

Oh Sweet Jesus, May we find ourselves refreshed and renewed by your presence this day.  
Amen.

I got tricked into purchasing an Audible subscription this week. There was a deal – for a low, low price I too could be one of the lucky millions who listen to the Audible books at my leisure. I love a good deal, so I signed up... the only reason I even got the subscription is because of another favorite pastime – listening to podcasts. I had heard Diana Butler Bass on a podcast talking about her new book “Freeing Jesus.” On the episode she told the story of how this book came to be... She had planned to write a general primer on a variety of church beliefs for people who were coming back to the faith after having had a long period away from church deconstructing their beliefs and were now coming back but wanting some guidance on putting the theological pieces back together with integrity both to the tradition but also to their current understanding of faith and life.

On the podcast she says she outlined that entire book – from virgin birth to creeds and sacraments and decided to start with one of the most pressing, but easiest topics for her to tackle... Jesus. She set off to write a 10 – 15 page chapter on Jesus.. and when she got to 70 pages she realized she had a problem on her hands. Either she was going to edit away 90% of her words, or she was writing a different book. A book she didn't know was in her. A book she didn't know she needed to write. A book that tumbled out of her with her deep love and passion for the subject. She had a robust, sincere book about Jesus on her hands and she didn't know what to do with it.

WOW – I thought. Imagine that, Diana Butler Bass, renowned church history scholar and theologian being surprised by her compulsion to just keep writing and writing about Jesus. My interest was immediately piqued. But I'm a mom of two young kids, I'm already reading 3 books, is it wise to start another... so I hatch a plan to get this book on audible so I can listen to it while doing dishes and car rides. I marvel at my own brilliance for a moment and presto, I now have a discount audible membership.

With all that, you can imagine the level of disappointment when after this whole ordeal I turn on this book and the author, while gifted at writing her words, is so not gifted at reading her words. The voice in my ears reading these lovely words sounded bored, disinterested and uninspired. It was as if I was listening to someone reading the phone book. I love Diana Butler Bass. I'm a fan but hearing her talk about her passion and experience of Jesus with this dry, flat affect; Emotionless and stilted was just too much for me. 20 minutes into the book I returned the credit. And you know what I did then... I learned that my local library had a copy of the book and I was able to download it on my kindle.

I'm so grateful I didn't give up, because so far it really is a remarkable book. But the experience did leave me wondering... what else do we do that undermines how we really feel about Jesus? What do I do that undermines how I really feel about Jesus? Would anyone know by my life, by my words, that I am one who believes Jesus and what he means for the world. And when I talk

about Jesus, if I do... What do I convey about this figure? Is Jesus a lifeless, ancient curmudgeon, or is Jesus an inspiring, animating force for love and light?

This question works well for people like me who are Jesus people. Oh yes, there's a whole category of us Jesus people. I learned that too from Diana Butler Bass. Early in *Freeing Jesus* Butler Bass writes that when people ask her why she's still a Christian (and they do) her response is "Because of Jesus. I know it sounds corny, but I love Jesus.... Although I'm not quite at the end point yet, my eulogy might say I was a 'cradle to grave' Jesus person."

As much as I love this statement, I recognize that these are the words of a Christian theologian and the sentiments of someone whose job is that of priest... So while I might wish it to be so, I can't imagine that every person [listening] here is going to jump and down and say, yup, I'm a Jesus person too!

That's ok... but now is the time where I take the liberty of saying that where ever you are on your journey of faith, Jesus is wildly awesome and my hope and prayer is that the awesomeness of Jesus becomes more and more apparent to you and alive within you each day of your life.

We have resigned Jesus to playing roles and measuring up to the standards set by the scientific method. A useful tool that really shouldn't be the only tool by which we evaluate truth in modern life. Jesus didn't set out to be some forever science experiment... That's putting a burden on Jesus outside the scope of his ministry. Jesus was about the business of healing and freeing people. Of introducing people to the kingdom of God that has come to Earth. In the life, death and resurrection of Jesus we have been given a whole new vantage point by which to view life – an opportunity, a mandate, to pivot from a life consumed entirely by earthly pursuits to a life informed by heavenly ones.

Today's Gospel story is one of the best examples of the power, significance and hope that Jesus embodies. In this story we have groups of people on opposite ends of the spectrum. An empowered religious leader and a disempowered, isolated woman. Yes, the accounts of the healings are amazing, for some modern hearers, a stumbling block... but put those to the side for a moment and even the way the story is told is saying something hopeful and inspiring. You people who often get distracted by power and prestige, know this – Jesus does not.

What we see is Jesus on the road, doing what itinerant healers did at the time, heading to heal a person of significance. And on the road to heal such a person, a healing happens by chance on the street. The message is clear – Don't be confused, Jesus' healing isn't confined to stately homes, Jesus is a street healer.

This street healing, fleshy Jesus... who came so close people could reach out and touch him for their healing ... This is the heart of Christianity. And rather than shying away from it, we need to be leaning into it. To the mystery and wonder of it all. And don't just take my word for it.

Krista Tippett, recounts in her book "Speaking of Faith" an interview she had with Brother Godfrey Diekmann, a Roman catholic giant of liturgical reform both before and after Vatican II. A year before he died in his nineties, Krista interviewed this revered monk. Recounting that experience she pens these words "The longer he lives and loves and prays, Godfrey tells me with some urgency before I go, the more he believes that Christianity needs a renewed incarnational theology – a back to basics understandings of the implications of belief in a God who threw themselves whole in the light and darkness of life with us . 'All of Creation in itself has a certain dignity, a certain reality as the image of God's greatness and beauty and strength. But we have failed to see things. We have failed to hear things."

My prayer for all of us is that our eyes and ears may be opened to this certain, Jesus shaped reality. Amen.