

A Walk with Jesus

BY KATIE MULLIGAN

For use with Lesson Seven of the 2016–2017 PW/*Horizons* Bible study, *Who Is Jesus? What a Difference a Lens Makes* by Judy Yates Siker



Scripture: John 21:25

“But there are also many other things that Jesus did; if every one of them were written down, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written.”

I thought I knew myself, knew my canon. Then, several years ago, as I was finding my way post-divorce, I realized that a woman who was a good friend was someone I was attracted to. I had assumed for my entire life that I was straight. But one day over lunch, I suddenly realized this friend was more than a friend; she offered me laughter and passion and delight and possibility. My entire way of thinking about myself and the world was turned upside down. I spent the next year sorting through new feelings and thoughts, and eventually came to identify as queer (or sometimes bisexual).

In some ways I was just the same person. But this new queer lens offered me a different perspective on relationships, family, faith, friendship, sexuality and even gender. Everything I thought I knew looked different. The church looked different, too—suddenly more threatening, as a place that would condemn me if they knew who I “really” was.

We are often told that our faith as Presbyterians is supposed to be decent and in order. We arrange committees and use parliamentary procedures to talk about so many aspects of living out the gospel, living faithfully. Yet in many congregations, taboo or

sensitive topics—like sexuality or gender identity—aren’t addressed. In the absence of talk about these topics, it can feel like parts of our lives are indecent and that they do not belong in church.

For several years after that, I was careful about how much of myself I allowed church folks to know. I began to realize how much of myself and my story I kept away from faith conversations. I could see how I had compartmentalized much of my “regular” life from my “church” life.

Marcella Althaus-Reid, an Argentinian theologian, opens her book *The Queer God* with this scene:

Suppose that you are feeling lonely and think that the world is not a loving place anymore. Then you decide to go to the bar after praying your novena to your saint or to the Virgin Mary. Perhaps you are asking San Antonio for a lover and you know that at the door of the bar nobody checks for rosaries or religious stamps in your pocket. The same can be said when you are at the door of the church. They don’t ask you for that old love letter that you still keep in your bag neither do they realize whose hands your loving hands like to hold. Now suppose that in your mind the church and the Latina bar somehow get mixed up with fragments of memories of the Nicene Creed and of a Christ who died of love for you some time ago contesting the fact that nobody else seems to be dying of love for you anymore.*

Faith, by definition, refuses to stay within strictly drawn boundaries. The Spirit cannot be captured in a box. Living faithfully means listening for God's guidance in all aspects of our lives—finances, relationships, politics, vocation, everything.

Too often our stories are shortened, simplified or sanitized to fit a narrative of what's comfortable to

discuss in polite company. The parts that are too loud, too dirty, too big fall away. Perhaps it is time to re-examine these stories—our own and the church's—to see what we might learn about ourselves, about Jesus and about God.

Questions

1. What are the stories and pieces of your life that do not easily fit within your faith tradition?
2. If you incorporated those stories into your faith reflections, does this change how you see Jesus? If so, what changes?
3. When you consider the story of Jesus' life, what is missing? What questions do you have about who Jesus is? What difference would it make if you knew more details?

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Note

* Marcella Althaus-Reid, *The Queer God* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 1–2.