

Jesus

DREAM.

“Jesus inaugurated a community that was so radical that it threatened everybody because it wasn’t just people who could keep the holiness code and do all the hand washing and keep all the laws of cleanliness and holiness. It was people who never washed their hands. It was people who lived what was called ‘sinful lives,’ and Jesus ate meals with them – incorporated all of them.”



– Sr. Helen Prejean, *Living the Questions*

1st Break:

What are some of the “dubious” & marginal characteristics of Jesus’ life and ministry described by Flunder, Scott, & Prejean?

What borders did Jesus cross in the Gospel of Mark? Where do you see that being significant today?

2nd Break:

Levine describes some of the likely characteristics of Jesus. Which ones stand out for you (and why?).

3rd Break:

List some of the generalizations about Jesus that have a “fairly high degree of probability.”

What are some of the characteristics of the “Kingdom of God” that resonate with your understanding?

If the “alternative vision” of Jesus’ Kingdom was so radical, so treasonous, so threatening back in the 1st century, how come it isn’t so (or is) today? Should it be?

4th Break Q’s:

How does the story of the Lincoln statue help you in understanding the “language of metaphor”?

Describe the differences between the pre-Easter and post-Easter Jesus and their implications for your faith.

Why does Borg consider the empty tomb a “distraction” from a relationship with Jesus as a figure in the present?

Nakashima-Brock suggests that the early church was much more preoccupied with Jesus’ Divine-Human nature than it was with the “atonement.” Why?

Describe some of the layers Flunder says obscures the real Jesus.

What's the significance of four "according-to's"?

General Reflection:

What do you find most helpful or interesting from the material so far?

What are the implications for your personal spiritual journey? For Christianity as a whole?

Try it

Sit down and read the Gospel according to Mark straight through. Read slowly and soak in the images and stories. From your own experience and knowledge of the gospel story, note what you think is missing from Mark's telling. What is different? Keep track of the places that made you stop and wonder or where you were certain it happened in a different way. Using a parallel gospel (all four gospels – or five including Thomas – lined up in columns) compare the other gospels with your notes in hand. What do the individual evangelists change? What stories have you internalized that are fleshed out by another gospel? How does this exercise change your understanding of the genre of "gospel?"

Spirit Practice

Inspired John Dominic Crossan's idea of "The Gospel according to...", what elements of Jesus' life and message would you emphasize in the gospel according to *you*? Choose one. In agreement with a partner, covenant to put into practice that one element in your life over the course of the next several weeks or months. Be accountable to one another in the pursuit of that one practice, attitude, or behavior. At the end of your agreed-to timeframe, share with one another what you've learned about the "Good News."

Words of Wisdom

The similarities and differences between Matthew, Mark, and Luke have given rise to what scholars call the “Synoptic Problem.” The synoptic or “common view” of these three texts leads to further questions not only about how similar they are in some places, but how different they are from one another and from John. The most obvious difference between the first three gospels and the Gospel according to John is the order of events:

The Synoptic Gospels

*Begins with John the Baptist
OR birth and childhood stories
Jesus is baptized by John*

*Jesus speaks in parables and
aphorisms*

Jesus is a sage

Jesus is an exorcist

*The “Kingdom of God” is the
theme of Jesus’ teaching*

*Jesus has little to say
about himself*

*Jesus takes up the cause
of the poor and oppressed*

Jesus’ public ministry: 1 year

Temple incident: late in the story

*Jesus eats a last supper
with his disciples*

The Gospel of John

*Begins with creation –
no birth or childhood stories*

*Baptism of Jesus assumed
but not mentioned*

*Jesus speaks in long,
involved discourses*

Jesus is a philosopher and a mystic

Jesus performs no exorcisms

*Jesus himself is the theme
of his own teaching*

*Jesus reflects at length
on his own mission and person*

*Jesus has little or nothing to say
about the poor and oppressed*

Jesus’ public ministry: 3 years

Temple incident: early in the story

Foot washing instead of the last supper

As one explores the chronological differences of the gospels, it also becomes clear that there is a completely different cast of characters in some places, different styles and vocabularies, and different political and theological agendas.

Find a Gospel Parallel (a book that displays the four gospels in side-by-side vertical columns) or visit an online version (like “The Five Gospels Parallels” at <http://www.utoronto.ca/religion/synopsis/>). Compare some of your favorite Jesus stories across the gospels. Take note of how they are the same or different. Use a commentary or other sources to determine some of the biases each evangelist brings to their writing.