



Minerva K. Teichert, *Rescue of the Lost Lamb*,  
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# MY PORTRAIT OF JESUS: A WORK IN PROGRESS

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**M**aybe because I love to garden, Easter is a particularly wondrous time for me. I marvel at how, after five months of blizzards and icicles, when colors are not much more than blue and gray, the earth can produce brilliant yellow crocuses, dancing daffodils, and vibrant red tulips. It seems impossible that life can suddenly spring forth from winter's barrenness. As I stand over my garden beds, warmed by the long-absent sun, I am overwhelmed by the way in which all things witness there is a Supreme Creator (see Alma 30:44).

For three years, my husband, Jim, and I lived in England while he served as president of the England London South Mission. Our lives were blessed beyond expectation serving with

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missionaries from around the world and with wonderful British Saints. One evening we had invited all the stake mission presidents to the mission home. One of them related a recent experience I have been unable to forget. While it raises some disconcerting questions about society, it has also caused me to ask some questions of myself. Here is his story.

He had gone to a jewelry store to purchase a gift for his wife. The woman in front of him indicated to the jeweler she was looking for something specific. She walked from glass case to glass case. The jeweler asked if he could help her find anything. She said she wanted to see the cross necklaces. So the jeweler took her over to the case with the crosses. He showed her several trays of necklaces, but she impatiently said no to each of them. Finally, in frustration, she said, “No, I’m looking for a cross with the little man on it.”

I could not believe it: Here was a woman in the late twentieth century who did not know that the man on the cross was her Savior and—if she knew who Christ was at all—did not know he had been crucified for *her*. Or why. Or that he had risen on the third day. Or that, most importantly, her hope for eternal life depended on him. These thoughts led me to reflect on what *I* knew about Jesus.

Of all times of year, when new life bursts into being, is there a more important time to know Jesus than at Easter?

Recently my granddaughter Ruby came to visit us. She told me about a family home evening lesson where her dad shared an experience. Her father had attended a business meeting. It was a high-stakes negotiation; the discussions had become heated and contentious. As tensions rose, one of the negotiators repeatedly took the Lord’s name in vain. Finally, Ruby’s dad stood and

said, “Stop—please don’t use Christ’s name like that. He is my Savior.” There was an embarrassed silence. When the meeting continued, the mood was subdued, more productive. Afterward, this chief negotiator approached my son and apologized for his insensitivity. Hearing how her father valued the sacredness of the Savior’s name and had defended him left as lasting an impression on Ruby and her siblings as it did on me. I pray this story will always remind my grandchildren of the sacredness of the Savior’s name and help them control their own expressions.

Adlai Stevenson is said to have told a story of two girls who were drawing pictures. The first little girl said, “What is it you are drawing?” “Why, I’m drawing a picture of Jesus,” answered the other. “How can you?” responded the first. “Nobody knows what Jesus looks like.” “Well,” said the other girl, “that’s ’cause I haven’t finished my picture yet!”

Jesus asked his disciples, “Whom say ye that I am?” (Mark 8:29). I want to be able to answer his question with an answer which reflects that *I know* who he is. And yet, like that little girl, my picture of Jesus is still in progress. Small parts of this portrait are beautifully rendered with luminous highlights and rich, detailed shadows, but others remain blurs—or even blank spots—on the canvas.

The best artists are those who capture through color, light, shadow, and gesture, the essence of their subject. The best portraits allow us to see not only the outside of another person—the style of their clothing, the color of their hair, and so on—but they allow us to see *inside* another person. In other words, who they *are*. They create a relationship—a visual conversation—between the subject and us. Such portraits allow us to feel that we know the subject and that the artist does as well.

I have read that many great artists, before ever picking up a brush, spend time getting to know their subjects by reading about them and spending time with them in their day-to-day lives. They ask questions and then listen closely to the answers. They visit the subjects' homes and families. Only when artists feel they really know their subjects do they begin to paint. Then, somehow, the inner character of the subjects is brought to the surface.

Creating a portrait with such illuminating qualities requires great dedication from the painter, even more so in attempting a portrait of the Savior. Yet that is what I want my portrait of Jesus to be. I want its viewers, especially my children and grandchildren, not only to know Jesus but to know that I know him.

### *SEEKING AND KNOWING JESUS*

“And now I would commend you,” wrote Moroni, “to seek this Jesus of whom the prophets and apostles have written.” Why did Moroni give us such a commandment? So “that the grace of God the Father, and also the Lord Jesus Christ, and the Holy Ghost, which beareth record of them, may be and abide in [us] forever” (Ether 12:41). In other words, that we “might know . . . the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom [he] hast sent” (John 17:3). Such knowledge is eternal life. Oh how I want to know him better!

Is there someone in your life who, as you have come to know them intimately—how they act, how they treat others, how they feel about you—has revealed hidden brushstrokes that inspired you to reach deeper into yourself and emulate them? My life has been blessed with countless such people. In my

mind's eye, I can see their faces. They have been divinely placed around me as family, ward members, Church leaders, neighbors, and friends—both Latter-day Saints and non-Latter-day Saints. They are the people around the world whom I have been so blessed to visit with through the years; such associations bring a frequent response, the desire to improve. I see purity, obedience, service, endurance, reverence, faith, hope, charity. My heart is enriched, my soul expanded by these connections across the globe. In my times of weakness or discouragement, joy and celebration, I think of those I know and have known, and I am inspired to become a little more like them.

I wonder if this same effect is why we are commanded to seek and come to know Jesus—not because he wants an everlasting, adoring fan club. Like all his commandments, the timeless prophetic pleadings to come know him is for *us*. As we learn about him and learn who he is, we strive to become more like him.

As the Prophet Joseph Smith taught, “Remember . . . that He has called you unto holiness; and . . . to be like Him in purity.” How can we become like him if we do not know him?<sup>1</sup>

When I was a young mother with small children, there came a time when I felt a deep yearning to know Jesus Christ. In an effort to deepen my knowledge of and acquaintance with him, my personal study focused on Elder James E. Talmage's book *Jesus the Christ*. I shall never forget when I read these words: “[Jesus'] development was unretarded by the dragging weight of sin; He loved and obeyed the truth and therefore was free.”<sup>2</sup>

What an insight into Jesus' character! As I pondered this short sentence, I realized that I was developing and wanted unretarded growth, that I wanted freedom from the dragging weight

of sin. How could I do that? Through obedience to truth. Just like Jesus. For years, Elder Talmage's words found a prominent place under a magnet on our refrigerator door. This knowledge spurred my feelings to action. I vividly recall a testimony meeting shortly after discovering this insight. The Spirit overcame me with an enormous need to stand and testify of Jesus. And as I did, my knowledge of him deepened and expanded; I came to know him just a little bit better.

Looking back, I realize my acquaintance with the Savior has come from countless influences. They are diverse in nature yet, when combined, serve to help me create a more complete portrait of Jesus. One such influence came early in my youth.

As a young girl, I was blessed by an aunt I never met. My dear mother had a sister, Rachel, who was two years younger. They were very close, even sharing the same birthday: May first. When Mother talked about Aunt Rachel, it was with great fondness and love. She told of sharing a bed, playing together, and swimming in the Idaho canals—Aunt Rachel loved to swim. She said Rachel was the best English student in her high school and spoke proudly of her wonderful poems and stories. Besides excelling in her studies, Aunt Rachel was blessed with a lovely sense of color and skillful hands that could crochet just about anything.

After high school, Rachel moved to San Francisco. She stayed with a widowed aunt who lived alone. She studied at Mount Zion Hospital to become a registered nurse and eventually passed her boards with a perfect score. She was asked to be the superintendent of student nurses at the French Hospital. Mother and her family were so proud of Aunt Rachel and all her accomplishments. Then, one day they received word that Aunt

Rachel had been swimming in the San Francisco Bay and had drowned. She was only twenty-two.

Mother missed Aunt Rachel deeply. So even though we had never met Aunt Rachel, Mother wanted us to somehow know this special aunt and to love her. In our home was a beautiful afghan that Aunt Rachel had crocheted. I can still see it—warm autumn colors of browns, oranges, yellows, and reds. When we were sick, mother would say, “Let’s put Aunt Rachel’s arms around you.” Then she’d snuggle us up in that afghan and say, “You will feel better soon.” It always worked. Even though I had only seen pictures of Aunt Rachel, oh how I loved her! Why? Because when I was in need, I had felt her arms around me.

Loving Aunt Rachel grew naturally out of learning about her. Her afghan was something tangible that I could wrap around me. When I was cold it warmed me, but not just physically. It also provided inner warmth because I knew somehow that she loved me. That afghan helped me realize how, more than anything else, feelings help us truly know and love someone—know them well enough that we might be able to paint them.

Aunt Rachel’s afghan is an unlikely source for a connection to Christ. I have had no tangible interaction with Jesus, no afghan to wrap around me. Yet in my hours of need, my times of sickness, my discouragements and disappointments, I have felt his arms around me, wrapping me in everlasting love. “Our Redeemer took upon Himself all the sins, pains, infirmities, and sicknesses of all who have ever lived and will ever live.”<sup>3</sup> As Alma said to his son Helaman, “I have been supported under trials and troubles of every kind, yea, and in all manner of afflictions; yea, God has delivered me from prison, and from bonds, and from death; yea, and I do put my trust in him, and he will still deliver



me” (Alma 36:27). It is through such feelings—love and rescue, safety and salvation—that I have best come to know Jesus.

So many of these feelings have come from the scriptures—accounts from those who knew Jesus and the ways their interactions with him affected them. Over and over people describe how being with him made them feel.

I think of the two disciples walking to Emmaus after the Crucifixion. As they journeyed, they talked sadly about the events of the past three days, and Jesus approached and joined them, unrecognized. They discussed the events of Jesus’ death, and he spoke to them about the gospel, citing scripture after scripture to put everything in perspective. As they were about to part ways, they pleaded with him to stay a little longer. Yet they did not recognize him until after he had broken bread with them and then vanished from their midst. At that point they said to each other, “Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the scriptures?” (Luke 24:32). I love the description that their hearts burned within them. They were changed by the experience, blessed with a deepened understanding and great joy—joy so great they immediately sought to share it with others (see Luke 24:33–52).

My heart has burned within me as I have testified that Jesus is my Savior. He speaks heart to heart, in a way that leaves no doubt as to how he feels about me: he loves me and counts me his. Lehi tasted of the fruit of the tree of life, which is the love of God (see 1 Nephi 11:22). It “filled [his] soul with exceedingly great joy” and made him “desirous that [his] family should partake of it also; for [he] knew that it was desirable above all other fruit” (1 Nephi 8:12). Like Lehi, I too have tasted of this

fruit. I testify that it is “the most desirable above all things . . . and the most joyous to the soul” (1 Nephi 11:22–23). Because I have tasted of this fruit, I have strived to speak heart to heart, to inspire my sisters and brothers to feel the sweet love of the Lord in their lives. I have endeavored, through my testimony and my service, to be an extension of his loving feelings. And as I have reached out to others to the best of my abilities, I have felt his love again. This celestial cycle has validated King Benjamin’s words that I am forever in the Lord’s debt (see Mosiah 2:23–24). This unending generosity teaches me to go and do likewise.

My painting of Jesus is not static—he is not sitting. Rather, he is standing, arms outstretched, beckoning me. As the Lord has spoken to my heart, I have learned the eternal significance of belonging: he desperately wants us to belong—to him and to each other. When I have felt pains of isolation or have witnessed the pain of others who feel the same, I have pictured this image of the Savior with his arms extended. His gentle words pierce the loneliness: “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28). This tender image calls me to extend my own arms to those who feel excluded so that they might be included. It causes me to see the Savior in others who step forward and do the same for me. I experience such extensions of lifting love from Saints—especially my sisters—around the world.

When I was called to serve in the Relief Society, the overwhelming inspiration was to testify to each sister around the globe that the Lord knows them and loves them. In wanting women to feel the love of the Lord in their lives, I felt I needed to better understand how Jesus felt about women. One of my early insights came from President Boyd K. Packer, but not in the

way you might guess. As you can imagine, my new calling was somewhat overwhelming. I went to President Packer to seek his counsel. When I sat down in his office, he did not launch into a lecture on how to run Relief Society. He did not tell me how to make beautiful centerpieces. Instead, he listened. From then on, I knew I could count on him to listen to my thoughts, then share his perspective and counsel. As I would leave his office, he would say, “My door is always open to you.” President Packer is a special witness of Christ, so was it any surprise that he listened to women?

My presidency and I felt impressed to use the story of Mary and Martha as the focus of one of the general Relief Society meetings. This story revolves around Jesus’ association with two women; it illustrates how he values us. As we prepared for the meeting by studying this and other scriptures, we soon discovered that not only did Jesus make a place for women, he was an ennobler of women.

In *Jesus the Christ*, Elder Talmage spoke of “the little sisterhood of faithful women who . . . ministered to Jesus in Galilee and . . . followed him thence to Jerusalem and to Calvary.” He referred to these special women as Jesus’ “other disciples.”<sup>4</sup>

To emphasize the Savior’s feeling toward women, Elder Talmage quotes Cunningham Geikie, who wrote that Jesus “swept away for ever from His Society the conception of woman as a mere toy or slave of man, and based true relations of the sexes on the eternal foundation of truth, right, honor, and love. To ennoble the House and the Family by raising woman to her true position was essential to the future stability of His Kingdom, as one of purity and spiritual worth. . . . He proclaimed the equal rights of woman and man within the limits of the family, and, in

this, gave their charter of nobility to the mothers of the world. For her nobler position in the Christian era, compared with that granted her in antiquity, woman is indebted to Jesus Christ.”<sup>5</sup> I testify that this is true.

Could anything speak more powerfully to this than the fact that, following his Resurrection, a *woman*, Mary Magdalene, “was given the honor of being the first among mortals to behold a resurrected Soul, and that Soul, the Lord Jesus”?<sup>6</sup> Jesus asked her, “Woman, why weepest thou? whom seekest thou?” And she, supposing him to be the gardener, said, “Sir, if thou have borne him hence, tell me where thou hast laid him.” Then Jesus called her gently by name, “Mary.” She undoubtedly recognized the great love in his voice and turned to him, responding, “Master” (John 20:15–16).

I recall leaving for our mission to England. Sitting among all those strangers on the airplane, I realized that for the next three years I would not be “Bonnie” but would be known only by the name on my tag: Sister Parkin. I confess this made me a little sad. I glanced down at my name tag. Below “Sister Parkin” I saw another name: Jesus Christ. My heart rejoiced. I was honored to share that name tag with my Savior. If nobody else knew I was Bonnie, He did. He knew Mary, and called her by name, and He knew me, and He called me. I was thrilled to respond and call him Master. After arriving in London, we called home to check on our family. Our three-year-old grandson James asked, “Grandmother, do you work for Jesus?” Humbled, I stopped a moment, then said, “Yes, James. I do work for Jesus.”

Nobody “works for Jesus” better than his dear prophet. Like Jesus, President Hinckley valued women. I recall a general welfare meeting with the First Presidency, members of the Twelve,

and other General Authorities. The Relief Society general presidency was asked to make a presentation. My counselors, Kathy Hughes and Anne Pingree, and I felt inspired to teach a principle as we did when training Relief Society leaders, which included asking questions and expecting responses. Such an approach was unusual for the welfare meeting. As expected, the Brethren were initially surprised with this approach. But they soon participated enthusiastically.

After the meeting, President Hinckley walked into his office and said to his secretary, Don Staheli, “Don, don’t let me forget. Don’t let me forget.”

“Forget what, President?” asked Brother Staheli.

President Hinckley smiled thoughtfully, then said, “Today we were taught by the women of the Church and we were no less for it.”

At the next general conference, President Hinckley said: “I witnessed a very interesting thing the other day. The General Authorities were in a meeting, and the presidency of the Relief Society were there with us. These able women stood in our council room and shared with us principles of welfare and of helping those who are in distress. Our stature as officers of this Church was not diminished by what they did. Our capacities to serve were increased.”<sup>7</sup> What a significant moment! I learned through Jesus’ prophet how he felt about the women of the Church.

Paintings are often layered with multiple meanings. In my painting, Jesus’ outstretched arms say more to me than inclusion—they also communicate constant loyalty. “He is not ashamed to call [me sister]” (Hebrews 2:11).

A few months ago, the father of a dear friend passed away. His first wife had died many years before, and he had remarried.

In preparing for the funeral, my friend's stepmother requested that the funeral be a celebration of her husband's life rather than a religious service. This must have been difficult for the children, as they were all active members of the Church. My friend was torn as to what to do: she wanted to honor her stepmother's request, but she also felt prompted to testify of Christ—something she often does. Throughout the funeral service, she kept praying that she would do the right thing. Near the end of the service when she finally stood to speak, my friend spoke of her father and the important lessons he had taught her in life. Then, acting upon the strong, undeniable impression she had received while preparing her talk, she testified of Jesus Christ and his Atonement. The words were few, but they were filled with power. She said, "I *know* that because of the Savior's Atonement, one day there will be a joyous reunion with my father and other loved ones." Then she closed her talk in the name of Jesus Christ. As she did so, the Spirit filled the room, ratifying her words. Tears rolled down my cheeks and, I am sure, the cheeks of others. I was strengthened by my dear friend's courageous testimony.

The good news of Easter helps me understand my Savior in a broader, eternal perspective. During a visit to President Hinckley's office, I asked him, "How are you doing, President?" "I'm lonely," he said. He told me how the night before he had been reading the Wilford Woodruff study guide that was to come out the next year. He paused, then, referring to his deceased wife, Marjorie, said, "I don't know if I dreamed it or if I heard her voice, but she said, 'I'm having a grand time. Wish you were here.'" It was not long after that that President Hinckley joined his wife in what was surely a joyous reunion. Now, united once more, I am sure they are having a grand time together. That is

the good news of Easter. Who would provide for such reunions but an elder brother willing to sacrifice his life for ours?

“The testimony of our Lord’s rising from the dead is not founded on written pages,” wrote James E. Talmage. “To him who seeks in faith and sincerity shall be given an individual conviction which shall enable him to reverently confess as exclaimed the enlightened apostle of old: ‘Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.’ Jesus, who is God the Son, is not dead. ‘I know that my Redeemer liveth.’”<sup>8</sup>

The Relief Society motto proclaims, “Charity never faileth.” Charity, says Mormon, “is the pure love of Christ.” I have often wondered if this means it is the love Jesus has for us or if it is the love we have for Jesus, or if it is both. Upon being called to serve in the Relief Society, I felt a special charge to communicate the Lord’s love for each sister around the globe and to testify of that unfailing love. So I began a yearlong study about charity. We studied it as a presidency and as a board. We pondered on and discussed each attribute. I love the definition of the Lord’s love: “Charity suffereth long, and is kind, and envieth not, and is not puffed up, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil, and rejoiceth not in iniquity but rejoiceth in the truth, beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. . . . Wherefore, cleave unto charity, which is the greatest of all, for all things must fail—but charity is the pure love of Christ, and it endureth forever” (Moroni 7:45–47).

That description of the pure love of Christ speaks volumes about who Jesus is. It is specific and concrete; it is deceptively simple. It might be discouraging if not for my painting of Jesus and his outstretched arms, beckoning, cheering, buoying. In that description, I see who my Savior is and who I can be. If Jesus can

be kind to his captors, I can be kind to all. If Jesus can forgive his crucifiers, I can forgive everyone. If Jesus can love me in spite of all of my shortcomings, I can do likewise.

I do not know if there is a more poignant or poetic depiction of Jesus than these words of Isaiah: “He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed” (Isaiah 53:3–5).

Only eighty-two words, yet Isaiah’s insights on Jesus and our relationship with him are stunning. They invoke pity, shame, humility, empathy, gratitude. I can scarcely take in the final six words: “with his stripes we are healed.” I don’t understand how that works! Nor do I fully understand why he would be wounded for my transgressions or bruised for my iniquities.

I paraphrase these words by Joseph Smith as I reflect on my painting of the Savior: “When [I] reflect upon the holiness and perfections of [my] great Master, who has opened a way whereby [I] may come unto him, even by the sacrifice of himself, *[my] heart melt[s] within [me] for his condescension.*”<sup>9</sup>

I love the image-rich lyrics of the hymn “Jesus, the Very Thought of Thee.”<sup>10</sup>

Jesus, the very thought of thee  
With sweetness fills my breast;  
But sweeter far thy face to see  
And in thy presence rest.



*TO SAVE THE LOST: AN EASTER CELEBRATION*

Nor voice can sing, nor heart can frame,  
Nor can the mem'ry find  
A sweeter sound than thy blest name,  
O Savior of mankind!

O hope of ev'ry contrite heart,  
O joy of all the meek,  
To those who fall, how kind thou art!  
How good to those who seek!

Jesus, our only joy be thou,  
As thou our prize wilt be;  
Jesus, be thou our glory now,  
And thru eternity.

There is no artist capable of capturing the complete essence of Jesus. For how can a painting even begin to capture such mercy, such love, such devotion? How can paint on canvas contain an eternal being of such majesty as to command the respect of all things in the heavens and the earth?

I have come to the realization that my best portrait of Jesus will not be rendered on a figurative canvas. Rather, it will be created in who I become—a person who has “received his image in [my] countenance” (Alma 5:14). My countenance, like all skillful portraits, will capture the essence of who I am. But if this is to be, I cannot be the artist. For there is only one artist capable of producing such a grand work of art. He is the master painter.

Because we have sought him and know him and have allowed him to change us, we will be like him. His image will shine through us. Could anything be sweeter or more humbling

or more joyous than not only to see Jesus in our countenances but to feel His character through every fiber of our beings?

Like the magnificence of spring flowers bursting from winter's bleakness, I love the hope Moroni extends us near the end of the Book of Mormon: "Pray unto the Father with all the energy of heart, that ye may be filled with this love, which he hath bestowed upon all who are true followers of his Son, Jesus Christ; that ye may become the [children] of God; that when he shall appear *we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is*; that we may have this hope; that we may be purified even as he is pure" (Moroni 7:48; emphasis added).

I testify that Jesus is the Christ. He is my Savior, my Lord, my God. I pray that when he appears I shall see him as he is and shall be like him. As comforting as Aunt Rachel's afghan was to me as a child, I, like President Faust, "long for the ultimate blessing of the Atonement—to become one with Him, to be in His divine presence, to be called individually by name as He warmly welcomes us home with a radiant smile, beckoning us with open arms to be enfolded in His boundless love."<sup>11</sup>

## NOTES

1. "The Elders of the Church in Kirtland, to Their Brethren Abroad," *Evening and Morning Star*, March 1834, 142.
2. James E. Talmage, *Jesus the Christ* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1977), 112.
3. James E. Faust, "The Atonement: Our Greatest Hope," *Ensign*, November 2001, 19.
4. Talmage, *Jesus the Christ*, 700.
5. Cunningham Geikie, *Life and Words of Christ* (London: Henry S. King, 1877), 2:349, as quoted in Talmage, *Jesus the Christ*, 484.

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6. Talmage, *Jesus the Christ*, 681.
7. Gordon B. Hinckley, "The Women in Our Lives," in Conference Report, October 2004, 87.
8. Talmage, *Jesus the Christ*, 699.
9. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2007), 53–54.
10. Bernard of Clairvaux, "Jesus, the Very Thought of Thee," *Hymns* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1985), no. 141.
11. Faust, "The Atonement: Our Greatest Hope," 20.