

Women Disciples of Jesus Did You Know, #4

Can you name any of the women disciples of Jesus? How about the names of women who followed Jesus? For, of course, that is what disciple means, to follow and to learn from the spiritual leader, in this case, Jesus.

Luke names “some women” or “certain women” who followed Jesus from Galilee, adding that there were “many others,” as well (Luke 8:1-3). And, in the only time the word is used of a woman in Scripture, he even names a woman as disciple: “Tabitha, which in Greek is Dorcas.” (See Acts of the Apostles 9:36.) Who are these “certain women?” And, who is Tabitha?

Primary among the “certain women” is Mary of Magdala. Besides her, we learn that Joanna, the wife of Herod’s steward Chuza, and Susanna, as well as “many others” followed Jesus. And they “provided for them” [Jesus- and the male disciples] “out of their resources.” We are left with many unanswered questions. What was the nature of these resources? Financial, perhaps? And also, the support and talents that committed friends can provide? Who was Susanna? Why would Joanna leave her husband in order to follow Jesus? What does this close association with women say about Jesus?

This much we know. We meet these women again, according to Luke, at the cross, watching all that was happening, and at the empty tomb. “The women who had come with him from Galilee followed, and they saw the tomb and how his body was laid. Then they returned, and prepared spices and ointments.” (See Luke 23:55-56.) After resting on the Sabbath, they returned to the tomb “on the first day of the week, at early dawn” in order to anoint the body. (See Luke 24:1.) They are the first to see the empty tomb, the first to see the angels, the first to hear the words, “He is not here, but has risen.” At which point they are reminded, “Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again.” This means, of course, that they were disciples, learners taught by Jesus of his “way.” Finally, we encounter them one more time in the Upper Room in Jerusalem... waiting for the power of the Holy Spirit to come upon them... as Jesus had promised. “All these” [the male apostles] “were constantly devoting themselves to prayer, together with certain women, including Mary the mother of Jesus, as well as his brothers.” (See Acts 1:14.) My hunch is that gusty, fiery, Holy Spirit did not choose to discriminate against the women gathered in this first church community. They, too, would be empowered to become “witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” (See Acts 1:8.)

And Tabitha? We are told that “she was devoted to good works and charity.” (See Acts 9:36.) So much so, that when she became ill and died, the widows, whom she had helped, were distraught. But she was held in high regard by the male disciples, as well. For they sent two men to Peter, urging him. Come to us! Immediately! Had Peter heard of her good works, too? We only know that he dropped everything... and went with them. Through the power of his prayer, she was restored to life, “and many believed in the Lord.” (See Acts 9:42.) Again, there are unanswered questions. What was the nature of her giftedness that she was so highly prized? And why was she, alone, of the many women who followed Jesus, actually named a disciple?