

Net•Work Notes

Week 8, Day 1: Christ—Meeting Jesus

God works to shape human life for his glory. We are, as you have seen throughout the Old Testament story, pretty good at resisting what God is doing! But as we get familiar with God's ways, our imaginations expand to let God into the picture of our fragmented lives; we learn "what it means to live largely, aware of God's grace and beauty in every detail of which we're invited to participate in" (Eugene Peterson, *Leap Over a Wall*). That is why God's people spend time reading the Bible—so that our understanding is constantly nourished by God's view of truly human life.

But if we leave the story with only the Old Testament, God's work is left incomplete. God's people struggled on, but they lived in virtual **exile** in Israel, under the power of foreign governments: Babylon, Persia, Rome. Many in Israel doubted whether there was a god in Israel. Others, their imaginations fed by reading the Torah and Prophets and their hunger for God heightened by praying the Psalms, expected that God would again restore His people. They experienced an intense longing for the Messiah, God's anointed leader and savior.

That is part of the tension in human life. We live badly, so we find ourselves ashamed before God, finding it hard to believe God could really care about us or desire our best. But there remains in us a longing to be made complete, to live a good, fully human life in the presence of

God. And this is where the Gospel writers tell us Jesus fits into the story. As the Gospel writers tell it, Jesus is the one who lives the fully human life and, in so doing, fully reveals God to us. Over the next few weeks we will be meeting Jesus and thinking about who he is and what he does for us. Take some time in the space below putting down some of your thoughts about who Jesus is. Maybe you could write a short paragraph retelling what you know about Jesus and how this makes a difference in your life.

My thoughts about Jesus:

Net•Work Notes

Week 8, Day 2: Christ—Meeting Jesus

Jesus is the center of a Christian faith in God. Eugene Peterson puts it this way: “Jesus is the pivotal story in God’s revelation, the story that gathers all the other stories into its orbit, establishes the center, and provides the comprehensive coherence. Its foursquare centrality is articulated by four storytellers, each telling the same story, this Jesus story, but each in a distinctive way. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John tell the story of Jesus, making clear that this is the story of God revealing himself in the person of Jesus: God revealing himself in a named *human being* in our history. In John’s straightforward, no-nonsense language, ‘The Word was God...[and] became flesh and dwelt among us’ (John 1:1,14).”

Four witnesses join in presenting the person of Jesus to us. Each is a reminder that God is working through people, through particular human lives. Some people are disturbed by the fact there are four gospels telling us about Jesus in their own distinct ways. But I find a greater richness in listening to them, for each one highlights for us different things about Jesus.

Which gospel are you most familiar with? What gospel do you find the easiest to understand?

We would like you to spend the couple of weeks reading through the gospel of Mark. You can choose the one you are most curious about. Mark is the briefest gospel, getting to the point right away (but don’t let his brevity fool you; he understands Jesus with surprising strength). John seems to speak with the simplest words, but his thought is often times the most filled with metaphor and imagery. Matthew makes the most direct connections to the Old Testament. Luke helps us remember Jesus’ concern for the poor and down-and-out.

Anyway, begin reading the gospel of Mark. We will point out certain stories common to all the gospels to talk about Jesus as we go along.

Start with these simple questions: Who do I discover Jesus is through this story? What do I see him doing? What happens in the lives of those who follow him?

Net•Work Notes

Week 8, Day 3: Christ—Meeting Jesus

At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. As Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased." (Mark 1:9-11)

Baptism

Near the beginning of all the gospels, we are told that Jesus was baptized in the River Jordan by John the Baptist. All agree that the work and ministry of Jesus began at this moment. What does baptism mean to you? Write a few sentences on your thoughts about baptism and how you understand it:

Baptism has many layers of meaning, but primary among them are the meanings of new creation and deliverance. By baptism we become "immersed in" and connected to God's people who are being re-created and renewed. Baptism is a sign that you are identified with God's people. When Jesus was baptized, he joined his life with the life of the people of Israel. He identified with their condition, their sin, their exile in the land. But baptism was an announcement that God was about to do a new thing (cf. Isaiah 43.19). Just as God worked through the waters of

creation to make a creature in his own image (Genesis 1) and acted through the waters of the Red Sea to deliver his people to freedom (Exodus 14), so now God would work to re-create his people and deliver them to true freedom as the sons and daughters of God. Notice that when Jesus came out of the waters, God identified (named) Jesus as his beloved Son. That was also another way of saying Jesus was God's anointed one (Messiah), God's true king.

What "new thing" would you like God to do in your life? In what parts of your life do you experience "exile"? If you are baptized, what does your own baptism mean to you? Do you need to claim God's re-creating and saving work in your own life? Spend some time asking God to work in your life, making you his son or daughter by joining you to Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

Net•Work Notes

Week 8, Day 4: Christ—Meeting Jesus

Make sure you have read a few of the early chapters of Mark that describe the early ministry of Jesus. What kind of things do you notice Jesus doing? List some of these here below:

The biggest mistake that people make in thinking about Jesus is to believe that Jesus was merely a very good and wise man who taught others how to be good and wise. Yes, he was very good and wise, but this misses too much. Jesus was much more than a teacher. Notice that the first act in Jesus' ministry was the announcement of the Kingdom of God (or "Reign of God"). All of the gospel writers agree that the Reign of God was at the center of Jesus' message and that, as God's messiah or Christ, Jesus was the one who brings God's reign into the world. Jesus isn't just interested in making us good. He wants to join us to himself and to God! He wants to be our king and reign over our whole lives. He wants us in a relationship of love and devotion.

That is why he calls together a people. Immediately after announcing the Kingdom of God as coming, he calls the disciples to follow him. To follow Jesus meant to leave your former life and loyalties behind (cf. for ex., Mark 1:16-20). This is another way of asking the question, "What are you living for?" Have you ever thought about what you are living for? What drives you on in life?

The disciples trusted Jesus enough to obey his call and follow him. Faith is placing our trust in Jesus and being willing to follow where he leads. Jesus called a variety of people to be his disciples; he did not just call 'holy' people to be his followers. But following Jesus did mean leaving behind the lives they were familiar with.

As we begin talking about Jesus, let me ask you a question. Be honest now. Is Jesus real to you? Or is he someone you have heard about but who really isn't a part of your life? Spend some time thinking and praying about this.

What would you have to leave behind in your life to follow Jesus more fully?

When do find it easiest to follow Jesus?

When is following Jesus most difficult?

Net•Work Notes

Week 8, Day 5: Christ—Meeting Jesus

When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven." (Mark 2:5)

Ministering to Our Brokenness

Jesus announced the Reign of God. Jesus called disciples to follow him and join his movement to recreate the people. Then Jesus ministered to and cared for people. Jesus met people in the midst of their needs. Make a list of some of the people that Jesus met early in his ministry and what he did for them:

Jesus worked to heal and restore people to wholeness. Sometimes we think that God is trying to keep us from enjoying life. But the ministry of Jesus says otherwise. Jesus works to bring wholeness and health into our lives. Jesus healed the sick, he cast out demonic forces threatening our lives, and he forgave sins. He was working to defeat anything that would keep us from a complete life. Notice that Jesus was not just focused on physical health. Jesus cares for the whole person: body, mind, and heart. He healed people's bodies and met their physical needs. He opposed evil powers that threatened people minds and warped their loyalties. He mended people's hearts and forgave sin, restoring people to a love relationship with the Living God. These are signs that God is reigning in a person's life!

God desires us to be shaped to his glory. He wants to work wholeness into our lives. Do you trust him for that? In what areas of your life do you want to have greater wholeness? Is your need a need of the body, or of the mind, or of the heart? Jesus Christ will meet you at the point of your true needs (even at points you may not yet be aware of!) because he works God's wholeness into our lives.

List some places in your life where you want to experience the wholeness that Jesus brings:

Now spend some time praying, asking Jesus to meet you in your needs.