

Was Jesus a Grassroots Community Organizer?

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When we examine the life, ministry of Jesus as portrayed by the Gospels, it would be hard to see any institution that Christ organized. Even in building his church through Peter, Christ never imposed a constitution and by-laws on the apostolic college in him as President and Judas financial secretary. The question posed by the Samaritan woman as recorded by John 4 was a legitimate one: “Art thou greater than our father Jacob, who gave this well?”

Despite the question posed by her, I believe that Jesus was very deliberate in his portrayal as a community organizer by being aware of the social forces he set in motion in defining the concepts of discipleship, community and love.

He did this at the onset of his ministry by calling the apostles from their occupations in becoming “fishers of humanity” the realities being leaving their families and attaching themselves to him. This displayed their confidence in him as leader. This loyalty to the master by the disciples was shown in the faithfulness of the eleven who still congregated together even when their leader had apparently died from the hands of the Roman government. The faithful eleven that remain speaks of the great judgment of the leader who picked them.

Jesus as community organizer didn't lump this group together but through time the little group became diverse. Certain apostles began to stand out by qualities which Jesus recognized through names he applied to them. A kind of leadership was accorded to Peter no longer are you called “Simon” but Peter (petros) upon this rock (pebble) I will build my church. Jesus was not satisfied in scattered followers but had a definite group or network. Today we would call this his Facebook friends or LinkedIn connections which served as the nucleus for the collective life.

Jesus also showed the high character of his work by the attention he gave to the education of his followers they were a traveling college. Just as Socrates walked about Athens with his pupils so was the barefoot itinerant village preacher from Nazareth opened the inner consciousness of those he encountered, particularly his disciples. He knew how to engage with Peter; knew to consult with Nathaniel Phillip who was the most analytical in organizing the hungry multitude. Jesus being a great leader knew the power of ideas which allows flexibility in uniqueness and was the precursor of the Holy Spirit.

A mark of a great grassroots community organizer is having a viable strategy but not wedded to it that one is not flexible to the undercurrents of the Spirit. Jesus redefines the expectations of the Jewish messianic revolt by evoking in his disciples the laws of organic growth as found throughout the parables.

In Matthew chapter 10:5-16, he outlines these instructions as a skillful grassroots organizer. 1) He had a target, limiting the scope of their activity to Jewish territory, thus keeping them on familiar ground and in their accustomed religious atmosphere; 2) He gave them something to believe in for community passion and action “the kingdom of heaven is at hand”; 3) He valued relationships as the basis of his grassroots campaign those sent to look up the worthiest household in every village and enter into friendly relations with it, if possible; 4) Also found in Matthew chapter 28 he was formally willing to change the strategy and scope to all the world instead of the confines of Judaism.

Jesus was in truth a grassroots community organizer. He knew human nature and met its needs; he was a discerner of the community. He had faith in those he hand-picked and invested in them not by a formula but by authentic relationship building. Before he gave his life as a ransom such inward and outward in which his organizing ability is manifested in the visible institution of two forms, one denoting fellowship and the other involving the symbolism of the natural expression of continuing the Passover meal.

This sense of community is manifested after Christ’s departure the church began to take shape and experience exponential growth and enthusiasm. The ultimate characteristic of a grassroots organizer knows that at best the method in carrying out the organizing is through the carrying out the legacy by one’s disciples and followers. Socrates and Jesus were voted the most influential people to have ever lived in the last 5,000 years. These men of influence had never written a book is defined by their legacy by those who are touched through free thought and relationships.

The measure of Jesus community activism can't be calculated, calibrated or counted-up. In Jesus' "parable of the sower," he speaks only about our responsibility to sow, to be out there spreading the news. It is God's responsibility to reap. Jesus as the great community grassroots organizer tells us we are called to plant the seed, but we cannot guarantee the harvest. Even with the greatest strategic plan, we cannot possibly know the results of our sowing until the eternal harvest, which is brought about by God. We will be judged, not by the results of that harvest, but on the sincerity as Jesus did throughout his ministry in our sowing.