

# STANDING WITH JESUS

## 1<sup>st</sup> Core Principle: The teaching of Jesus is our central reference point. (criterion)

Our first principle and criterion is that “The teaching of Jesus is our central reference point.” He is our guide in how we stand with culture, how we stand against culture, and how we stand in service of culture.

For those of you who have been our readers for any length of time, I hope our principles are already obvious. But let me say why we wanted to put Jesus first and foremost. We, like all who are trying to act with integrity, know that we need a North Star, a final authority, a clearing house, a guiding teacher who orients and critiques all the rest. That “one God before us,” as the Hebrew Scriptures advise, is clearly Jesus of Nazareth. If Another is not our reference point, we are burdened with being our own, which makes for a very small and self-referential system of thought and vision.

Without the assurance of Jesus’ teaching and example, I would not have the courage or the confidence to say what I say. How can I trust that things like non-violence, the path of descent, simplicity of life, forgiveness and healing, the preference for the poor, and radical grace itself are as important as they are, unless Jesus also said so? This discernment is made even harder, however, by the fact that the actual Jesus agenda does not tend to be the same agenda that is emphasized in the Christian churches. Without Jesus, I would have no authoritative place to stand either in reference to church or culture, and I would be left with merely culturally shifting opinions and my own small mind and heart.

This has also been true for the twenty-five year history of the CAC. With the best of intentions, and from the very first meeting in 1987, good people have pushed for other central reference points than Jesus. Most of them have been very good, but they are just not the same as the holism and authority that Jesus brings to most questions. Native American spirituality, feminist spirituality, peace and justice activism, Catholicism, the gay and lesbian issues, critical politics, eco-spirituality and earth care, running our own local hospice or soup kitchen could all have become our single guiding star, but they did not. All of these concerns surely share in, or at least follow from the teaching of Jesus. But they also have the ability to become *myopic*. Jesus does not have “eyes closed to everything else” (*myopic*), but in fact, Jesus teaches us to look at all of these issues with “a third eye” which he calls the “Reign of God” and I call the Big Picture. That is very different, indeed much more difficult, and today not so popular—with either the Right or the Left. It is clearly our task, and we hold ourselves to it. Jesus teaches us more *how* to see than precisely *what* to see.

Now let me share how Jesus is our precise way of connecting to culture, because again I think he is unique, authoritative, and compelling. First of all, he combines humanity and divinity in one act. Human and Divine can be one. That is his great service to human history, and reveals to us our own task too.

His social stance, however, is often hard to explain, precisely because it is a third way, not easily seen by our normal dualistic mind. Jesus does not stand against culture, which appeals to the oppositional mind, nor does he stand in conformity to culture, which appeals to the uncritical mind, but instead he does something quite astounding. He consistently stands with the excluded, the outsider, the sinner, and the poor. That is his place of freedom from every local culture, his unique way of critiquing all self-serving culture, and his way of standing in union with the suffering of the world—all at the same time. That is his form of world healing. It also puts him outside any status quo thinking and any establishment thinking.

Brilliantly, Jesus names “sin” in a totally new way, which most Christians are still largely resisting. Sin, for Jesus, is not found in any kind of localization of evil *outside* or *over there*, where I can point to it, punish it, and try to change it. That is too easy, and thus it is religion’s constant temptation. Without denying sin or making light of evil, he shows us the one way of actually overcoming it. Sin, for Jesus, is *the very act of accusing itself*-whenever you try to expel and accuse evil groups, nations, religions, or people, and somehow leave yourself out of the equation, you end up “sinning.” It is rather shocking that Jesus is never actually upset at sinners, as we are, but he is only upset at people who do not think they are sinners. That is very different than almost all organized religion in history.

“Accusers” in various forms are the ONLY people that Jesus himself accuses. (In fact, Satan means “the accuser” and is rightly seen as the opposite of Jesus.) Jesus would never deny objective evil, but he knows that any human attempts to conquer it, or control it, can only be done according to the pattern of the crucifixion

itself. There he teaches us how to *hold it, carry it ourselves, and finally transform it*--by recognizing our own complicity in evil but our eagerness to attack it elsewhere. (See Romans 8:3, Galatians 3:13.) Until this dualistic illusion is suffered, we are never prepared to attack evil ourselves, which is revealed in Jesus' first facing the three temptations to power himself (Matthew 4:1-11) before he begins his ministry. Until we face our own power demons, none of us are prepared to fight evil. That is the humiliating position of Jesus where few choose to stand.

It is rather obvious that Jesus spends most of his ministry *standing with* the accused, the excluded, the unworthy, the so called bad people, the demonized. It is actually rather scandalous how the only way he tries to change them is by loving and healing them, never accusing anybody but the accusers themselves. His social program is primarily solidarity. Jesus stands with the demonized until the demonizing stops. This is Jesus' primary form of justice work, which is why Jesus' "strategy" is always so hard to pinpoint and name. *His justice strategy is solidarity with suffering itself, wherever it is. This is the core meaning of his crucifixion, and why the cross is our very unique agenda for salvation and liberation (1 Corinthians 1:17-18)*--even more than working or fighting for justice per se, which disappoints many activists. Even justice work, as needed as it is, can be an ego and power agenda.

Mary is doing the same, by the way, by standing at the foot of the cross. He and she stand with the pain, to call us all to lives of communion with the world's suffering. This is so much harder than merely trying to fix it, understand it, control it, or even localize it. Only love can do this, and really only God's love.

I am sure you see how Jesus' agenda has led us to our central emphasis on contemplation and spiritual conversion here at the CAC and in the Living School, over pure and simple activism. Our work is the work of human and divine transformation (*theosis*), not the too easy work of political or religious correctness. If the universal kinship, the solidarity, the communion with God, with ourselves, with the rest of the world, is *daily experienced and lived*, we do have a very grounded plan and runway for significant peacemaking, justice work, social reform, civil and human rights--but now from a very positive place, even a unitive place, where "I and the Father are one." We want our people to bear much fruit in the world "and fruit that will endure" (John 15:5, 16).

True spiritual *action* (as opposed to reaction) demands our own ongoing transformation, often changing sides to be where the pain is, and even requires a new identity, as Jesus exemplified in his great self-emptying (Philippians 2:6-7). Instead of accusing others of sin on the Left or the Right, Jesus instead "became sin" (2 Cor. 5:21). He stood in solidarity with the problem itself, hardly ever with specific "answers" for peoples' problems. His solidarity and compassion was itself the healing. This was his strategy and therefore it is ours. It feels like weakness, but it finally changes things in very creative, patient, and humble ways. Such solidarity is learned and expressed in two special places--*contemplation* (non dual or unitive consciousness of things) and specific *actions* of communion with human suffering.

This is our formal name and our task, and it comes from watching Jesus.