

CHAPTER 25

A MEMORABLE HOUR WITH JESUS

THE NEXT MORNING I heard Jesus start forth before dawn and knew that he was on his way to the mountain to pray. His footsteps had vanished in the distance when, taking great care not to rouse the sleeping disciples, I rose and followed him.

In my land we would not call this a mountain but a high hill. On the crest I found Jesus seated on a rock looking off toward Jerusalem. I sat down on the grass at his feet. There was no hesitancy about speaking to him any more. Since I had found that my conversations with him were merely experiences of thinking aloud I knew my words were no more an interruption to his silence than my thoughts. And I had discovered that only evil words, just as evil thoughts and deeds, could be an intrusion to him.

And so I sat in his presence and thought aloud. And his thoughts spoke in answer to mine.

"Jesus of Nazareth, sinners whom you have forgiven love more and are more loved than those who have never sinned. Is that so?"

"There is more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner that repents than over the other ninety-nine that are whole."

"Might this tempt some weak ones, Master, to go forth and sin and return and repent?"

"All have already sinned enough," he replied. "Why need anyone seek to sin more?"

"Wherein have all sinned?"

"Every time you sit down to a full meal without thought, word, prayer or act toward blessing those who are without food, you are a partner in sin. Every day that you accept comfortable living without making protest or offering prayers regarding an economic order that begets tyrants, criminals and wars, you are a co-creator of those criminals and those wars. Every time you hold prejudice or contempt toward any race or class or nation, you are planting seeds of death and decay. Every time you harbor anger and resentment in your heart toward any living creature you are pouring into the pure air about you poison that helps to create murderers. Every time you look with lust upon a woman you are adding to the danger of a less-controlled one's committing folly. Therefore I say unto you, do not go forth seeking to commit a crime whereof to repent, but rather repent first of the crimes in which you are an unconscious and unwitting partner. Take the vast crime of indifference and inertia and selfish complacency of the entire world upon your own shoulders and kneel here at my feet and repent for all. Behold, I who have committed no sin will love you for sharing the sins of all and lifting the sins of all.

With joy I knelt at his feet and with joy I felt him lift the burdens from my shoulders. After I resumed my sitting position he lapsed into a long silence. Then one by one he dropped golden thoughts into the air that I stored in the treasury of my heart.

"Lay aside all longings, yearnings, struggles and strife, my beloved."

I could not tell whether he was saying this with his voice or with his soul.

"Search no longer. I am here. I am the only perfect Answer to all your seeking."

There was another long silence. Such all-encompassing Love and Peace emanated from Jesus in these silent times that I welcomed them almost as much as I welcomed his words. It was privilege enough merely to be sitting at his feet.

"The Father and I are one. Abide in me and let me abide in you and you shall know through experience that I am in the Father, you are in me, and I am in you."

Come Follow Me

Another silence. More wonderful still was that silence!

"Stop thinking and believing that you are one and that I am another, that you are separate from me, for I am the only Real of you."

How tremendously true that affirmation had become to me!

"Let not your heart be troubled. You believe in the Father, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions. If it were not so I would have told you. I went, two thousand years ago, to prepare a place for you. And into that union where I went you may go also. Abide in that place and you shall remain eternally one with me and with the Father."

"Father in Heaven," I whispered in my heart, "let me always be aware of that oneness."

"Abide in me and I in you," went on the pervading voice. "As a branch cannot bear fruit of itself except it abide in the vine, so neither can you except you abide in me. I am the vine, you are one of the branches. He that abides in me and I in him, the same will bear much fruit; for apart from me you can do nothing.

"My beloved," he was speaking very softly now, "most of those who heard me two thousand years ago could not accept this. They heard with their ears, but their understanding was blocked. They heard not with their hearts because their hearts had been hardened."

"O Jesus," I cried, "let that realization become mine as you seem to yearn to make it mine. Or did you yearn?"

"Did I yearn! Did I not say to my companions, 'O faithless generation, O you of little faith, how long must I be with you, how long must I bear with you'? Did I not say to my city, 'O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how I would have gathered you into oneness with me even as a mother hen gathers her chicks and you would not!' And if I yearned then, do I not yearn now for you? I yearn with all my love, with all my life. My love is ever about you. You need only to be aware of that love."

"And when I attain that awareness—?"

"'And when I attain!' You have already attained! The time has come when you should cease to search and start to expand."

"But how—"

"Cease your seeking, cease your striving, cease your struggling. 'The Spirit of Truth I sent into the world is I myself in action. Simply rest in that Truth. I bring to you as revelation what you cannot get by speculation. I give unto you All-Truth, and the greatest of all Truth as well as the simplest is that you and I and the Father are one.'"

An overwhelming sense of helplessness came upon me. Suppose I couldn't grasp this! Suppose I could not wholly realize it! Then again the voice of Jesus:

"Be still and know that I am God."

"And who—?" I was on the point of asking who would be the 'I.' But I remembered that I was to cease my asking, cease my seeking; I was to be still and *know*. Know what? That I—no matter how small and insignificant—am an expression of God.

As I got still and ceased asking, it seemed that I was being stretched out. Out and out and up and up until I filled the universe even as God fills the universe. I filled all space. Then I *knew* the Father and I were one. I kept on expanding until I filled all Time—yes, all Eternity. Then I knew that the Holy Spirit and I were one. Then all the Space that I was and all the Time that I was swirled into beautiful rhythms and the rhythms took form and dwelt with me—and then in a moment of infinite bliss I knew that Jesus and I were also one. And then all Time and Space and Rhythm and Form focused into the tiniest speck, and that speck was I. Such littleness did not disturb me now. Instead my very littleness made the power appear all the greater.

Jesus seemed to sense how poor in thoughts of self I had become. So little I felt that he could not see me. "Good," he said quietly, "for the Kingdom is like a grain of mustard seed which expands and expands and—"

I was expanding again and peace and joy were filling everything. All Space was mine; all Time was mine now. God the Father was mine, God the Son was mine, God the Holy Spirit was mine. But greatest bliss of all was the knowing that I was totally *theirs*.

Jesus arose and left me. But even when he left I was still with him.

As the days went by, often for long periods I held the perfect realization that I and the Father were one. At such times I *knew* that this was the highest experience anyone could attain. Oh, how wonderful to know that perfect union which made everything else perfect, whole, one! But always somewhere I would lose my grasp, something would slip, and the vast wideness, broadness, depth and height would cease to expand. A condensing, shrinking movement would begin as though my thoughts were not braced firmly enough to hold the high realization. And then I shriveled into near nothingness. But whenever this happened all I needed to do was to go with all this awareness of my helplessness and sit again by the blessed Jesus, and immediately the expansion would begin once more.

"Can this be natural," I asked Jesus one day, "like the in-breathing and out-breathing of the lungs?"

"At this stage of your development it is," he replied. "But why stay in that stage?"

That started me to wonder. Would it be possible to be expanding *always*, eternally, forever? Going on into greater, greater, greater revelations of Truth, going deeper and deeper and deeper into Love, going higher and higher and higher into Bliss?

"But that would be Heaven!" I exclaimed.

"Need there be any greater Heaven than that?" the voice beside me said. "The purpose of my coming is that my joy might remain in you and that your joy might be full. I want you to live in Heaven now."

From that time forward it seemed as if all there was of me and ever had been, and ever would be was flowing forth to meet and mingle with that which was Jesus.

CHAPTER 26

A LITTLE HOME IN BETHANY

THERE is a saturation point even in spiritual things. A drinking glass can become so full that it will not hold another drop.

I awoke one morning to find myself in that state. After a journey which brought so many mountaintop experiences, I felt that one more such experience and I would faint by the roadside.

"I feel that I should go apart awhile," I said to Jesus, "in order to digest what I have been receiving. I am under an urge to go back to the mountains from which we just came, and yet that alone would not satisfy my need. I also feel the need for the gentle touch of human sympathy and understanding. Can you help me resolve this paradox?"

The whole room was filled with the glory of Jesus' smile.

"My brother, you can find high mountain vistas in human hearts. You can find vast quiet spaces in human souls. When I want sanctuary from the fever of the world's activities, I have sometimes gone to the mountain, sometimes into the desert, and sometimes to a little home in Bethany. I advise you to go to Bethany."

"Would I not be intruding?"

"You never intrude in a home of love and trust, if love and trust precede you on the way."

And so it happened that I found myself seated on a little bench in the garden of Mary and Martha in Bethany. I was sitting very, very still, capturing the beauty and the spirit of that far-off time into which I had been so suddenly plunged. I was weeding out all old emotions, old thoughts, old memories which had not yet been born—or had they?—in the age from whence I had come.

As one in a foreign land contemplates the great distance in Space separating him from his home—perhaps an ocean, a mountain range or two thousand miles of desert—so I contemplated the two thousand years that separated me from my own Time, from my own associates, from what I proudly called my life work. Then suddenly I realized that this experience had provided an opportunity to attain that inner oneness with God far more easily than in my own time. For I had no possessions to let go. As I looked over the fields and hills of Galilee, at the towns and cities, I could see nothing that I owned and nothing that I desired to own, for it was not my Time nor my Age.

I also had no fame and no position in life to guard. I knew for once the delight of anonymity. I felt it would be an absolute impertinence to put my name into anyone's ear. No one had even asked me my name! I never realized before what a wonderful privilege anonymity could be. And besides, I had no addictions. I could not smoke; no one did. I could not taste the wine, and did not care for it if I could. Sex had no pull upon me.

Then it occurred to me, why could I not return to my own time, my own age, my own little nook in life with all pretensions, all possessiveness and all addictions screened out? Why could I not retain this perfect anonymity, this perfect possessionlessness, this perfect freedom from consuming habits of all kinds? What joy and freedom I then could have! Why let the accident of my being born into the twentieth century burden me with *things* to own, with *vanities* to protect, with *habits* to cleave to? Could I not let this passage through Time serve as a sieve to strain out these mundane things. But what would my former associates say? How would my cronies of the Era in which I lived accept all my abstinences? Suppose I told them that I had "returned" from another Age, that I belonged to another world, and keep my blessed adherence to God? Would they think me queer? "Let them!" I exclaimed. What harm could come of it? What did people think of Lazarus after he had returned from the grave?

Come Follow Me

And so I rejoiced and became very, very still, and immediately felt the radiant presence of the Father.

I was aware that I was trying to reread events through the ether of a far-distant time. I wondered how much of this was coming to me as through a glass darkly, and how much of it I was witnessing face to face. As an oar seems to be bent at a more oblique angle beneath the water than above, and as smoke following a train assumes different shapes a short time after it is first seen, I wondered how much the events and words I was here witnessing and hearing were juggled, shadowed and reshaped after the space of these two thousand years.

I remembered how, after awakening from a dream that I wanted to recapture, I must recall it quickly or else like the dew on the grass at dawn, it would evaporate and the dream be lost. I was quite aware that there would be some loss, some rearrangement of the patterns, but this, too, I knew: that when I held fast the vision of Zebedee arranging his nets or when I recalled the endearing voice of John or the dynamic voice of Peter, and yes, when, seated among the Twelve, we all looked into the face of Jesus, and turned our thoughts upon our Father in heaven, the real values of this experience would never be lost, for everything about it was perfectly and marvelously *true*. The smoke from the past event might fade and change its form somewhat because of the vast distance in Time separating the two Eras, but it was still the same smoke. I might not recall all the words of Jesus distinctly, and they might not be in the same form and the same order that have been handed down by the gospel writers of Galilee, but this I knew, it was the same voice, the same truth, and, though through my weak channel often crudely altered, they were at least the same word-concepts that Jesus spoke in those days.

I was not getting the dust nor feeling the rough places in the road as I know Jesus, the physical Jesus, must have felt them two thousand years ago. The odors of field and forest, of cooking food, of camels, asses and workmen were not to me as they must have been to the disciples so long before. But I did catch sounds and I did see sights with an inner ear and an inner vision that screened out much of the raucousness and all the jar. And so with the highest of the five senses—sight and hearing—albeit in an inward, more than an outward way, I was catching something very beautiful and very precious of the life and words and activities of Jesus.

Filled with these thoughts I knelt down beside the bench and thanked God with all my heart for giving me this blessed privilege of being awhile with Jesus.

While I was still kneeling I heard soft footsteps beside me. Glancing up I saw Mary looking pensively at me. Without any sign or manner of surprise at my position she sat upon the bench and after awhile I rose and sat down beside her.

"It is wonderful, the way all things take perfect form when Jesus is in this garden," she said quietly. "Long after he leaves, his spirit remains. He is so much one of us in our home that we can never lose him. I find that, as we share him he becomes more wholly ours. I wish that all the homes in Palestine loved him as we love him and belonged to him as we belong to him.

"There isn't a breath of ours that isn't his. Our hands, our feet are his. Lazarus is never so happy as when running errands for Jesus. Martha is in heaven when she has the opportunity to serve him. I could sit at his feet forever and forever and never get tired. The reason I tell you all this is because I often come to this bench and kneel, just as you have been kneeling, and feel his blessed presence as I know you must have been feeling it when I found you. Sometimes I open my eyes and expect to see him looking down at me. And he is here—in spirit. Whenever I get quiet and adore him he knows it, no matter if he be a hundred leagues away. Every time we think of Jesus we help him, he once told me. And he is thinking of us and helping us—always."

CHAPTER 27

RAISED FROM THE DEAD

THE NEXT DAY Ruth, the cousin of Judas, arrived. I was half expecting this. I knew that her father, Jairus, the ruler of the synagogue of Capernaum would bring his entire family up to Jerusalem for the feast of the Passover which was now just three days away. I knew that sometime or other Ruth would be coming out to visit Lazarus. And now she was here and I was the one to meet her. Mary and Martha had gone to the garden to gather berries. Lazarus was lounging in the sunlight under a fig tree near by. Ruth was overjoyed at finding me.

"You know why I have come!" she exclaimed.

"Yes," I replied. "You and Lazarus must have much in common—you two who were raised by the Master from the dead."

Lazarus, usually so silent and absent-minded, was all alert when he heard our voices. His eyes glowed with enthusiasm and he reached out both hands to take the hand of Ruth in his. For a long time each merely looked in silence into the eyes of the other. I was starting to leave when Ruth, without turning her head or dropping her eyes from those of Lazarus, said kindly, "Don't go."

How did I qualify for such a blessing? Was it possible that there was a mystic fellowship between these two whom life had already passed by and those to whom life had not yet come? Jesus could draw back these from the past; could he draw me forward from the future? At least I knew this much, that I, too, carried something non-dimensional, other-worldly about me. And then it burst upon me that each of us, you and I and everyone everywhere, are always carrying something of heaven with us. What we lack is only the awareness of this fact. Just as one is not conscious of the privileges of his native country until he has sojourned awhile in a foreign land, so we are not aware that heaven is all about us until we step away from our present life far enough to see it in its perspective as a mere way-station in a vast journey through Eternity.

So smug are we in our little mundane world that it requires a shock to awaken us to the fact that we are truly creatures of heaven. The shock of death itself is the greatest awakener, the greatest illuminator of all. No wonder Ruth and Lazarus had this consciousness in common. Now I could see why Jesus kept reiterating that strange paradox, "He who loses his life shall save it." Yes, one must sometimes die in the flesh to live in the spirit, but dying was only half of it. "Unless you are *born again* you are in no wise worthy of the Kingdom of Heaven." It seemed that every day that I walked in Galilee, yes, every hour that I was in the presence of Christ, I was being born again. And Mary was right: one did not have to have the physical body of Jesus of Nazareth always at hand to be with him. As these thoughts flashed upon me, my soul cried out, "Lord, keep me always conscious of the loving presence of the Living Christ!"

The voice of Ruth was still ringing in my ears. "Don't go!" Thrilled at this invitation, I withdrew a few paces and seated myself on a bench near the fig tree. Presently Lazarus, not letting go of Ruth's hand, drew her to the bench and they sat down beside me.

"You know what I know, Ruth," was all he said. "I need speak no further." Then turning and laying a hand on mine, he closed his eyes and together we three sat in what I would call the greatest Quaker silence I had ever experienced.

All through that hour I felt the living presence of the Christ. I felt him as powerfully as I had ever experienced his bodily presence since I had been in Galilee. So all-encompassing was this embrace of heavenly Love that I could not have shaken it off if I had tried. I wondered if heaven

Come Follow Me

could be merely sitting with two or three kindred souls in such deep realization of God's presence as this. I was submerged in Love. Not only did it wrap me round but it filled every cell and pore of my being. I found myself breathing Love, inhaling and exhaling Love. I felt Love throbbing through my veins and arteries. I felt it in the very core of my being.

Then into this great sea of Love in which I was resting and which was resting in me, I began to put one by one all the persons and things that I wanted to place there. I placed Jesus himself in the center and at once felt a veritable tidal wave of his Love and prayer for me, and then I knew that in blessing Christ he was in a far greater way blessing me. I put my loved ones into this great sea of Love and a vast flow of heavenly blessing swept in upon them. I put into his hands all the spiritual leaders that I knew. I finally turned over to him my enemies, those who had said any manner of evil against me, every one of them. Then all the dreams and desires of my life I put one by one into this sea of loving fulfillment. "This is the kind of prayer," I thought, "that I must take back to my Age, to my people."

When an hour had passed, Lazarus rose and walked to and fro with head thrown back looking upward into the sky. Finally he began to speak as one who is merely thinking aloud:

"That heaven which I saw differs only from this earth in that everything is in order and the inner always controls the outer. The inner is so great, so wonderful so complete and so perfect, that no outer expression is even necessary, save for those weaker ones who must walk, as it were, with a cane or a crutch. My sister Mary is so close to Jesus that she didn't have to die to catch this secret of heaven. And you, little Ruth, came through the same experience that I did to live there too. When confronted with two choices you and Mary always choose the better part. Martha still walks with a cane. And your dear cousin, Ruth, your cousin that carries the bag for the Twelve, alas, he walks always with a *crutch*. Pray for him, Ruth, for he is far, far from the kingdom. And never farther than right now. He sees the outer so plainly that he is confused and blinded by it. Not only does he stay outside, but he helps to keep others outside also. He throws a shadow when he is near—a shadow that I recoil from. But oh, how hungry he is! Like the poor man gathering crumbs at the rich man's table, his eyes are always on the floor. It is only the crumbs of life that he sees. He fails to realize the feast spread out before him. To be so near the Nazarene and yet so far away, so rich and yet so starved! It is worse than a sailor's perishing from thirst on a raft upon a wide, wide sea.

"When Jesus had my friends remove the burial cloth that day, there unrolled from me the bonds of the outer which had held me a living corpse for thirty years. For the first time I was truly alive! For the first time I saw first things first, O my friend," and he turned to me, "when you return to your native land, remember to seek first the Kingdom of Heaven and its righteousness and after that all other things will truly be added unto you."