

Dear Jesus,

Adapted from CHRIST THE POWER SOURCE by Patricia Raube

Acts 1:6-14

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Sometimes therapists recommend writing letters to others where you get a chance to express your feelings uninterrupted. Often those letters are never sent but can be extremely helpful to the writer to work things out for themselves. A kind of processing through an event or relationship. I want to share a letter with you that I think speaks in this kind of manner written by Pastor Patricia Raube. (pause) /

Dear Jesus,

What happened? You were here on earth, walking among your people, teaching them, healing them, showing them the Way... where did you go? /

It must have been a blur. One moment, you and your disciples were all together celebrating Passover. But then... the worst happened. You suffered, you died... It was over, and they knew it. Your beautiful dream, which you had made their beautiful dream: good news to the poor; release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, letting (1)

the oppressed go free, the year of God's favor... God smiling on all God's children! All of it ended in a blur of violence and sorrow. /

But then, shock upon shock: like a different kind of dream, you were among them again. Your tomb was empty. They saw you; they touched you. Two of them walked a long way, and they discovered you walking with them. They broke bread together, and they found you in their midst. /

They were convinced! You lived again, still! /

And still, you held your dream for the world before them: God's kingdom, a place where all God's children are loved, cared for, valued, included. A place where greed and self-interest has no place. A place where the kindness and generosity of God are above all, and in all, and through all. (pause) /

And they thought: This is it! Finally, Jesus will reign in power, here! They were ready. They were ready for a ruler they could trust, one who put the well-being of the people above the empire, above his own power. And they asked you if they were right, if they had read the signs: Was this it? Was this the moment when you would ascend the (2)

throne? Show the Romans, and Herod, and all pretenders to power what real power looks like? /

Oh, Lord Jesus. How many times had you had some version of this conversation with them? “Not getting it” almost seems like it was a hallmark of discipleship, like everyone had passed some test for density, for not hearing this one thing you said, over and over. /

You were not ever going to be that kind of king. You were not ever going to be that kind of Lord, one who uses armies to accomplish his will. Not you. Not ever. They still didn’t get it. /

I can imagine, Jesus, the shadow crossing your face. You said to them, God’s timing, not yours. God’s will, not theirs. /

But you said a strange kind of thing, didn’t you? You told them that they would have power when you sent your Spirit. They would have power, not to march into Rome carrying swords under silken banners, like some version of Caesar 2.0. They would have the power to be your witnesses, right there, where they were, and to the ends of the earth. (3) /

But what happened, Jesus? You were there with them, or so it seemed... where did you go? (pause) /

Some say, you were lifted, right out of sight and into the heavens. Some say nothing at all about what happened, as if, maybe, you ghosted on them. Simply melted into a crowd, one day, disappeared. Some say, it was just like that morning at the tomb again, witnesses in white, angels explaining. Again. /

And so, your disciples returned to their upper room. They prayed. They searched the scriptures. They went about the business of living. Some probably talked of returning to their boats and their nets, goods, and their bills of sale. After all, everyone needs to make a living. Life goes on. /

And what does it all mean, anyway? How do they learn to live in a world where they could no longer *see* you? How do *we* live in that kind of world? (pause) /

Dear Jesus, this story, the one we read today, marks the moment when the early church suddenly becomes recognizable to us. We read about you in the gospels, and we think: If only we had been there. If (4)

only we could have seen him, in the flesh. If only we had heard him speak, felt his hand laid on us in healing, had eaten the bread he blessed and broke, as one of the hungry crowds gathered on the green grass.

What that must have been like! /

But here, in this story, the church of the resurrection becomes the church *we* know: a church that must carry on in faith, not certainty. A church that must share the good news with hope, not guarantees. A church in which we are asking ourselves, every day: Was that Jesus? Did we just see him... there, in that interaction? And we find ourselves looking up into the sky and wondering: Where did he go? What happened? /

And then we read a story about people in another mass shooting where several people stepped up and sacrificed themselves that others might live on. And a jolt of recognition streaks through us as we wonder: Jesus? Is that you? /

And we hear another story, this one about a 7th grade girl, giving an end-of-the-year presentation to her class, reciting a poem she has written. And suddenly everyone in the class is completely still, (5)

because this young girl is speaking the truth about the pressure girls are under: Pressure to be pretty, pressure to be slim, pressure to be smart—but not too smart! Pressure to please the teachers, pressure to be cool, pressure to twist and configure themselves into something they are not, because, for some reason, the overriding message our society too often is giving them is: they are not good enough. But she ends her poem:

“Society is wrong. You are loved. You are precious. You are beautiful. You are talented. You are capable. You are deserving of respect. You are good enough.” And... the hairs stand up on the back of our necks, and we look at this 13-year-old girl, and we wonder: Jesus? Is that you?

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Because you promised us the power, didn't you? You told us that we would have power when you sent your Spirit, and by that power we come to realize that we are characters in a big, big story that is, fundamentally, about God. And if we wander through our days looking for a haloed man in a white robe and sandals, or even wearing a crown on your head... well, we just might miss you in the heroes who prevent more deaths, or the 13-year-old 7th grader. / (6)

////// In our baptism you have claimed us, Jesus, isn't that right?
You have placed your seal upon us, the one that says: You are mine.
And if we are yours, then we share in your dream, isn't that true? The
very same dream you shared when you walked among your people: good
news to the poor; release to the captives and healing to the suffering,
freedom for the oppressed, and God smiling on all God's children. Your
dream still lives in those who step in to help a stranger, or in those who
dare to name the price of being a member of an oppressed group. Your
dream lives on in homeless men who rushed towards the explosion in
the concert hall in Manchester, England a few years ago to administer
first aid to children not their own... and your dream lives on in those
who make it their life's mission to end homelessness. Your dream lives
on in smaller acts of heroism, too, like lending a hand to someone who is
weary, speaking a word of encouragement to someone who is worried.
There are countless ways to be witnesses to the love you have shown us,
and in your Spirit, we have the power to do them all. / (7)

The power to do these things comes from you. The power to fill the world with Jesus-like acts of caring is in us. The power to be your people never leaves us, and so, you are always with us. (pause) /

Oh, Jesus. How do we live in a world without you? The simple answer is, we don't. You are here. We see you every day. Thanks be to God. Amen. ////