

Women Who Knew Jesus

Bonnie Ring

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Women Who Knew Jesus is a feminist theological text that focuses on the active participation of women in Jesus's ministry.

Episcopal priest Bonnie Ring's probing study of sixteen biblical women, *Women Who Knew Jesus*, focuses on their taboo-breaking interactions with Jesus as a source of inspiration for challenging contemporary patriarchal biases.

This enhanced view of the place of women in Jesus's life and ministry was based on a series of transformative retreats and on feminist biblical scholarship. Personal anecdotes are coupled with historical information, theological arguments, and scriptural exegesis. The book draws both from Christian apocrypha and the canonical gospels, examining accounts of what was known about Jesus and signs said to point to Jesus as the messiah. Taking the cultural norms of Jesus's day into consideration, it argues that Jesus's inclusionary attitudes were revolutionary.

The book also applauds the bravery of its focal women, whom it credits with defying cultural barriers and taboos—as with Mary, the mother of Jesus, who is depicted as strong, courageous, and able to take initiative in her response to God's call, despite the life-threatening situations she faced as a pregnant, unmarried girl. To make each such story personal, the book encourages individual exploration, along with considerations of how, and to what, God may be calling women, and how they might choose to respond.

Interesting notions, such as that Jesus did not enter the world fully formed, God-like, and always in control of his emotions and responses, arise in the course of the book's theological discussions. Not even Jesus's interactions with women are set up to have been perfect: he is shown to have sometimes been inconsiderate, resistant, and even angry with women, at times responding to their requests only after they refused to stand down. The result is a provocative text filled with captivating stories.

Questions for reflection and guided meditations at the end of each chapter invite engagement with the events portrayed, as with the questions following a chapter on a woman forced to live in isolation for eighteen years due to a hemorrhage; they are pointed and relevant for all who feel unacceptable and alone. Such inquiries are designed to nurture the audience's discovery of its own sacred stories. A wide-ranging bibliography is provided to facilitate further research. Full-page illustrations of Bible stories are included—many taken from public domain sources.

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KRISTINE MORRIS (May 12, 2020)

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