

Steps Towards Transformation

In an article for *Sojourners* magazine (2003), Rowan Williams reflects on the words of Jesus to Mary Magdalene, after the crucifixion. 'Do not cling to me,' says Jesus. Mary wants Jesus back as she remembers him, the humanly familiar Jesus she knows and understands. Rowan explains the feelings that might underlie a need to see Jesus on our own terms:

'There is a clinging to Jesus that shows itself in the longing to be utterly sure of our righteousness. We want him where we can see him and manage him, so that we know exactly where to turn to be told that everything is all right and that he is on our side. We do it in religious conflicts, we do it in moral debates, and we do it in politics. We want to stand still and be reassured, rather than moving faithfully with Jesus along a path into a new life whose turnings we don't know in advance.'

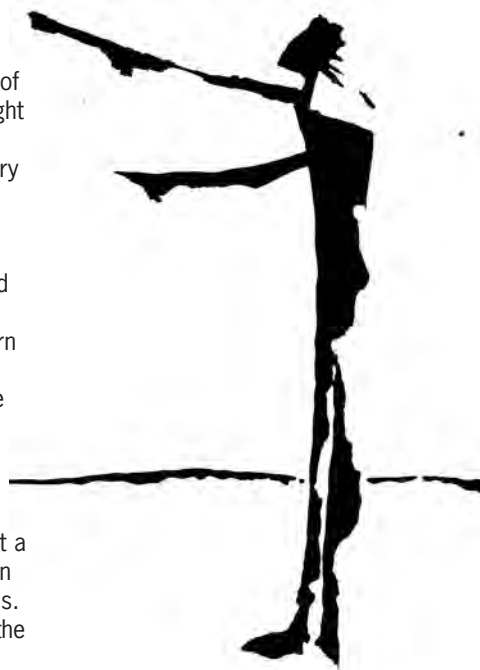
But no. ***Don't cling.*** Instead, follow. Moreover, go and bring others along on the journey. The disciples, along with Mary, have to ***'learn that the risen Jesus promises a transformation never yet imagined or expected, the possibility of reconciliation and of sharing Jesus' intimacy with God.'***

Like Mary and the disciples, we too are summoned to follow Jesus on this journey of transformation, not knowing where this might lead, but living in the faith of the resurrection. The role of the church, in every age and in every place, is to proclaim the gospel in such a way that transforms individuals, institutions, societies and the world. St Paul writes, 'do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so you may discern what is the will of God; what is good and acceptable and perfect' (Romans 12). If we are ***not*** made different by receiving the gospel message then what meaning does our faith have for us?

The articles in this issue of *Green Christian* go some way to demonstrate that a ministry of transformation is taking shape in the lives of contemporary disciples of Jesus. Transformational ministry may call us into the joy of voluntary simplicity, supporting the

move to 'local resilience' called for by the Transition Town movement. It might involve us in pastoral care, stepping into solidarity with the often-invisible poor people in our towns and cities. It might engage us in political advocacy and non-violent direct action in the face of overwhelming corporate power. It might grapple with the ethics of our dependency upon computer technology. Whatever the area of our calling, the temptation to dull our prophetic voices, to be complicit and complacent and to collude with unjust structures, is ever present. How easy it is for us as church members to step into the role of 'chaplains' to our culture, instead of being 'subversives' to it.

In all times and places the faithful church will transform lives and communities. Perhaps the most urgent transformation for our times, is that of our relationship with the wider Earth community. The need for a transformation in our relationship with the Earth is evident to us in the innumerable facets of the global ecological crisis. Our hope is that the churches will focus attention on healing our abusive relationship with the



Earth and so be among the most effective agents of change.

Rowan Williams, in the same article in *Sojourners* magazine, reminds us of another temptation. Through our desire to cling to Jesus as-we-want-him-to-be, to claim him for our version of what is right and good, we fail to notice the evil in ourselves. The temptation is to claim the absolute rightness of our cause, and to see absolute evil in the other. However, this serves only to ***'stand in the way of following Jesus to God.'***

It is our intention that the articles, stories and information presented here help us to struggle with the ethical dilemmas of our times in such a way that our eyes and minds are opened to hearing and welcoming the views of others. In so doing, ***'we do our best to test and challenge our own convictions, to bring them to the truth ... we accept that even as we work for good ends, we shall find ourselves wandering or compromised. We make our decisions about right and wrong, good and evil, as prayerfully and carefully as we can, and try to find the courage to take the consequences of those decisions ... and we recognise that the denial of evil in ourselves does not help the cause of good.'***

We don't yet see clearly. But lack of clarity need not lead to passivity, nor to clinging on to images of ourselves as good and right. We can take the next step. We can follow. Like the disciples before us, we can follow Jesus, justified by his gift of love alone. As we do, we might contribute to the transformation of our relationship with Creation which God so passionately desires.

Laura Deacon and Chris Walton

The passages in bold italics are taken from 'Don't cling to me' by Rowan Williams in *Sojourners* magazine (July-August 2003)