

## **Wisdom Jesus – Sandy Sweetnam’s presentation 4/24/22 at Living the Quaker Way: Reclaiming Jesus? Session 3**

Through my years as a Quaker, I’ve come to know God as a oneness, connecting all things, experiential. I reach for God by letting go of my practical left brain and moving into the mystical right brain, leaving behind the ego. Jesus to me was a model of how to be in the world. Cornelia Parkes suggested The Wisdom Jesus which folded Jesus into my personal Quaker theology.

Cynthia Bourgeault makes the case, from the Gospels, that Jesus was one of a number of enlightened individuals—the Buddha, Mohamed, Rumi-- who have come, each in turn, to transform our consciousness.

Sunday School taught me “Jesus was nice and he wants us to be nice the way he was”. She explains His teachings as a radical call to transformation. Our brains are hard-wired to see the world in polar opposites—good/bad, light/dark, man/woman. We perceive through differentiation, this not that—that left brain. He tried to move us to a non-binary openness, with no separation between God and man, human and human; to move us from our animal instincts and egocentricity to a flowing love and compassion and radical generosity. “My kingdom is not of this world “is a metaphor for this transformed awareness.

There had been a near East tradition of wisdom teachers who taught transformation of consciousness. Their hallmark was puzzles, parables, like zen koans. How do you lose your life to find it? What does it mean to die before you die? This tradition has continued in the teaching of Gurdjieff, Sufiism, Vedanta Kabbalah. The early church fathers spoke of a pathway of perception they called *epinoia*—knowing through intuition and direct revelation. The church in the West entered theology though Paul, became Savior-oriented. It stresses how different Jesus is from us—The Son of God. In the East Jesus was seen as the enlightened one. Jesus is like us, what he did himself is something we are called to do in ourselves. You may know that the word translated as “repent” comes from the Greek *metanoia*, which means “go into the large mind” or “go beyond the mind”. He wasn’t asking people to say they were sorry for their sins; he wanted to blow their minds! That Eastern path is what is found in the Nag Hamadi collection, the Gospel of Thomas, the African desert fathers and mothers, Celtic poetry.

You know the parable of the sower. A man hires some guys in the morning to work in his fields, they agree on a fair wage for the day. Then he hires more guys at noon, and another guy during the last hour of the day. It's time to settle up—he gives them all the same pay. “Not Fair” cry the morning guys, and we, which is binary thinking. He is trying to show us the perspective of fullness, abundance, enough for everyone, not a competition. He tries to short-circuit our mental wiring to a new way of seeing and being. Again, in the prodigal son, the profligate younger brother crawls home after wasting his inheritance. The father throws a big party. “Not Fair”—we get stuck in judgementalism and our own self righteousness. Jesus wants us to look at the part of us that insists on keeping score, that can't let go into generosity and love. We're with the older brother standing alone outside the party, where our egoic, binary brain keeps us from joining the dance. If we're stuck in the ego, we can't hear the music.

With these parables he is trying to challenge us, make us angry, make us look at ourselves more closely. It's a subversive tool to short-circuit the grasping, acquiring, comparing linear brain and open a new mode of perception. His whole mission can be seen as trying to push, tease, shock and wheedle people beyond the limited analytic intellect into the vast realm of the mind. He's beckoning: “Let's get into the larger mind. This is what it looks like. This is how you do it. Here, let me help you.”

The Gospels have what have been called the “hard teachings”, difficult sayings that seem to belong to a different Jesus tradition. They stand out like a sore thumb, irritating, unsettling. In Luke “Leave behind father, mother, brother, sister”. That's not nice! “Let the dead bury their dead”. They ask us to let go of our attachments, let go of our identity in the world. You've heard about the Gospel of Thomas, some of the oldest authentically attested teachings of Jesus. Thomas is a collection of Jesus transformational sayings. Nothing in Thomas contradicts any of Jesus' teachings in the canonical gospels, it rounds them out metaphysically. Much of it is very Zen. It speaks of a unifying oneness, of interabiding, “I in you, you in me, all in God, God in all.” It's a circle of continually renewed giving and receiving. Even in John, we read “Father, the glory that you have given me, I have given them, so that they may be one as we are one; I in them and you in me” --no separation between God and humanity; no separation between individuals,

because the sap flowing through everything is love. All spiritual paths lead to this same center, this one-ness, the emergence of this larger, non-binary mind, but they get there through different Wisdom Teachers.

Jesus asks us to put on the mind of Christ, acquire his consciousness, respond to the world with the same wholeness, and healing love and radical generosity, that he showed. Repent!