

DARE TO BELIEVE
RISE UP TO ACT

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DARE TO BELIEVE
RISE UP TO ACT

Equipping laity to be
the public face of Christ

MARY SHARON MOORE

AWAKENING VOCATIONS

Eugene, Oregon

DARE TO BELIEVE, RISE UP TO ACT

Equipping laity to be the public face of Christ

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ISBN: 978-1-7943-8798-0

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Front cover image: Lluís Borrassà (Catalan, 15th century), *St. Peter is walking on water*

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INTRODUCTION

In this delicate hour before first light of dawn, when the morning star hangs just beneath the waning crescent moon above the Coburg hills, I slip into my prayer space, slip into the silence, and ready myself for Morning Prayer.

Unexpectedly, I encounter Jesus, sitting on the hillside, his back to me, as he overlooks the vineyard. He seems absorbed in prayer.

Until he glances back, over his shoulder.

“I have been waiting for you,” I hear him whisper.

I have been waiting for you.

He has been waiting for *us*, for you and for me.

In the Land of Noise and Opinion they have been saying that church is irrelevant. That it cannot get beyond itself. That, given time, it will simply implode and collapse of its own colossal weight.

But because the Lord has been waiting for us, waiting for me, one of his laborers, since before the dawn of day, I see things differently.

As a laborer for the Lord, as part of the laity, I understand church differently.

And as part of the laity I must love and care for this world which Jesus loves, which God still so loves and cares for.

And how must I express this love and care? The real question is: Am I willing to be formed, disciplined, apprenticed to love as Jesus loves?

This, of course, is an intensely personal question, for you and for me, because if you answer Yes, your life will no longer be conveniently and comfortably your own. You will be apprenticed in the ways of the Master.

If you answer Yes, you will shoulder, with Jesus, the burden of God's love for this world.

The stakes are high: Not just for you, or for me, but for this world which God still so loves.

As a lay laborer for the Lord, I am anointed in the Spirit of the risen Christ, and therefore I am equipped and empowered to stand in my world as a real presence of Jesus who is LORD.

As part of the laity I am the public face of Christ.

And so are you. This is who we are as anointed lay men and women: the public face of Christ. Whether we are accompanying another, speaking up, contributing time, skills, or resources, or responding hands-on in local emergencies, we are the public face of Christ.

But I did not spring out of the laity box fully formed and good to go. None of us did. It doesn't happen that way.

I discover that I am invited, in particular ways unique to my gifts, my talents, my interior makeup, my milieu, *invited*, I say, into a lifetime of apprenticeship with the Master.

Not a lifetime of reading books, watching videos, and absorbing fascinating facts about "the faith." But a lifetime of laboring side-by-side with the Master, in his workshop and on the road, along with fellow apprentices, learning by doing the work, receiving the Master's instruction, his correction, and holding every one of his words as true.

I have a committed love of Jesus, and of his unwavering witness to his Father's justice and love.

Therefore, what drives my work is the magnitude of human and creational suffering in my world today, just as Jesus was driven by the magnitude of suffering in his world and in his day.

I count myself as a committed, though sometimes laggard, apprentice and follower of Jesus.

I also love the town where I live, the county and state where I live—my Nazareth, my Galilee. Here is where I regularly find Jesus, and it's where I follow him. Here is the place where I am most frequently and deeply engaged in what is larger than myself.

Because I am a committed follower of Jesus, my community and my people matter to me. My world matters to me. Just as Jesus' community, his people, and his world mattered to him.

And because I care about my world, I care about my church—which includes you. Together we have a mission, a particular and urgent work of justice and love to do in our world, in our place and time. You in your place, me in mine, in these complex times, in this beautiful and groaning world which we share.

The church, like the world, may be in turmoil, but this does not absolve me from being, nonetheless, the public face of Christ.

I take my mission seriously. And I take your mission seriously. Therefore I feel responsible for the insights and understandings that have been entrusted to me, which I share with you in these pages.

I owe it to you, here and now, to share with you some things that I believe deeply.

First, I believe deeply in the power of our shared sacramental anointing—in Baptism, in Confirmation. We are baptized and anointed for a purpose. And like the Apostle Paul, I understand that I live now, “no longer I, but Christ lives in me” (Galatians 2:20).

My life is not my own, just as your life is not your own. Perhaps we don’t hear this often enough. Or perhaps we hear it, but (and I speak for myself) we might have beans in our ears. Or we may simply be too distracted, too filled, with a thousand other things.

Second, I believe deeply that church exists for the sake of the world, *this* world, which God still so loves (see John 3:16). Church cannot exist for its own sake and survive, much less bring forth the next generation for fruitful mission. Church exists, pure and simple, for the sake of the world.

Third, and I take this belief seriously, I believe that the world is aching, suffering—dying, even—for us to wake up to the power of our anointing, to dare to believe Jesus, to believe what he is saying, to take him at his word, and therefore rise up to act.

I feel the urgency of our mission. I have seen too much oppression and anguish—and likely you have, too—to simply look away, to pretend that injustice and suffering, oppression and diminishment of human spirit do not exist. I feel the urgency to rise up and act on my anointing and my beliefs.

And because I feel the urgency of our mission, I lean hard, daily, into the power that flows from Jesus’ resurrection. I invoke it morning after morning. And I imagine this power that flows from Jesus’ resurrection penetrating everywhere, into the most needful places—places of oppression and injustice and forsakenness, places of anguish and dying and death.

Still, I do not see our times as a problem to be fixed—although there are plenty of problems, and they beg for our attention and our urgent resolve to bring wisdom, compassion, resources, and just action.

I see our times as an invitation—God’s invitation to make real, in our time and place, the Land of the Rightside Up, the vision of God and the reign of God.

Together, as church, we must become something that the world actually needs. Jesus calls us salt, leaven, light—humble elements which are indispensable, practical, and used in service toward a greater good.

A brief background

I do not remember how, or when, or where the idea of the DARE TO BELIEVE, RISE UP TO ACT process began. The seed was a discovery, of sorts, likely in Spring 2017.

Perhaps after decades of sitting with the Gospels I one day realized with a piercing beam of clarity that it is not enough to believe *in* Jesus.

I understood that I have to *believe* him. To take him at his word. And to stop massaging his words so that I will not be discomforted by the demands and cost of following him.

I began to understand that if I want to follow him—not just theoretically, or in my imagination, or “someday”—then I have to go where he goes now, and love now whom and what he loves. Right here, in my town, my county, my state, my Nazareth, my Galilee. In my nation, and beyond.

The daily drubbing which is the endless and ubiquitous news cycle leaves many of us feeling powerless, small, unequipped to mobilize and to act in ways that bring relief and remedy, justice and compassion, encouragement, tenderness, and love.

The DARE TO BELIEVE, RISE UP TO ACT parish-based process offers laity a way to tap and claim and call forth the power of our anointing, in order to be “real presence” in society, effective laborers in the kingdom of God. And this book spells out the issues, the urgency, and the process for action.

This book, along with the process described in the DARE TO BELIEVE Toolkit at the back, is designed to move you out of the “good enough” zone and into the power and dignity of your anointing in the Spirit of the risen Christ.

Having come, myself, from the “good enough” zone, I don’t ever want to go back. Nor can I. Not really. I am chastened by the words of Saint Teresa of Avila: “The world is on fire, and this is no time to be concerned with unimportant things.”

Layout of the book

Dare to Believe, Rise Up to Act is written in two parts: first, Our Apprenticeship, and second, Our Assignment, followed by the DARE TO BELIEVE Toolkit.

Your assignments come in the course of your learning, and your apprenticeship continues in the course of your assignments. This overlap keeps us humble, I discover, and makes us pay attention.

The rhythm of apprenticeship and assignment gives flesh to the liturgical rhythms of gathering as Christ-centered community around Word and Sacrament, and then going forth to the world where we laypeople are engaged in work, in community, and in civic life.

The rhythm of apprenticeship and engagement also gives flesh to our twofold mission as anointed men and women of God: to remain in Christ and to reveal him everywhere.

Dare to believe. Rise up to act. Dare to believe some more, at deeper levels, with greater fervor, as though believing Jesus were the breath, the life blood of your very existence. Because it is.

And then rise up again, and again, with ever deeper conviction that resurrection is real, and that the power that flows from Jesus' resurrection is the most powerful force in the world. Because it is.

Let's journey together. We *need* to journey together. Each of us needs every one of us, as together we dare to believe and rise up to act.