

Former Diakonia Instructor Publishes New Book

Alexander (Sandy) Jacobs is a retired ELCA pastor and a member of the Greater Milwaukee Synod. From 2006 - 2018, Pastor Jacobs taught Introduction to the New Testament to more than 150 students. His new book, *Gospel Voices*, is available from Amazon or Barnes and Noble.

Pastor Jacobs reflects below on how his teaching informs his writing.

As a teacher of the New Testament for many decades, I have sought to convince my students that these texts are not monological, but dialogical. The texts are one half of a conversation. Paul did not just lecture his congregations, he responded to their questions and concerns. The Gospel writers did not simply cut and paste from various traditional stories, they responded to the needs of various communities of faith: What about divorce? Should we welcome everyone? What about clean and unclean things and people? AS a teacher, I have sought to challenge my students to re-imagine the other half of the conversation that lies behind and beneath the narratives of the Gospels.

I have also been deeply influenced by the writings of the theologian Marcus Borg. he was most interested in what made Jesus so different from his contemporaries and from other messianic leaders. His conclusion is that Jesus was rejected and eventually killed because he wanted to replace the “purity code” of the Pharisees with the “mercy code” of the Pharisees. The parable of the Good Samaritan is an example of his approach. Jesus’ willingness to touch lepers and dead people and his welcoming of tax collectors and prostitutes is also consistent with this central practice.

I have always been intrigued by many of the characters who are mentioned but never have a voice or are left hanging. One in particular occurs in Mark’s account. In chapter 14, Jesus has just been arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane and his disciples have all fled. Then in verse 51, mark tells us “A certain young man was following him (Jesus), wearing nothing but a linen cloth. They caught hold of him, but he left the linen cloth and ran off naked.” And that’s it! Who was this young man? Why was he in the Garden? In my book, I give him a name and a place of origin and a reason to be in the Garden. In the account of the healing of the woman who suffered 12 years with a hemorrhage, when she is healed, she tells Jesus “the whole truth.” (Mark 5:24ff.) Yet, we never hear what that whole story is. I tried to imagine what her life might have been like and how risky her actions were. In the story of the paralytic whose friends lower him through the roof to be healed, the focus is not on the paralytic, but on the friends: “when Jesus saw THEIR faith. . .” (Luke 5:20). I wondered what this paralytic must have thought. I gave him a name and a story and, of course, he was afraid of heights.

I also thought about many of the main characters in the narratives, like Mary and Joseph. Apart from the ‘Infancy Narratives,’ we do not know much about their life together as husband and wife. We do know that Jesus had five or six brothers and sisters (Matthew 13:54ff; Luke 8:20). My conclusion is that Mary and Joseph must have had a very active sex-life, and that that were most likely very typical of other observant Jewish families in Nazareth. And what about Jesus’ love-life? We know that he never married, but was he ever “in love?” And did he have young women hoping to attract his attention? And what about the prostitutes? In one of my stories, ‘Tamar of Judah,’ I tell of a prostitute who says of Jesus: “the reason I love him is that have never been able to seduce him. I know it sounds strange, but it is true. He

respects me. He refuses to use me.” I have also tried to give voice to some of the lesser known disciples, like Bartholomew and Thaddeus. I also imagine the grief and pain of the father of Judas Iscariot.

My intent in this book is to humanize the characters that are found in the Gospels. I have tried to portray them as flawed but faithful, realistic but ready to believe in miracles. I have sought to describe how they might think of imagine their responses and reactions to the power of God’s work in the person of Jesus. I have tried to remain faithful to the various narratives as well as to the historical and cultural context of the story.

GOSPEL VOICES is published by Wipf & Stock: ISBN 978-1-6667-1745-7. Also available at Amazon and Barnes & Noble

ABOUT REV. ALXANDER M. JACOBS:

After graduating from the Lutheran School of Theology in Philadelphia in 1966, Pastor Jacobs pursued graduate studies

in New Testament while serving two parishes in Philadelphia. In 1974, he began his career in Lutheran Campus Ministry:

Wayne State University, Detroit, MI, 1974-82; Stanford University, 1982-85; and the University of Wisconsin - Milwaukee,

1985-2003. While at UWM, he also served as the Director of the Gamaliel Chair in Peace and Justice. He then served as

interim pastor for the Greater Milwaukee Synod, 2003 - 2019: Mt. Carmel, Milwaukee; Zion, Ashippun; First United,

Sheboygan; and 11 more congregations.

Pastor Jacobs is married to Drusilla Cagnoni who teaches creative dance for children. They have one daughter, Risa, a

clinical psychologist in Illinois. He is an avid tennis player and poet.