

CHOOSING LIFE ON THE EDGES

The Gospel's Message to Those on the Margins

Mark 1.4—And so John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness.

Mark 1.12—At once the Spirit sent him out into the wilderness.

“While the margin has a primarily negative political connotation as a place of disenfranchisement, Mark ascribes to it a primarily positive theological value. It is the place where the sovereignty of God is made manifest, where the story of liberation is renewed, where God's intervention in history occurs.” Ched Myers, *Say to This Mountain: Mark's Story of Discipleship*, p. 12

Luke 6.20-24—Looking at his disciples, he said: “Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed are you who hunger now, for you will be satisfied. Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh. Blessed are you when people hate you, when they exclude you and insult you and reject your name as evil, because of the Son of Man. Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, because great is your reward in heaven. For that is how their ancestors treated the prophets. But woe to you who are rich, for you have already received your comfort. Woe to you who are well fed now, for you will go hungry. Woe to you who laugh now, for you will mourn and weep. Woe to you when everyone speaks well of you, for that is how their ancestors treated the false prophets.

Luke 1.80—And the child grew and became strong in spirit; and he lived in the wilderness until he appeared publicly to Israel.

“We can celebrate the light of easter without demonizing darkness and reinscribing a white supremacist dialectic on Christ and the resurrection. My blackness is radiant, luminous and will not and does not need to be made white as snow. The blood of Jesus will not make me white. We must learn to talk about brokenness in the world with our reducing evil to darkness and goodness to light. Blackness is God's good gift.”
Rev. Dr. Wil Gafney (Attributed)

Mark 1.14-15—After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. “The time has come,” he said. “The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!”

Amos 4.1-2—Hear this word . . . you who oppress the poor and crush the needy . . . The Sovereign LORD has sworn by his holiness: “The time will surely come when you will be taken away with hooks, the last of you with fishhooks.

Jeremiah 16.16—“But now I will send for many fishermen,” declares the LORD, “and they will catch them . . . I will repay them double for their wickedness.”

Ezekiel 29.3-4—“I am against you, Pharaoh king of Egypt, you great monster lying among your streams. You say, ‘The Nile belongs to me; I made it for myself.’ But I will put hooks in your jaws and make the fish of your streams stick to your scales. I will pull you out from among your streams, with all the fish sticking to your scales.”

Mark 1.16-18—As Jesus walked beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. “Come, follow me,” Jesus said, “and I will send you out to fish for people.” At once they left their nets and followed him.

(Jesus summons working folk to join him in overturning the structures of power and privilege in the world!)

Matthew 5.3-14—“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you. You are the salt of the earth . . . You are the light of the world.”

All Texts Quoted from the NIV Unless Otherwise Noted

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Mark 11.15—On reaching Jerusalem, Jesus entered the temple courts and began driving out those who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves.

Mark 11.18—The chief priests and the teachers of the law heard this and began looking for a way to kill him, for they feared him, because **the whole crowd was amazed at his teaching.**

Political Hierarchy (Power and Privilege)
Citizenship

Class Contempt

(Contempt for Marginalized)

Religious Legitimation/Bigotry

Corrupt Criminal Justice System

Militarism

(Police Brutality)

Manipulation of the Masses

(Mob Action)

Mark 15.25—It was nine in the morning when they crucified him.

“Black women are intelligent people living in a technological world where nuclear bombs, defilement of the earth, racism, sexism, dope and economic injustices attest to the presence and power of evil in the world. Perhaps not many people today can believe that evil and sin were overcome by Jesus’ death on the cross; that is, that Jesus took human sin upon himself and therefore saved humankind. Rather, it seems more intelligent and more scriptural to understand that redemption had to do with God, through Jesus, giving humankind new vision to see the resources for positive, abundant relational life. Redemption had to do with God, through the ministerial vision, giving humankind the ethical thought and practice upon which to build positive, productive quality of life. Hence, the kingdom of God theme in the ministerial vision of Jesus does not point to death; it is not something one has to die to reach. Rather, the kingdom of God is a metaphor of hope God gives those attempting to right the relations between self and self, between self and others, between self and God as prescribed in the sermon on the mount, in the golden rule and in the commandment to show love above all else.” (Delores S. Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk*, pp. 130-131)

Mark 11.11—Jesus entered Jerusalem and went into the temple courts. He looked around at everything, but since it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the Twelve.

Mark 16.6-7—“Don’t be alarmed,” he said. “You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him.”

Luke 24.5-6—“Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here; he has risen!

“Matthew, Mark and Luke suggest that Jesus did not come to redeem humans by showing them God’s ‘love’ manifested in the death of God’s innocent child on a cross erected by cruel, imperialistic, patriarchal power. Rather, the texts suggest that the spirit of God in Jesus came to show humans life—to show redemption through a perfect ministerial vision of righting relations between body (individual and community), mind (of humans and of tradition) and spirit. A female-male inclusive vision, Jesus’ ministry of righting relationships involved raising the dead (those separated from life and community), casting out demons (for example, ridding the mind of destructive forces prohibiting the flourishing of positive, peaceful life) and proclaiming the word of life that demanded the transformation of tradition so that life could be lived more abundantly . . . God’s gift to humans, through Jesus, was to invite them to participate in this ministerial vision (“whosoever will, let them come”) of righting relations. The response to this invitation by human principalities and powers was the horrible deed the cross represents—the evil of humankind trying to kill the ministerial vision of life in relation that Jesus brought to humanity. The resurrection does not depend upon the cross for life, for the cross only represents historical evil trying to defeat good. The resurrection of Jesus and the flourishing of God’s spirit in the world as the result of resurrection represent the life of the ministerial vision gaining victory over the evil attempt to kill it. (*Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk*, p. 130)

“Jesus did not choose the cross. He chose to live a life in opposition to unjust, oppressive cultures . . . Jesus chose integrity and faithfulness, refusing to change course because of threat . . . It is not the acceptance of suffering that gives life; it is commitment to life that gives life. The question, moreover, is not Am I willing to suffer? but Do I desire fully to live? This distinction is subtle and, to some, specious, but in the end it makes a great difference in how people interpret and respond to suffering . . . To be a Christian means keeping faith with those who have heard and lived God’s call for justice, radical love, and liberation; who have challenged unjust systems both political and ecclesiastical; and who in that struggle have refused to be victims and have refused to cower under the threat of violence, suffering, and death. Fullness of life is attained in moments of decision for such faithfulness and integrity. When the threat of death is refused and the choice is made for justice, radical love, and liberation, the power of death is overthrown. Resurrection is radical courage. Resurrection means that death is overcome in those precise instances when human beings choose life, refusing the threat of death. Jesus climbed out of the grave in the Garden of Gethsemane when he refused to abandon his commitment to the truth even though his enemies threatened him with death. On Good Friday, the Resurrected One was Crucified.” (For God So Loved the World? in *Christianity, Patriarchy and Abuse*, p.18-20, edited by Joanne Carlson Brown & Carole R. Bohn)

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