

IN HIS STEPS
(Monolog)

By Donna Jensen

Good evening. My name is Virginia Page and I've come to tell you a story. A story which began in the year 1800 and 50. It is my story, and that of the people I go to church with *and* the community in which we live.

We were living life as usual, attending to family, work, neighbors, nothing out of the ordinary, when God *decided to capture our attention*. And this is the way He did it.

We had an unusual visitor in church one Sunday morning. It seems he'd stopped the day before at the parsonage to speak to Rev. Maxwell. He was looking for work and hoped Rev. Maxwell might be of some help. They spoke briefly and the man left.

Sunday morning, he came in unobtrusively and took a seat in the last row under the balcony.

Rev. Maxwell's sermon was taken from I Pet. 2:21 "For hereunto were ye called because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example that ye should follow in His steps." It was a splendid message.

As he closed the Bible on his notes and leaned forward to make his final comments, someone spoke out from the back of the church.

It was Rev. Maxwell's visitor from the day before. He said, "Excuse me!" and rising quickly, made his way up the aisle to the front of the church. He assured us he was harmless and he wasn't drunk or crazy.

Well, no one had ever come forward to speak like that before but he was very humble and no one stopped him.

He went on to say that he wasn't well and he'd been told he hadn't long to live and asked if he could speak to us for a few moments.

What could anyone say? He certainly had our attention! Looking down at his rags and then out at us he explained that he wasn't a bum, but he didn't know of any teaching of Jesus that made one person less worth saving than any other. That was certainly true.

He paused a moment, coughed painfully and went on. He said he'd lost his job ten months ago and hadn't been able to find work. Since then he'd been travelling from town to town looking for a job. He said there were a good many others like him...he didn't mean to complain.

“But all that set aside, this is what I need you to tell me. Is there anything to being a Christian?”

“Reverend, you told us the disciples of Jesus must follow His steps. What do you mean by that? (Speaking to the congregation) When you sing “I'll go with Him with Him all the way,” do you mean that you are suffering and denying yourselves and trying to save wretches like me as Jesus did? My wife died four months ago in a tenement that was owned by a Christian. Now I'm dying and I have to admit that I'm scared. I'm scared because I've never met anyone whose life reminded me of Jesus. My life's almost over and I'm wondering if it has counted for anything. I wonder what will become of my little girl. I want to believe that following Jesus makes a difference. But I need to know the *truth*, to tell my daughter.” Suddenly he lurched over in the direction of the communion table. His hat fell to the floor. Dr. West rose to go to him. The young man passed his hand before his eyes and then fell

headlong onto the floor! Rev. Maxwell quickly dismissed the congregation and had the stranger taken to the parsonage.

The following Sunday a larger group than usual was crowded into First Church. Rev. Maxwell came forward a different man.

He had no notes and didn't enter the pulpit but stood beside it resting one hand on it as he delivered his message.

He began by saying that our visitor from last Sunday passed away that morning. (Yes.) His little girl had arrived one hour too late to say good bye to her father. She would be staying with him and his wife for the time being.

(Pause)

After a pause, Rev. Maxwell continued. He said that the appearance and the words of this stranger in church last Sunday had made a very powerful impression on him, and that what he said, followed by his death in his house that morning, had compelled him to ask as he had never asked before, 'What **does** following Jesus mean?'

After pausing to look into our faces he continued...He said that for him, following Jesus would now mean that he would indeed deny himself and seek to save the lost as Jesus had. He would also observe the needs of those all around and ask God what he should do to help. Then, one decision at a time, he would be obedient to the leading of the Holy Spirit and follow His direction no matter what it cost him personally.

Then he invited all of us who would, to join him in this experiment. Our motto would be, "What would Jesus do?" Our goal would be to follow in Jesus' footsteps as closely as we believe He taught His disciples to.

He asked us to stay after the service for a few minutes to talk over the details of the plan and closed in prayer thanking God for new light which had brought greater depth to our Christian experience and asked for guidance in this endeavor.

Among those who responded were Edward Norman, Publisher of the Gazette; Dr. Norman Marsh, President of Carlton University; Alexander Powers, Railroad Superintendent; Rachael Windslow, talented young vocalist; and myself, an heiress with a million dollars in the bank.

And so, our adventure as serious disciples of Jesus Christ began. We could not have imagined the individual and corporate costs that would be incurred by the challenge we'd put our shoulders to. But if you will bear with me for a few minutes, I'd like to show you where Jesus led us.

(Pause)

When Edward Norman interviewed Dr. Marsh at the Gazette, he discovered that Jesus had showed him that he could no longer avoid the duties of citizenship by hiding in his little world of literature and scholarly seclusion. He'd known that the city officials were a corrupt unprincipled set of men, controlled in part by the whiskey element. He'd been out of touch with the real world of people. Now he must take a personal part in the coming election. Throw the weight of his influence, what ever it was, toward the nomination and election of good men.

Edward Norman said that he could see how difficult this was for him. Dr. Marsh replied that he'd sooner walk up to the mouth of a cannon any time! But the call had come to him so plainly that he could not escape. If he did not take up this cross, he would deny his Lord.

Edward Norman told him that he'd tried to explain something like that to his managing editor. Norman had always been a man of action. He made decisions quickly and set right to work. But after making his commitment to follow Jesus he became a little hesitant—even fearful.

Dr. Marsh commented that his new policy was certainly dynamic and asked if it was true that cancelling liquor and tobacco ads and the Sunday edition had lost so many subscribers that he was in danger of financial ruin?

Norman replied that just between the two of them, things were very serious. He'd put every available dime at his disposal into the paper but it was only a drop in the bucket.

My contribution of \$50,000 kept the paper afloat for the time being. His staff agreed to stand by until the end but they didn't believe in what he was doing. They said it was too idealistic—that you can't live what the Bible teaches. A foundation which he couldn't name at present was interested in funding them. If they did, he'd be able to bring the good news to those who wanted to hear it. So, it was all in God's hands.

At one of our get-togethers, Alexander Powers shared with us a conversation that he'd had with his daughter as he was packing to leave his home at the request of that daughter and his wife.

She asked why this had happened. As he looked at her words failed him. She insisted that she needed to know the reason. He replied that he just didn't know what to say any more. She told him how angry that made her feel. She told him her mother had said that if he'd only have burned the letter he received they'd have been spared all this. She wanted to hear his side of the story.

He told her that the letter her mother believed he should have destroyed contained proof that the company he worked for was engaged in systematic violation of the Interstate Commerce laws.

It had been sent to him in error.

When he realized what he had in his possession, he dropped the pages like they were on fire. Instantly the thought flashed through his mind, “What would Jesus do?” He tried to shut the question out. He knew as did most of the other officers of the company that this was going on but had no proof.

How he argued with himself.

If he'd seen a man enter his neighbor's house to steal, would it not have been his duty to call the police? Was a railroad company such a different thing? Was it under a different rule of conduct so that it could rob the public and defy law and go undisturbed because it was such a large organization?

(Pause)

Then there was her ...and his wife... and the luxury and the good place they enjoyed in society. If he turned in the evidence he'd have to resign and he didn't know if their relationship was strong enough to withstand financial ruin.

His daughter retorted that he hadn't been fair in not letting them have a choice in the matter. They wanted to be more important to him than anyone else. More important than strangers or a railroad!

He had said, “Darla, my dear, dear daughter. I will never be able to justify my decision to you. I can only tell you that each of us, at

some time, must stand alone before God and account to Him for all that we have done.

(Pause)

The substance of all that I had and was—twenty-five years of hard work is gone.

(Pause)

God gave me the courage to inform on the guilty and the strength to live with *all* that it cost me.”

(Pause)

Rev. Gray, missionary and evangelist who ministered from a tent on the lower side of town in the area known as the Rectangle, visited with Rev. Maxwell. He came seeking volunteers to assist with the Saturday night services. It could be dangerous. People who wandered in off the street there would be in different stages of inebriation.

(Pause)

Rachael Windslow, Rev. Maxwell, and I stood trembling behind the curtain that separated us from the boisterous crowd who were taking seats in the tent that next Saturday night. My fingers were so stiff with fear that I wondered how I'd be able to play the piano.

Rev. Gray admitted that he too was always nervous before he preached because it was he who had to step into the pulpit. Once he began to speak, the Holy Spirit took over and then it was easy.

I asked if it was sort of like Peter walking on the water. Rev. Gray said he thought it was quite a lot like that. Smiling at us, he asked

if we were ready to get out of the boat. We nodded, the curtain was pulled to the sides and we stepped out on to the platform. I went to the piano, Rachel and Rev. Maxwell took seats on the platform, and Rev. Gray stepped to the pulpit. He greeted his audience and began to speak. They paid him no attention. If anything, they grew louder. Rachael and I looked at each other, very lost, Then an idea lit up her face. She walked to the front of the platform and started to sing. Her beautiful clear voice rose above the clamor and the comforting words of “Sweet Hour of Prayer” penetrated their hearts subduing and then silencing them. As she finished and took her seat, they turned their attention to Rev. Gray.

He presented the gospel message offering, forgiveness, love and acceptance in a way they could understand (Pause) but would they receive it? Softly a woman began to cry. Rev. Gray continued kindly offering his invitation. Loreen slowly rose to her feet. Slightly inebriated she made her way to the altar and collapsed there.

Others came forward and knelt at the altar. I left the piano and went to Loreen. As I took her in my arms, I saw Rollin. Rollin my brother. In his tuxedo! Our eyes met as he knelt at the altar. What a contrast between him and the others. He said he'd been unexplainably drawn to come to the meeting. Since then, we have the close relationship we'd lacked.

Rachael and I became close friends, frequently having tea together as we mulled over decisions we would make. At the time of her vow, she was considering whether to accept a contract to do comic opera with a large traveling company or sing lead soprano with a reputable company here. After singing a few times at Rev. Gray's tent meetings and watching the way lost, hungry souls trembled and wept as she sang about Jesus, she knew she would not choose the theater.

As for myself, when I took an honest look at the life I was living, as an heiress with a million dollars in the bank, able to gratify almost any desire, I couldn't see Jesus living this way. I felt most selfish and useless.

Rachel nodded and then asked if it was true that my mother had moved out. I told her that it was true. She has taken a house in town. Mother had been in the parlor, the day I brought Loreen home. I hadn't stopped to consider what anyone would think when I brought home a girl of Loreen's "background". I was so taken aback when I saw her in the Rectangle staggering down the street, slipping back into her old life that I had to do something. When I asked where she lived, I was told she had no home. Can you imagine? I had to practically drag her up the street to Rev. Gray's house and when no one was there, she just sat down on the stoop and cried. I found myself asking "What would Jesus do with Loreen?"

Rachel asked what I was doing on foot in the Rectangle by myself. I explained that sadly, a group of ladies from our church, out on a lark, had stopped in their carriage to ask me to show them the Rectangle. I could see their interest was not spiritual. I offered excuses as to why I couldn't go, but they refused to accept them and in the end, I got in with them. What they saw there struck them as humorous and they joked about the condition of the hapless people.

That's when I saw Loreen. I made them stop the carriage. I got out and waved them on, heading after her.

About that time, there was a knock on my door. It was Rev. Maxwell. He'd stopped to caution us that there might be trouble at the tent that night. Dr. Marsh's stand against the licensing of liquor had swung many votes to the opposition. If the bill was defeated,

the Rectangle might blame us and strike back in some way. He couldn't let us go to the meeting without a warning of the danger. He said no one would blame either of us for staying home. He suggested we discuss it and let me know our decision later.

I thanked him for his concern but assured him I would be there. Miss Windslow responded, "What would Jesus do?" She too would be there. We all smiled at each other as Rev. Maxwell told us how much he appreciated us.

That night we were shouted down as we attempted to start the service. We stepped back and closed the curtain. Rev. Maxwell exclaimed that he'd never seen anything like it! He couldn't imagine that in America the word of God could be silenced by a drunken, screaming mob!

Loreen peeked through the curtain. Speaking very slowly, lost in her thoughts she said "A few months ago I was just like them, scared, angry---I'm still me---the same hands and face---I wish they could see how changed I am inside--- I went to her and gave her a hug, assuring her that they would.

Rev. Gray said we should leave now before it got worse. He and Rev. Maxwell lead the way with Rachel, Loreen, and I close behind.

As we emerged onto the street we were pelted with rocks and mud. Suddenly Loreen screamed and pushed me out of the way as she fell to the ground. She had been struck in the head by a whiskey bottle meant for me. I screamed her name as Rev. Maxwell helped me to my feet. I knelt beside her, cradling her head in my lap. She slumped dead in my arms. I kept whispering her name as I sobbed.

The mob noises quieted. I gently wiped the blood from her forehead with my handkerchief. Looking up at the crowd gaping at us, I screamed at them. “Look what you’ve done! She was one of your own and you killed her!!!”

Oh friends, what does it usually take a tragedy to get us moving--- God channeled the anger I felt into positive action. Construction is now nearly completed on decent housing and Miss Windslow’s music studio.

The Rectangle’s face is no longer ugly and it is considerably less threatening.

(Pause)

Closing Comments

And that’s the story I came to tell you. But our story didn’t end there...it continued on... one decision at a time. Your story can begin anew today. Before we part company, I’d like to give **you** the opportunity to make a commitment to begin a serious walk with Jesus. That is what being a Christian is all about. Being a doer of the word not a hearer only.

As you seek and follow His guidance one decision at a time,

people will be able to see that there is a great deal to being a Christian,

and that you are indeed one of them.

What an adventure you will have!

If God is speaking to you, please come to the front as we sing “I Have Decided To Follow Jesus”.

Your pastor will meet you here and give you some guidance for your journey.

If there are those of you here who have not yet asked Jesus to forgive your sins and save your soul, that's where your journey as a Christian begins. Please come to this area now and we will pray with you.