

# JESUS MATTERS

## questions for discussion

### **Chapter 1**

#### Questions for Discussion

1. Jesus called his first disciples with astounding authority. “Come and follow me!” Why did Jesus have that authority?
2. What did believing and following Jesus mean for the first disciples? What did they need to give up? What did they gain?
3. What does following Jesus mean for personal ethics and daily living—does it really change the way I interact with people, the way I manage my time, how I spend my money, the kind of work I do? How does it challenge the world around me—the popular culture, and the social, political, and other power structures?
4. What does suffering for Christ look like today?
5. Jesus said that he had come to give abundant life for his disciples. What does that mean?

### **Chapter 2**

#### Questions for Discussion

1. List the titles, names and metaphors used to describe Jesus in the nativity stories in Matthew and Luke and the introductory sections of Mark and John. What do they say about who Jesus is? Are there other titles or metaphors for Jesus, either biblical or from the church’s tradition, that you also find helpful?
2. Do you think that the gospel message is the same for everybody? Does it say the same thing to the long-established citizens as it says to undocumented immigrants in our midst?
3. What was expected of a savior in the world into which Jesus was born? What is expected of a savior now, in our time and in our neighborhoods? What did the angel mean when he proclaimed that Jesus was Savior?
4. Why do you think that it was so dangerous to confess that Jesus is Lord in the Roman Empire of the first century? What are some expressions of opposition to that confession that North American Christians experience? Think of situations where it is costly to confess that Jesus is Lord. Why is this so?
5. In light of the confession that Jesus is Lord, how does one decide what belongs to God and what belongs to the nation-state?

## **Chapter 3**

### Questions for Discussion

1. Why would some persons wish to distance Jesus from his roots in the history and Scriptures of Israel? What are the consequences of doing so?
2. Can the New Testament be both reliable and trustworthy, on one hand, and have emerged in real history, on the other? If so, how do you imagine God's work in this process?
3. Do you find it disturbing or exciting that there are four accounts of Jesus' life and ministry?
4. How do you imagine the Holy Spirit's role in the process of remembering and passing on the traditions of Jesus' words and deeds?

## **Chapter 4**

### Questions for Discussion

1. Can you explain in your own words why the first Christians were so quick to confess the human Jesus as the Creator, with God, of the world?
2. What differences do you see between the Bible's view of the natural world and a secular, materialist view? In what ways should such differences make a difference in our behavior?
3. In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus teaches commitments that relate to creation care (Matthew 5:44-45; 6:25-30). What are those commitments and what steps can we take to abide by them?
4. Name a few practical ways that your congregation can participate in creation care.

## **Chapter 5**

### Questions for Reflection

1. You have just read the prayer that we call "the Lord's Prayer." What transformations would you anticipate in your community as God moves in response to this prayer?
2. What transformations would take place in your church and in your own life as God's kingdom comes "on earth as in heaven"?
3. In what ways do you and your church demonstrate signs of the presence of the kingdom of God?
4. Share with others your observations about the kingdom of God. In what ways do you observe people opposing the kingdom? In what ways do you see the transforming power of the kingdom bringing new life and hope?
5. Hope is a precious gift of the kingdom of God. In what ways does the church reveal and celebrate hope? In what ways do you celebrate the hope of the kingdom in your own experience?

## **Chapter 6**

### Questions for Discussion

1. What is it about human nature that keeps us from trusting God to protect us and save us from the powers of evil?
2. Are we on the side of those who collude with the powers and perpetrate oppression or are we the victims of oppressive powers? Or are we some of both?
3. Do you ever feel that the powers block your prayers? When we prevail in prayer, do we sense release from the powers, with freedom and joy in the Spirit?
4. Jesus gathered a community to continue his mission in this world. What roles might we as individuals and our church community play in witnessing to Christ's victory over the powers?

## **Chapter 7**

### Questions for Discussion

1. What have been your images of God through the years?
2. How is Jesus a prophet speaking God's word—and more than a prophet?
3. Skim the Gospel of Mark. What words and actions of Jesus give us a picture of what God is like?
4. What is the difference between thinking of Jesus as fully human and fully divine, versus half human and half divine?
5. Many hymns of the church sing praise to the Trinity. Why is it important to consider all three persons of the Trinity? What happens when we concentrate only on one?

## **Chapter 8**

### Questions for Discussion

1. What does Philippians 2:5-11 tell us about God becoming human and a servant in the person of Jesus? And what does it tell us about who we are to be?
2. What does the author of Hebrews mean that Jesus learned obedience through suffering?
3. How do we make the cross central in relation to Jesus and ourselves without “glorifying suffering”? (See, e.g., 1 Corinthians 1:18-31; 2 Corinthians 4:7-12.)
4. How do you experience Jesus crucified to be “the power of God”?
5. Explore the various meanings and images of Jesus crucified that the New Testament presents. How do they deepen our understanding of the multifaceted significance of the cross in our personal lives and the life of the church?

## **Chapter 9**

### Questions for Discussion

1. What do you think happens to you after you die? What kind of a body, if any, do you believe you'll have?
2. Do you think your beliefs regarding Jesus' resurrection affect your ethics? How might those beliefs impact you personally and our society in general?
3. Daniel Moya wrote, "The resurrection is necessary to explain that the project of life defeats the project of death. Death doesn't have the last word when it comes to bringing God's kingdom, which means bringing justice and reconciliation to a world where the voice of the marginalized and oppressed are easily shot by threats of death and hunger." Do you think your beliefs regarding Jesus' resurrection affect how you face injustice? How so?
4. Have you seen "resurrection power" at work? How difficult is it for you to believe that you have the same power to help build the kingdom that God used to raise Christ from the dead? What needs to happen for you to utilize this power more?

## **Chapter 10**

### Questions for Discussion

1. Is it true that we sometimes read the story of Jesus as though the sending of the Holy Spirit is not a part of the gospel? If so, how does that affect our Christian life and faith?
2. What do you think are the signs that someone has received the Spirit? How do you know today that someone has received the Spirit of God?
3. Why is it important to maintain a clear link between the crucified and risen Jesus and the work of the Holy Spirit? What happens when that identifying link is broken?
4. What are some of the truths that the Holy Spirit has led us into in the past? What are some that the Spirit might be leading us into today? How do you know if new ideas or movements are of the Spirit?
5. Do we stress both the deeply personal dimensions of the Holy Spirit's work and the corporate nature of our experience of the Spirit, or do we tend to stress one at the expense of the other?

# Chapter 11

## Questions for Discussion

1. *Salvation* is related to *sin*. It may help you to put both of these terms in your own words, even if that results in some unconventional metaphors. What do you need to be saved *from*? What do you want to be saved *for*?
2. Not everyone has or develops a sense of needing to be “saved.” Such might be the case, for example, for many comfortable, middle-class North Americans who perceive themselves to be managing their lives quite well and with no need for any rescue plan or outside assistance. How should the good news of Jesus be communicated to people in this situation? Is the word salvation helpful in such a case, or would some other term be more appropriate and do a better job of connecting?
3. Likely the biggest problem with some common notions of salvation is that they are limited to that first-time, decisional moment of “accepting Jesus as Savior.” Yet we go on being saved, or in the terms of this article, we go on growing in our relationship with Jesus. What are some of your experiences of being saved or growing in Christ?

# Chapter 12

## Questions for Discussion

1. Lots of people nowadays talk about peace. What is the difference between the kind of peace, for example, the Dalai Lama offers and that of Jesus?
2. Why are we tempted to separate peace with God and peace with others? Is this separation the root of our struggle to hold mission and peace, evangelism and social concern together? What happens to the “gospel of peace” when we treat them as separate themes or activities?
3. If you chose to list on a cross some of the sufferings with which you are acquainted, what would you write? You can think about yourself, others, your community or the larger world. Can you imagine how doing this could lead to peace with God and with others? Try it sometime.
4. Why is it important to walk in the “way of peace” within a community rather than attempting this path alone?
5. What aspects of Jesus’ message of peace do you find most challenging?
6. Do you agree that peace is a gift? Can you give peace to someone else?

# Chapter 13

## Questions for Discussion

1. What experiences have you had with persons committed to the mission of Jesus in all circumstances?
2. Jesus sent his followers to share his message of the kingdom and make this kingdom visible through signs of healing and deliverance. What do you do and say that point others to the kingdom?
3. Describe the connection between discipleship to Jesus and mission.
4. Immediately after Jesus embraced God's mission in baptism in the Jordan River, Satan challenged him. What challenges does the church face today in fulfilling its mission? Since Jesus did not arm his followers with physical weapons, how do we persevere in mission in the face of obstacles, challenges, and the powers of evil?
5. This chapter indicates God's mission is global and personal. "Jesus ministered to each person at the point of greatest personal stress." Examine one of the following scriptures in light of what you have learned in this chapter:
  1. The Paralytic and Four Friends (Luke 5:17-26)
  2. The Syro-Phoenecian Woman (Mark 7:24-30)
  3. Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1-10)
  4. The Rich Ruler—and Peter (Luke 18:18-30)
6. In what ways do you observe Jesus ministering to people in times of personal stress today?

# Chapter 14

## Questions for Discussion

1. Are the two components identified by Jesus in Mark 1:14, i.e., "the time has been fulfilled" and "the kingdom of God has drawn near," central to your congregation's gospel understandings as demonstrated in the teaching, preaching, and strategic planning of the congregation? How are they evident in your congregation's practice?
2. This chapter suggests a connected sequence from Jesus to gospel to kingdom presence to kingdom people to church. In other words, the church is *essentially*, and not *marginally*, connected to the message that Jesus proclaimed. Is this connected sequence compelling to you? What difference does or should it make for your church?
3. The author states near the end of this chapter: "If the church is not behaving as it should, then instead of inventing a churchless gospel, which in reality is no longer the gospel of Jesus, we should commit ourselves to changing the church so that it is worthy of its vocation." Discuss the implications of this statement for your own faith and commitments to faith.
4. Jesus indicates in Mark 1:15 that the most important way of responding to the gospel is by *believing* that the Kingdom indeed has become present in our world and by *repenting*, aligning our lives with this presence. What are the obstacles that make this difficult in our society? What are the elements that make it easy?

# Chapter 15

## Questions for Discussion

1. Describe your response to the way Jesus related to the Samaritan woman.
2. Unpack the meaning of Jesus' statement, "Salvation is from the Jews."
3. How do your friends who are not committed to the Christian faith respond to this statement: Jesus is the Way? How might you explain that statement in a way that they really hear the good news of the gospel?
4. Consider ways that modern culture communicates "a lie" about the meaning of life. Then consider signs of truth within modern culture.
5. How can the church more fruitfully bear witness to Jesus in our pluralistic world?

# Chapter 16

## Questions for Discussion

1. What Christian understandings of the future do you come across among acquaintances or in popular media? What kind of God do these views represent, and do they present good news?
2. Based on Acts 1:6-11, what might Jesus have to say about the popularity of Christian books about the future today? What priorities did Jesus have when his disciples wanted to know about the future?
3. If the world around you became God's new creation, what suffering or brokenness do you expect God would heal? Can you describe ways God is using you now to bring healing?

