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It must have been amazing to be one of the disciples of Jesus, following him around the countryside and seeing firsthand the wonders of his life. Imagine hearing him teach the crowds who gathered to see him. How about witnessing people healed of their illnesses? Wouldn't that have been remarkable!

I imagine of few of his followers may have wondered, "Why me, Jesus? Why have you chosen me to be part of your group? I don't have any special skills that set me apart from anyone else. Why me?"

I also wonder if Jesus' disciples felt a bit pressured being in the spotlight of this great teacher. Worried about their responsibilities. Feeling nervous with everyone watching them.

Being chosen isn't always an easy life. Being selected for an honor may begin well enough, with words of congratulations and handshakes and applause. But then the pressure begins to mount: being asked to speak in front of others, having to be careful about what you say and do, and worrying

that you might make a mistake. Being chosen may feel uncomfortable at times.

Disciples preacher Fred Craddock tells of a time when he was a boy and his preacher had announced that he had chosen someone as the focus of his next sermon. Just imagine the anticipation of hearing the name of the person chosen, but also imagine worrying if the pastor had selected you, that he might call out your name in the middle of worship. Fred tells about that Sunday when everyone had gathered to hear the sermon about the one chosen:

Pastor of our home church, years ago, advertised on a given Sunday he was going to preach "The Member of this Church I Would Most Like to See in Hell." Boy, did we have a crowd! People who'd never been, came. It was fantastic. A bunch of us kids, boys from the Sunday school class, were sitting back there, all anxious to see who it was. Finally, when he called the name—he actually called the name—it

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was our Sunday school teacher. And we said, “Yeah.” No, no, we didn't really.

Then he went on to say that the reason he had chosen her to be the one he would most like to see in hell was because she was such a quality saint that, within two weeks, hell would be converted. And it made a nice sermon, but people, you know, still were expecting something else.¹

After the sermon this teacher may have heard lots of congratulations and way-to-go, but what about the weeks afterwards? She may have felt eyes were looking at her, wondering what would happen if she made a mistake. Would she still be part of the chosen group if she made an error?

Those who followed Jesus may also have wondered about their futures if they made a mistake. Could they be excluded from his circle of followers? Could Jesus fire them from being a disciple?

How many times have you worried about a mistake you've made, wondering if God will still

accept you? Or if the church will accept you? That's a concern that young Tommy Cummings had one Sunday morning. The Cummings family had belonged to the church for many years, but Tommy became upset one week when the preacher began talking about sin.

He talked about human failures, pride, and shortcomings. That day after church the youngest boy, Tommy Cummings, moped around the house. Mom and Dad finally asked him what was wrong. He said, “The preacher doesn't like me anymore.” Mom and Dad asked him where he had gotten such an idea. He said, “Well, he kept talking about how bad our short Cummings are, and I'm the only short Cummings in the church. So I suppose he doesn't like me anymore.”²

Just as young Tommy was afraid he was no longer a part of the church due to his sin and shortcomings, sometimes we may fear that God will reject us due to our mistakes and bad choices.

Throughout Jesus' ministry he reminded his followers of God's welcoming love and acceptance, even for those who made bad choices and mistakes. Even one of those closest to him feared what would happen when he denied knowing Jesus. Simon, who Jesus called a rock using the Greek word *petros*, translated as Peter, the Rock, is a play on the word *petra*, the rock foundation of the future church. Even this rock, this secure one who said he would follow Jesus anywhere, denied knowing Jesus when things got too intense. But rather than me telling you about that night in the courtyard, listen to the gatekeeper who watched it happen.

Even though I'm mentioned in all four stories about Jesus, I imagine you may have overlooked me. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John told my story, but none of them bothered to even mention my name. I'm not surprised, for I didn't have a lot of status in those days. I was only known as a servant girl in the high priest's courtyard, and yet, I had a very important role. I watched the gate, letting in only those people who needed to be there. I took my job very seriously as a gatekeeper, for if

someone looked a bit suspicious, I didn't open the gate. You would be amazed at the stories I heard, the reasons people needed to see the high priest. I could decide who to let "in" and who should stay "out." I determined the "insiders" and the "outsiders."

One evening I heard that a guy named Jesus had been captured and was taken inside, and numerous people wanted to get into the courtyard to catch a glimpse of him. I had heard stories about Jesus—how he healed people, how he was a wonderful teacher, *and* how he hung out with tax collectors and sinners. I didn't know what to make of him, for I had heard wonderful things about him, so when I heard he was arrested I began to wonder what he had done.

I had seen one of the followers of Jesus enter through the courtyard when they brought in Jesus. Later this follower, who I heard was a disciple of Jesus, came out and spoke with me in the courtyard. He asked me to let another disciple inside as well—I think his name was Peter.

When I opened the gate for Peter, I asked him, "You were one of Jesus' disciples, right?" I had hoped to create some casual conversation and learn more about Jesus, but I was amazed at Peter's answer: "No, I'm not a follower of him." He walked off and stood by the fire to warm himself.

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A bit later that evening I heard one of the guards ask Peter, “Aren’t you one of Jesus’ disciples?” Again he denied it saying, “I’m not!”

Another one of the servants of the high priest asked Peter once again, “Didn’t I see you in the Garden of Gethsemane with Jesus? I just heard that one of my family members had his ear cut off by one of your followers of Jesus when he was arrested.”

Peter denied knowing Jesus a third time, and just a few moments later I heard a rooster crow. I wouldn’t have paid much attention to that sound, but immediately after the rooster crowed Peter looked terribly upset, and then I heard him mumble something about being sorry for denying Jesus three times as he ran out of the courtyard.

Even though he said he didn’t know Jesus, he obviously did. Jesus was hung on a cross and died

the next day, and I thought that was the end of their group, but years later I heard stories about Peter’s leadership among the followers of Jesus. Even though Jesus was dead, they continued to gather and celebrate his life and teachings. Some even said they had seen Jesus after he had died!

I discovered how amazing this man Jesus had been, for he welcomed everyone into what he called the Kingdom of God. Since I was a gatekeeper and only let in certain people, I wondered if Jesus would have let me into his group. But then I realized that if Jesus welcomed Peter who had denied knowing him, then surely he would welcome me—and even you!

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¹ Fred B. Craddock; Mike Graves; Richard F. Ward. *Craddock Stories* (Kindle Locations 1369-1375). Kindle Edition.

² Hodgkin, Michael; Hodgkin, Michael. 1002 Humorous Illustrations for Public Speaking: Fresh, Timely, Compelling Illustrations for Preachers, Teachers, and Speakers (Kindle Locations 4001-4005). Zondervan. Kindle Edition. #623