

Jesus stands up in the synagogue and reads from the prophet Isaiah. He is ready to embark on a mission that will take him from his hometown to the cross on Calvary. He speaks frankly. He wants to comfort the oppressed and to call the comfortable to action so they will see the oppressed and respond to their needs.

The people of Nazareth hoped for a messiah who would expel the Romans. Revolution was close to their hearts. Jesus was not interested in politics. He preached liberation from oppression by love, justice, and mercy, not by the sword. From the very start of his ministry, Jesus felt intense opposition, but he did not back down. Is Jesus right? Is freedom possible through love, justice, and mercy?

Fred's life had fallen apart. He was 35, divorced from his wife and estranged from his father. Although he had completed a second stay at a rehab center, Fred was ready to hit the nearest bar and drown his sorrows in alcohol. He knew it wouldn't solve his problems but all he was looking for was some way to numb the pain. As Fred was putting on his coat to go out, the doorbell rang. His father stood there with a bag of groceries. "I thought you might need a few things and a hug. It doesn't matter what has happened, you will always be my son."

The two began to speak frankly to one another. Fred told his father how proud he was of him and only wished that he could display some of his father's courage in order to deal with the demons in his life. His father replied that he was proud of his son for the tremendous courage it took to go through alcohol recovery not once but a second time after he had failed and fallen back. That deliberate act of love was a turning point. Fred has been sober ever since. And he has shared his story with others at Alcoholics Anonymous meetings trying to help them to be courageous as well.

Was Jesus right? Is freedom possible through love, justice, and mercy, or is the sword the only way? Many years ago, on a British airways flight from Johannesburg, a white South African, found herself sitting next to a black man. The woman called the flight attendant and asked that the problem be rectified immediately. "I demand that you do something. I can't possibly sit next to this disgusting man. Find me another seat." The flight attendant tried to calm the woman down. The flight was full and there were few options for fixing the situation. The flight attendant left for a few moments to confer with the captain. When she returned, she explained that she had some good news.

"Madam we have one seat in first class. It is most extraordinary to make this kind of upgrade, and I have had to get special permission from the captain. But given the circumstances, the captain felt it was outrageous that someone be forced to sit next to such an obnoxious person." The flight attendant turned to the black man and said, "Sir, if you'd like to get your things, I have a seat ready for you in first class." The surrounding passengers stood and gave a standing ovation while the black man moved forward to first class. The woman was filled with fury and wanted to hurl the flight attendant off the plane. Sometimes, the truth stings.

The next time you are ready to give into despair or are filled with fury and ready to hurl someone else over the cliff, remember: "Love never fails...Love is patient, love is kind... it is not rude, it does not seek its own interests, it is not quick-tempered, it does not brood over injury, it does not rejoice over wrongdoing but rejoices with the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things" (1 Cor 13:8, 4a, 5-7).