

Soul Graffiti.

Mark Scandrette.

San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2007.

248 pages. Paper. \$14.95.

Barbara Mutch.

Vice President Academic, Carey Theological College.

Vancouver, B.C.

Through winsome stories, thought-provoking questions and the offer of engaging spiritual practices, *Soul Graffiti: Making a Life in the Way of Jesus* offers a fresh consideration of what it means to follow Jesus. Mark Scandrette, minister, writer and fellow traveller, writes to people trying to re-imagine what it means to be Christian today. He writes for all those looking for a spiritual path that is more a way of life than merely a way to believe.

Scandrette seeks to provide an exploration of the essential message of Jesus (Mark 1:15). He then relates that message to the experience of contemporary persons, and guides readers to take action toward making a life in the way of Jesus. Scandrette compares the message and method of Jesus to graffiti, viewing them both as immediate, street level and personal, and believes that the good news Jesus proclaimed is deeply

relevant for today if the real issues of people's lives are acknowledged as part of the story.

In order to explore the message of the good news proclaimed through the words and deeds of Jesus, Scandrette organizes the book into four parts, each corresponding to one of four phrases from the introduction to the Gospel of Mark. Part One explores the context from which we encounter Jesus as a messenger. Part Two addresses issues about how we relate the good news of God to our time and place. Part Three investigates how the sacrifice of Jesus is related to the message of God's reign. Part Four discusses how we might respond to the invitation to repent and believe the good news.

In addition, each part includes a chapter on praxis inspired by the four themes he sees evident in the life of Jesus. Jesus is pictured as a companion who lived with arms extended wide to all people, actively making friends with those who are despised. Jesus is painted as an artist possessing an awakened imagination for the immediacy of God's kingdom, telling stories and acting prophetically to provoke and inspire those among whom he walked. As healer, Jesus is shown identifying with the sufferings of humanity, touching those who suffered, and advocating for the poor and the weak. And as mystic, Jesus is portrayed as one who lived with a constant awareness of the transcendent reality of God, and who accessed power to love through spiritual practices, including contemplative prayer, surrender, silence and solitude.

The main problem being addressed through *Soul Graffiti* is that followers of Jesus know more than they live. “Most of us could close the scriptures and simply spend the rest of our lives trying actually to obey the wisdom we can remember” (40). Scandrette responds winsomely and congruently to this lack of continuity between knowledge and experience by showing what making a life in the way of Jesus looks like in practice, thereby incarnating his central argument – that following Jesus is more about how we live than resting on a collection of propositions. Through deftly-painted pictures of kindness and radical hospitality, Scandrette builds a convincing case for the power of knowing one’s neighbours, embracing all of life as sacred, expanding the boundaries of love into neglected corners and making beauty with one’s life.

Scandrette is eminently qualified to write a book about making a life in the way of Jesus, for he has been trying to do that for most of his life. He is a founding member of SEVEN, a monastic community devoted to holistic and integrative Christian spirituality. He is a cofounder and the director of ReImagine, a centre for spiritual formation in San Francisco. He lives a life characterized by intentional commitments and relationships, seeking in the company of others to bring greater wholeness, love and beauty into the world. “We are more likely to trust messages that are inhabited”, Scandrette says. Throughout the pages of the book, we see multiple ways in which he and others inhabit their words.

This is a deeply hopeful book. Scandrette believes that we are part of a good creation and invites his readers to embrace life by affirming that we are living in a world where God is at work. He claims that because of the nearness of the kingdom of

God as announced and embodied by Jesus, a new kind of life is possible. Through the sacrifice of Jesus, we gain access to God's power to make a life in the kingdom of love. We have the ability to be agents of healing in our world, and we learn to love the God we cannot see by loving the people we *can* see.

Soul Graffiti is also a practical book, and in this lies its largest contribution. Scandrette values an experimental approach to life. "How exactly do we put the teachings of Jesus into practice? The short answer is that we try. Just do something" (40). "Conversation at its best is never just talk; it is the means by which we kindle imagination and gain the courage to take action together...Through conversation we learn to integrate the force of love into our daily lives and discover what it means to seek the reign of love in our time" (47). Every chapter ends with questions for conversation and experiments to practice, thus reinforcing the conviction that this life made in the way of Jesus is made in the company and shared practice of others.

Soul Graffiti is a valuable primer to the emergent conversation, a helpful resource to those wanting to walk in the way of Jesus as well as to those with the added responsibility of leading others in that walk. As such, it would enrich the curriculum of those in Doctor of Ministry programs, as well as persons perplexed by church yet wanting to take seriously the invitation to walk with Jesus. I recommend *Soul Graffiti* to those interested in understanding more about the emergent conversation, and all those wanting a fresh consideration of what it means to do this thing called life with Jesus.