

Like Jesus Would

By: Jack LaValley

I think from an outsiders point of view it's both people's faith and the social networking of church that makes for the happiest people. My good friend who is a strong believer explains it like this: "when you have lost someone or something so important in your life that you think you can't possibly go on, having the belief that there is a being higher than you that loves you and will show you the way gives you the hope to go on." Those are powerful feelings and I know my friend feels this sense of reassurance because she believes that God is watching over her. I would like to believe like that but I'm just not there.

I've walked the fence between wanting to believe and what I'll call integrity of thought for fifty five years beginning when I first had doubts about what I was hearing in church. It's always seemed too contradictory to the life I'm living and too simple-minded. Nevertheless, after reading the principles of other religions for years, I always fall back on the words of Jesus, not that I think he was always right. Some of the things he predicted seem and no doubt are absurd. It's those things though that 'bring him down to earth' in my mind, then resurrect him in the image of the greatest philosopher ever, telling us how to bring peace to individuals and human civilization. Sadly, the record of Christian efforts to represent him and actually keep the peace over the centuries is abysmal at best. We might be learning though if history, in fact, teaches and of course if he didn't give us a bum steer, like an unworkable philosophy under the best of earthly circumstances and saintly efforts.

An old friend, who may now be dead, that I met at the local Nazarene Church thirty seven years ago, said to me after I'd told him I'd been struggling with belief most of my life, "That's o.k. Just use Jesus as a roadmap through your life. You won't go wrong." He was a very humble and glowing kind of guy that got my attention right away. He had, what the Nazarenes called 'The Indwelling Spirit' and it was a powerful thing to be in the presence of. Sadly, it never rubbed off on me and I no longer struggle to find it. But those first words on the day I met him did rub off, and though I am a die-hard student of the truth and, thanks to my study of science, a very fussy assessor thereof, I am also a harsh critic of my own 'knowledge' which has helped me to appreciate the practical value of being a Christian. A cynical and vigilant one to be sure,

but a Christian nonetheless. This level of 'faith', if you can call it that since I don't think of my faith as needing the characteristics of the supernatural at all which is why I don't join the church I regularly attend, is a matter of personal honor. I need them because I trust them and because I trust them, they are true friends to me. Life without true friends would be too lonely, it seems. But, I can't swallow the official creed so I just do what I can as a non-member. So this pretty much supports the idea that " It's both peoples' faith and social networking that makes people happy." And here's a surprise discovery from my attendance at the Presbyterian Church: I've met many people there who are every bit as vigilant and cynical as I am about deities, and other concepts, who also make considerable sacrifices in their personal lives to help the church even as it struggles for credibility. We know there's great value there, especially in terms of the trust it fosters, but it does seem in desperate need of a new image through redefinition... and a promotional miracle.