he felt so guilty that he acknowledged his mistake. He tried to return the money to the priest but the priest refused it. He threw the money on the temple floor and went out and hanged himself afterwards. That's one account. The Acts of the Apostles gives a different account of Judas. It is said that he bought a field with that money and he fell head first into it and all his bowels gushed out. The stories differ, but either way, Judas died a horrible death. And yet, there is also a book called *The Gospel of Judas*.

Mary Magdalene, one of the earliest and most devoted followers of Jesus. The gospels say very little about her until the day Jesus was crucified. She then becomes very prominent. She



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saw him die on the cross. She watched to see where he was taken and she returned to the tomb early on Sunday morning to find it empty. It is she who runs and tells others. It is Mary to whom Jesus appears first. She runs to tell the others and they think she's nuts! And then without any explanation Mary disappears from the text. Afterwards it appears she is shunned by the men and historically there appears to be great controversy between she and the very Peter who had denied Jesus. Mary has a book called *The Gospel of Mary*. Our scripture is taken from Mark chapter 16 and the disputed verse is 9 – 15 and it reads like this: *Now after He arose early on the first day of the week Jesus appeared first to Mary Magdalene from whom He had cast out seven demons. She went and reported to those who had been with Him while they were mourning and weeping. And when they heard that He was alive, and had been seen by her, they refused to believe it. And after that, He appeared in a different form to two of them, while they were walking along on their way to the country. And they went away and reported it to others, but they did not believe them either. Later Jesus says to all of His disciples, "Go into the world and preach the gospel to all creation."*

No, I'm not going to debate the accuracy of this story because, as some of you know, the ending of that resurrection story in Mark has three different stories. It's called the longer ending or the apocryphal edition but it's simply part of the story. I must confess that, like the book of Mark, I struggle over several endings for this but I do know that the common thread here is the word 'believe'. Regardless of what happened to the aforementioned persons their stories have wound their way down through the ages and have become our stories. We are the recipients of all that is afterward from that time. Did we see ourselves in Peter? Did we see ourselves in Pilate? Did we see ourselves a little bit in Judas? Did we see ourselves in Mary? Did we see some personality traits, some repeating patterns in any of them?

This morning we had two wonderful personal stories told by Melee and Marysia. Unless we forget – we all have some pretty amazing stories. I'm sure none of us are going to end up like Judas, and remember a story is really an account of an incident, actual or imagined. What we've shared tonight have been stories, stories from a totally different time, stories from a very different tradition and they're all about 'afterwards.' What happened to them afterwards? And what of your stories? I've heard some of them and I've been moved. I've been challenged and I've been blessed. Just to know where you've come from is amazing, but what you look forward to, your 'afterwards' is even more so.

Amen.