



Spiritual Formation for Kingdom Action

Being Jesus in the World



By Rev. Bill Haley

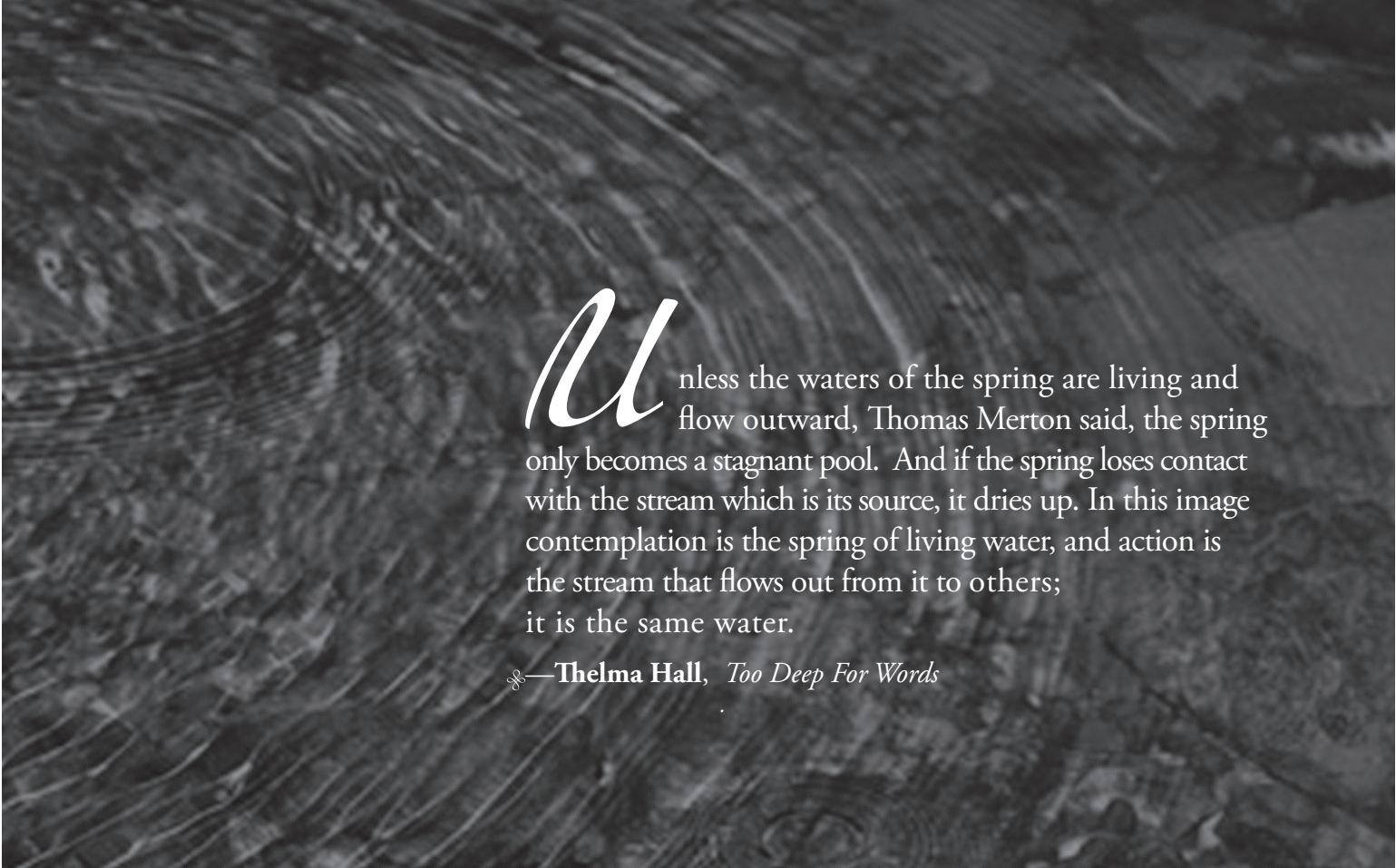


The motto of Coracle is: *“Spiritual Formation for Kingdom Action”*

It is not “Spiritual Formation *and* Kingdom Action”, like macaroni *and* cheese, that you can have one without the other, or peanut butter *and* jelly, which are great together but you can in fact have them separately. No, it is “Spiritual Formation *for* Kingdom Action.” That is to say that the work we do for God

in a broken world must be preceded and never separate from our becoming more like Jesus along the way. Similarly, we don’t allow our efforts at spiritual growth to thinly veil a deeper goal for self-actualization, or a more comfortable life, or to remain as fire insurance. Rather the purpose of our

becoming more and more like Jesus is precisely then to engage the brokenness of the world for the sake of the Kingdom of God, and all of it for the glory of God. Like water flows downhill. Like two wings of a bird. “Spiritual Formation *for* Kingdom Action.”



Unless the waters of the spring are living and flow outward, Thomas Merton said, the spring only becomes a stagnant pool. And if the spring loses contact with the stream which is its source, it dries up. In this image contemplation is the spring of living water, and action is the stream that flows out from it to others; it is the same water.

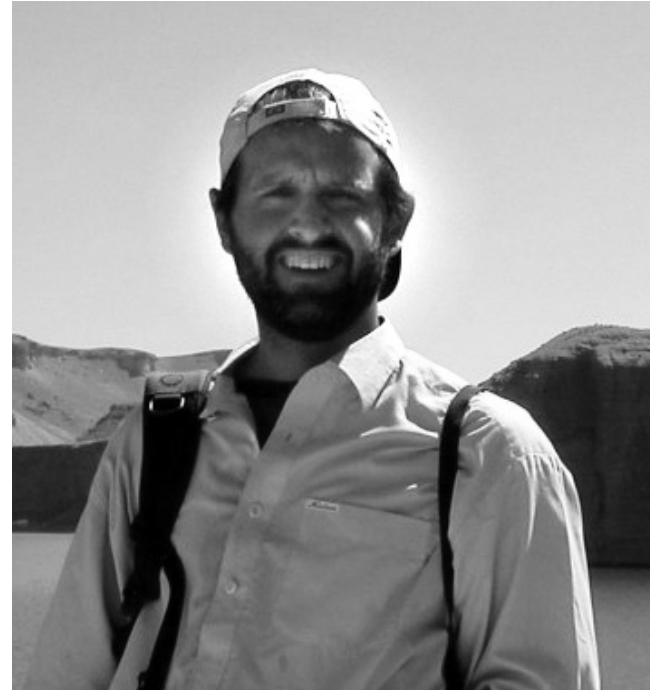
✧—**Thelma Hall**, *Too Deep For Words*

On August 5, 2010, Glenn Lapp and nine other Christian workers were shot and killed in the far northeast of Afghanistan.

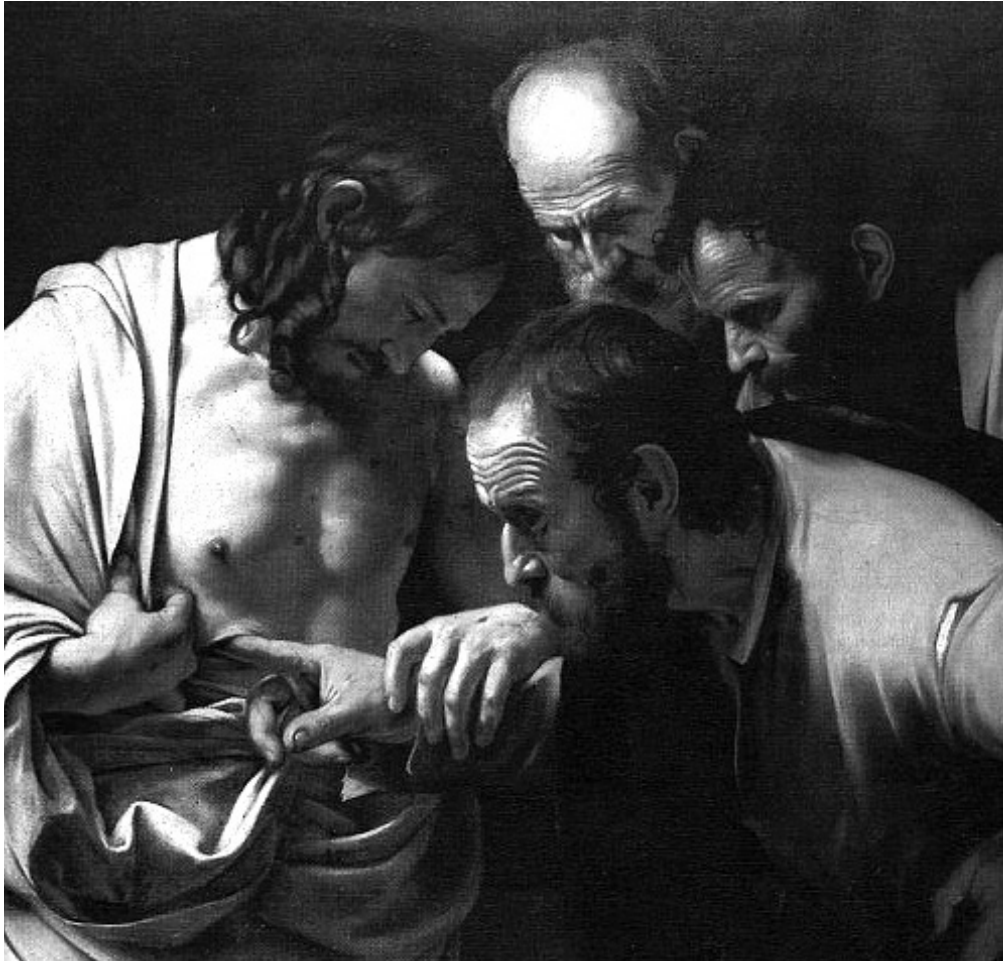
This team from the International Assistance Mission (IAM) included a surgeon, an optometrist, a nurse and a dentist, and their presence in Afghanistan was neither new or naive. IAM had been working in Afghanistan since 1966, and leaders of this particular team both had been working in Afghanistan for over thirty years, even living there. They knew well the risks involved with working there. They had gotten all the permissions from the Afghan government to run a healthcare camp that focussed on bringing healing to the sick and sight to

the blind. It was a medical mission, and they all had gone to care for the bodies of the Afghan people with beautiful souls whom God loves, and somehow in their service show, with their hands and feet, God's love. Then they were executed by the Taliban.

Just a few weeks before he was murdered at age forty, Glenn wrote home to Pennsylvania about why he was doing what he was doing. He wrote, **"I'm just trying to be a little bit of Christ in the world."**



At first glance, this story seems to be about death, but it's actually about resurrection, specifically the resurrection. The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the only thing that makes sense of the death of Glenn Lapp, and what light it casts on that darkness.



A Reading from John 20

19 On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, “Peace be with you.” **20** When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. **21** Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.” **22** And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. **23** If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld.”

The context of John 20:19-23 is quite literally, cosmic. John 20 is the account of what happens right after the resurrection of Jesus. Having reflected on it's larger meaning over many years, John chooses to include certain facts about that event that tell us that something remarkable, literally universal, has happened.

At the beginning of the chapter, John is explicit. This is the first day of the week. It happens in a garden. When Mary sees Jesus for the first time, she mistakes him for a gardener. Later on that same first day, when Jesus sees the other disciples for the first time, he breathes on them, and gave them his own spirit. They become a new kind of creature.

The echoes of Genesis 1 and 2 are clear and strong, when God starts creating a new world, and creates a man in a garden and breathes new life into him. What John doesn't want us to miss and the Bible is clear on is that Jesus is the Second Adam and the day of resurrection of Jesus is the first day of a New Creation. Something important begins, and it's literally cosmic, the first step in a new sort of world, and even a new sort of human.

The larger arc of the Biblical story is that God created the world with a great design, and then it broke, radically broke, and so here Jesus is getting the world back on track towards that design that was from



the very beginning. As my 11 year old son Liam describes it, "It was like a ship that had gotten blown off course and Jesus is putting back on the right course." That's the larger context here.

So then in John 20:19 the disciples are locked in a room because they're afraid, Jesus shows up through a locked door, and probably scares them half to death! So he says, "Peace be with you", that is, "the Shalom of God be yours, the fullness of God be with you." And he shows them his hands and side, with remnants of the wounds from the spear and nails.

There is something striking about this image—Jesus showing them his hands with nail prints and then he says it again, "Peace be with you." The power of this image and what Jesus says while he shows them his hands will become evident.

Then he says something amazing that comes all the way across the centuries to us as well, "**As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.**" Wow, really? As God the Father sent Jesus the Son, that's how Jesus is now sending us? But what does that mean? It means a lot of things, and one of the clearest of them is in Luke 4:43.

What's going on in Luke 4 brings to mind one of the most powerful moments of the pilgrimage to Israel and Palestine that I took in February 2015. It is in Luke 4 Jesus gives his first sermon. He goes public, really

public, in his hometown synagogue in Nazareth. While we were in that little town we sat in that very place, and read Jesus' words of good news that started his ministry. He said in his sermon, "I have come and I am here. All God's promises for 2000 years are now coming true, and it's good news for the poor, the oppressed, the sick, the blind. And it's good news for everyone, Jew and Gentile, good news for the whole world."

He said something in that place, and then he started walking, doing something that demonstrated that what he had said was actually true. And what did he start doing? He started directly confronting the effects of a broken world, and through the power of God brought a different story. He started healing sick people and giving sight to the blind. He started casting out demons and raising people from the dead. He started making things right.

And then he says something amazing. People were wanting him to stay in their town. You'd want him to as well! But he said, "**I must preach the good news of the Kingdom of God to the other towns also...for I was sent for this purpose.**" (Luke 4:43)

OK, here you have Jesus, walking



from place to place, confronting brokenness and bringing redemption, preaching good news with his words and deeds, in his message and his actions, in his words, he was bringing the good news of the Kingdom of God. This, by his own testimony, was why he was sent, to bring the good news of the Kingdom of God.

Now that is one murky phrase, the “Kingdom of God.” What exactly does that mean? It’s obviously important since Jesus talked about well over a hundred times in the Gospels. But what does it actually mean? It took me quite a few years to wrestle it to the ground and come up with a definition that makes sense to me and gives me some sort of idea what to do. Here it is, **the Kingdom of God happens when what God wants to happen happens.** It’s pretty simple. Put another way, **the Kingdom of God comes when the way God designed things to be are.**

And how did God design things to be? He made this whole world and put people on it so that everyone and everything could experience his goodness and his full-

ness and his grace and his glory. He made it all so it could become what he made it for, and so that each person could become who he made them to be, to **flourish**, in living relationship with him. Another way we could say that is that he made everything and everyone so that we all could



“The Kingdom of God happens when what God wants to happen happens. It’s pretty simple.”

experience his **Shalom** and know his glory, all the goodness that he is, and that by living like this, it would be awesome for us, for every body, for the whole creation. And when it does work that way, it is awesome. There’s nothing like it.

But that’s not the way it turned out. We know this. We feel this. It’s not the way the world has worked since sin and death entered it, and it’s not the way

the world works now. To go over history’s list is too long. Just some of the events of the first half of 2015 are unfortunately enough to make the point that the world is not as it should be. Charleston. Baltimore. Syria. Iraq. Ferguson. The Germanwings airplane crash. ISIS. Nepal. Mexico. Tunisia. North Korea. Ukraine. Boko Haram. Charleston.

There’s some good news here actually. In fact, for as rough as the world looks right now, its actually in much better shape than its ever been in relative to peace, and poverty, and disease. There’s much to celebrate, and as often as not it’s followers of Jesus who are behind so many of the efforts to make the world look more like a place of Shalom than less.

And it’s also true that if Jesus hadn’t come, if God’s grace wasn’t operating, and if Jesus didn’t launch a movement, the world would look a lot worse than it does now. If God’s Kingdom of God hadn’t begun 2000 years ago on the “the first day of the week”, we’d be in a lot worse shape. The whole world would look like Syria does now.

But here's the thing. Jesus *did* come. Jesus *was* sent. To do what? To bring the Kingdom of God. To get the world, blown off course like a sailboat in a storm, back on course. **He was sent so that the world could arc towards the Kingdom of God that it was always meant to be, a place where what God wants to happen, happens, a place where everyone and every thing knows God's Shalom, his fullness that leads to our flourishing.** That's why Jesus was sent. That's what'll happen when he comes back and brings the Kingdom of God in its fullness. Maranatha! But until then?

Back to John 20:21. Remember, Jesus is showing them his hands. "As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you." He's showing them his hands. Wounds for the sake of love. Cost that comes from bringing the Kingdom of God. Suffering for the sake of others that leads to redemption. "As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you."

Here it is. Jesus came into the world to intentionally confront the effects of the

Fall, to take on the suffering of the world upon himself, and by the power of God redeem it, by his body being a conduit of God's grace for the sake of the coming of the Kingdom of God and the revelation of his glory. And that's what we are to do. As followers of Jesus and his very body on earth, we are to intentionally confront the effects



“Put another way, the Kingdom of God comes when the way God designed things to be *are*.”

of the Fall, take on the suffering of the world upon ourselves, and by the power of God redeem it, with our very bodies being a conduit of God's grace for the sake of the coming of the Kingdom of God and the revelation of his glory. Kingdom Action.

Kingdom Action is doing stuff to bring the Kingdom of God, making the world a place that God designed it to be.

But we cannot do this on our own strength. We cannot. It's too broken. Our strength, our skill, our smarts are simply not enough.

So Jesus goes on, "As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you...Receive the Holy Spirit." Receive my spirit, he says. "Let me live inside you. If you are going to do what I'm sending you to do, you must let me live inside you. You must let me live through you. Your body will become my body. You will become the way I keep doing my work in the world. You will become the way the world will know what I look like. You will become like me."

And this is Spiritual Formation. **Spiritual formation simply is the “process of becoming like Christ for the sake of others.”** (Robert Mulholland)

Spiritual formation is the long process of how the Holy Spirit of Jesus continues to take up residence in us, and takes fuller possession of us, and makes us more and more like Jesus himself in our character and with his power.

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“The more we find out about Jesus, and particularly about his death and resurrection, the more we are then energized by the Spirit to reveal God’s love to the world. In John 20 Jesus breathes on the disciples and says to them, “As the Father has sent me, so I send you. Receive the Holy Spirit.” And suddenly we see the whole vista of what God did in Jesus, through his healing and his suffering, through his parables, his celebrations, and ultimately his agony. And, with that, we discover that the story of Jesus’ ministry is not only the story of what he did in history, but encompasses also the vocation that comes to us in the present: that we should be, in the power of the Spirit, the presence of Jesus for the whole world. This discovery brings the most remarkable joy and the most remarkable sorrow. This is our vocation: to take up our cross, and be Jesus for the whole world, living with the joy and the sorrow woven into the pattern of our days.”

✂—NT Wright, *Reflecting the Glory*





“Christ has no body but yours,
No hands, no feet on earth but yours,

Yours are the eyes with which he looks
compassion on this world...

Yours are the hands, yours are the feet,
Yours are the eyes, you are his body.

Christ has no body now but yours,
No hands, no feet on earth but yours,

Yours are the eyes with which he looks
compassion on this world.

Christ has no body now on earth
but yours.”

✂—Teresa of Avila

Spiritual formation is at the heart of Jesus' imagery in John 15, vines and branches, fruit that lasts, abiding in him. He said, "Abide in me, and I in you... I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in them, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing."

Spiritual formation is at the heart of Paul's spirituality. We heard it read this morning. Galatians 2:20 "I have been crucified with Christ. **It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.** And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." In other words, it's not even about me any more...it's about Jesus living in me.

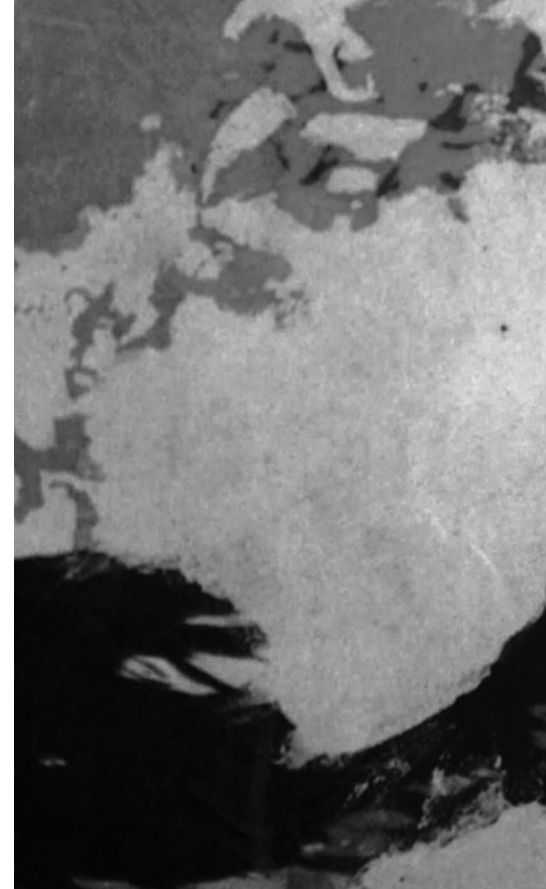
This is the purpose of our salvation. This is why Jesus saved us. Not simply to pluck us from the fires of hell, but rather so that we could be somebody. The forgiveness of our sins is not actually the point, it's the starting point. It's a necessary beginning of a process for a greater purpose. It's a means to a greater end. **The purpose of our salvation is so that our lives can be transformed into the very likeness of Jesus Christ, so that we live like him, love like him, heal like him,**

act like him, know the Father like him, be used like him, be like him, because He lives in us, by his Holy Spirit in our body, so that we can be who we are, the Body of Christ in the world. CS Lewis puts it simply, starkly, and well: "Every Christian is to become a little Christ. The whole purpose of becoming a Christian is simply nothing else."

So "Spiritual Formation for Kingdom Action" means this: "By the power of the Spirit, becoming like Christ in order to make the world the way God meant it to be."

On the Spiritual formation side of things, we do things in our lives to create space for God to make us more like Jesus and to abide in him. We often call them spiritual disciplines or spiritual practices. They include prayer in all its forms including silence and listening, finding God in the Scriptures, worship, community, the Eucharist—feeding on the body of Christ so that can be who we are, the body of Christ— and so many others. We do these to create space for God to change us and make us more like Jesus because we're interacting with him. We are living our union with him, and he changes us.

And then this works itself out in doing God's work in the world, with special



attention to the places and the people where the Kingdom God needs to come, where it's not the way it's supposed to be and God wants it to be different. It's a lot of places, and a lot of people.



For all of us it then begs questions. **Which place has God put on our heart? What people? What person? And, how's my walk with Jesus right now?** Is it him liv-

ing through me, or is it me trying to do his work on my own strength?

I think one of the most important things I've come to learn over the many years of ministry is this, that **God can do infinitely more through me than I can ever do for him.**

This was certainly true of Mother Teresa. She touched literally millions of lives, in India of course but also around the world. When people think of Mother Teresa, they think about her primary work as serving the poorest of the poor: Kingdom Action. That's not what she said. Rather she said something quite a bit different and a whole lot deeper. **"Our primary vocation is not to love the the poor. Our vocation is to belong to Jesus."**

I heard her speak once and met her in Calcutta, and it literally changed my life. She was barely 5 feet tall and yet was one of most powerful people of the 20th century.

I heard her speak in 1994 at the National Prayer Breakfast here in Washington. Literally flanked by the President and Vice President of the United States, and surrounded by dozens of other presidents and prime-ministers and members of parliament and members of Congress, she was by

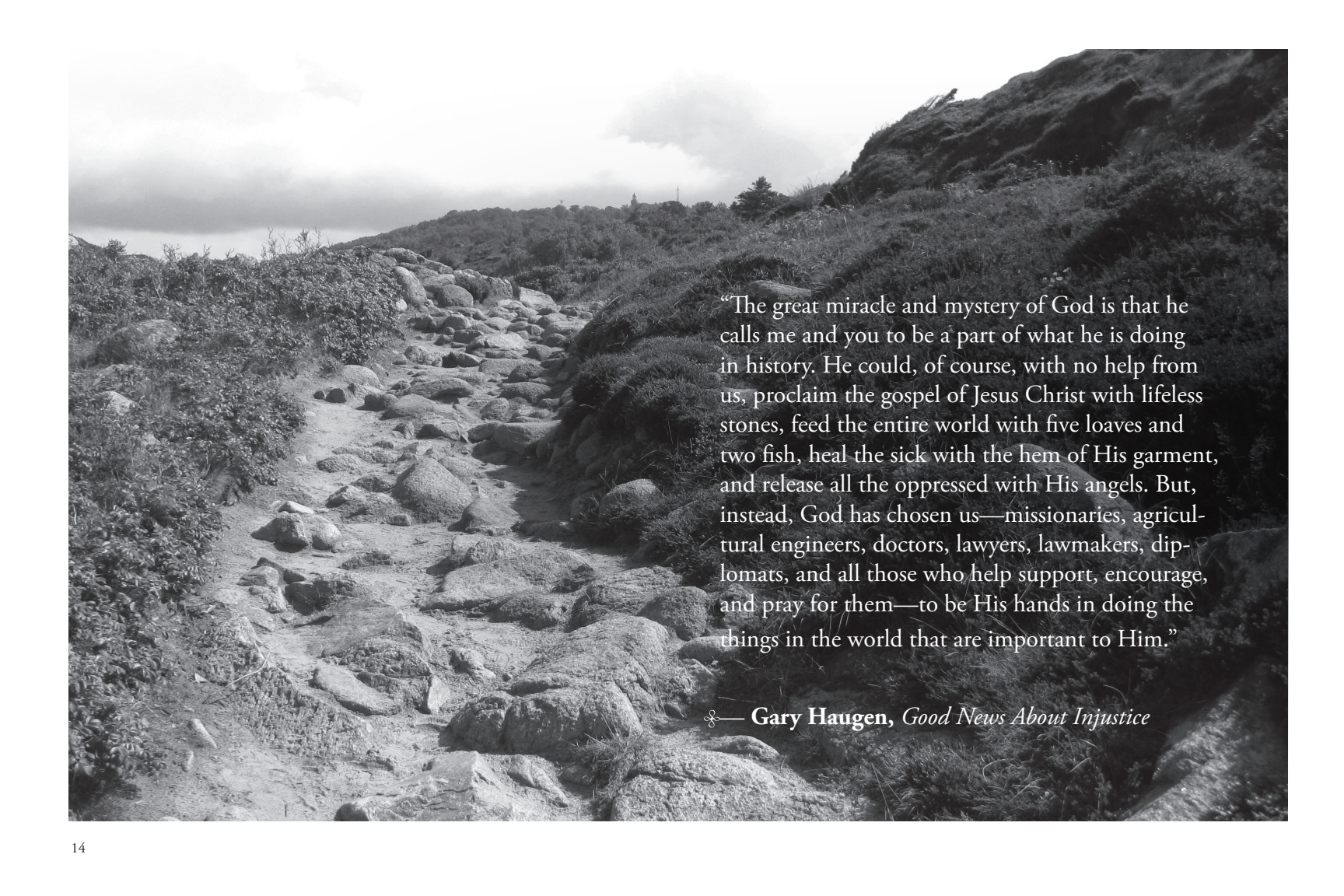
far the most powerful person in the room. People remember that speech for different reasons, but here's what pierced my heart, changed my life, and set my vision.

She said, "We are not social workers. We may be doing social work in the eyes of some people, but **we must be contemplatives in the heart of the world.**"

"We must be contemplatives in the heart of the world." Contemplatives, people seeking union with God...there's spiritual formation. In the heart of the world, there's the Kingdom Action.

The question is not how can I be like Mother Teresa, but rather how can I go deeper with Jesus and into Jesus in the place where God has me now and with who he's made me to be. As we do that, God knows best how to use us in the world that he loves and that He sent his Son to redeem, and He will. And God will always do more through us than we can do for Him, and He wants to.

And if people are amazed at what we're doing and ask us why, we can simply say, **"I'm just trying to be a little bit of Christ in the world."** ✨



“The great miracle and mystery of God is that he calls me and you to be a part of what he is doing in history. He could, of course, with no help from us, proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ with lifeless stones, feed the entire world with five loaves and two fish, heal the sick with the hem of His garment, and release all the oppressed with His angels. But, instead, God has chosen us—missionaries, agricultural engineers, doctors, lawyers, lawmakers, diplomats, and all those who help support, encourage, and pray for them—to be His hands in doing the things in the world that are important to Him.”

✂— **Gary Haugen**, *Good News About Injustice*

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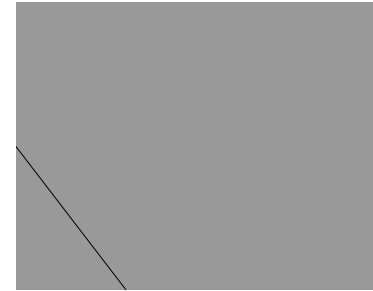
SPIRITUAL FORMATION FOR KINGDOM ACTION

Coracle is a ministry that exists to inspire and enable people to become the presence of God in the world by offering spiritual formation for Kingdom action. Some of this happens at Corhaven, a retreat home in Virginia's Shenandoah Valley, some of it happens in the Washington D.C. metro area and throughout the mid-Atlantic, some of it happens around the country and around the world. We do this through:

- Spiritual direction
- Individual and group retreats
- Sacramental ministry
- Mission trips and pilgrimage
- Writing and speaking
- Ministries of mercy and justice
- Creation care
- Community

We invite you to join the journey with us! Sign up for our weekly e-newsletter, or contact us via email at inthecoracle@me.com

You can learn more at: www.inthecoracle.org



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