

“Although there are many good books that introduce us to the Four Gospels, they rarely focus on the spirituality of the Gospels; that is, what the Gospels mean for our lives in Christ. Father Peter Feldmeier has admirably filled that need by providing us with a reliable reading of the Four Gospels that shows how they call us to live our lives in, with, and for Christ. This book will be of immense value to all who want a better understanding of how the story of each Gospel calls them to Christian holiness.”

—Frank J. Matera, Professor Emeritus, The Catholic University of America

“Through a masterful weaving of scholarship, theological insight, and spiritual wisdom, Peter Feldmeier leads us on a new type of adventure through the Gospels. He walks us through each of the four Gospels, providing opportunities to learn anew not only the power of engaging the living Word of God, but perhaps more valuably, the power of a vocation to ‘live Christ.’”

—Virginia Herbers, author of *Gifts from Friends We’ve Yet to Meet*

“Pope Francis has frequently reminded Christians that we need to renew our approaches to Scripture and to be challenged by the radicality of Jesus’s preaching in the Gospels. Too often Christians have become complacent with tired interpretations and preconceptions about the Gospels. In this book, Peter Feldmeier offers readers a way to engage with the Gospels in a deep, theologically rich, and pragmatic way that answers Pope Francis’s call to spiritual renewal. No matter how well you think you know the Gospels, Feldmeier invites us to rethink our assumptions in order to enter into the Word of God with new eyes and an open heart. I highly recommend this book, not only for Christians looking for a great scriptural resource but also for preachers seeking new inspiration.”

—Daniel P. Horan, OFM, Professor of Philosophy, Religious Studies, and Theology at Saint Mary’s College, Notre Dame, Indiana

Living Christ

A Spiritual Reading of the Gospels

Peter Feldmeier



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Introduction

Not Just Another Commentary

This book has a twofold agenda, and they are intimately related: The first is that its readers will come to a deeper, more intimate knowledge of Jesus Christ, our Teacher, Healer, Prophet, Master, Savior, and the Incarnation of God. The second is to discover how reflecting on the Gospels and engaging the truths they express can make a transformative life in Christ realized here and now. St. Jerome, the great patristic biblical scholar, remarked, “Ignorance of Scripture is ignorance of Christ.”¹ The reverse can be true as well: understanding Scripture is understanding Christ. But it cannot stop there. Simply having a lot of knowledge about the Bible or Jesus’s life and teachings does not guarantee knowing the Lord or living a graced life in him. Our minds and hearts have to both penetrate the text and let God’s grace mediated through the text infuse our lives. This is the principal hope of this book: to richly engage the truths witnessed by the evangelists and make them one’s own. Toward the end of John’s Gospel, he writes, “Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name” (20:30-31). This is my singular desire in writing this book, that we can engage the Gospels in a way that we might know Jesus intimately as the Messiah, the Son of God, and that we might have new life in his name.

When the fathers of Vatican II were writing their classic document on biblical revelation, they made it clear that the Bible is the word of God solely because it witnesses authentically to the Word of God, that is, to Jesus himself. Jesus is *the* revelation of God. Unless we enter

into this truth, the best we can get from the Bible is knowledge of important first-century Christian documents. But if our focus of the text is to know Christ, then the Bible becomes a vehicle to understand and know the Word himself. This is how the fathers of Vatican II frame it:

It pleased God, in his goodness and wisdom, to reveal himself and to make known the mystery of his will . . . , which was that people can draw near to the Father, through Christ, the Word made flesh, in the holy Spirit, and thus become sharers in the divine nature. . . . The most intimate truth thus revealed about God and human salvation shines forth for us in Christ, who is himself both the mediator and the sum total of revelation. . . . Hence, Jesus Christ . . . “speaks the words of God,” . . . and accomplishes the saving work which the Father gave him to do. . . . As a result, he himself—to see whom is to see the Father . . . —completed and perfected revelation and confirmed it with divine guarantees.²

The Bible is foundational and indispensable for Christianity and for our own souls. But it is a complicated book, or, literally, set of books. In it we find different theologies and different visions of faithfulness. These do not always cohere neatly to each other. Some even seem to exist in a creative tension with each other. This fact, however, ought not to frustrate us or undermine the Bible’s authority. Ultimately, God transcends words and concepts, and we should not mistake the finger pointing to the moon to be the moon itself. Ultimately too, the kingdom of God that Jesus preached will not be reduced to a formula. God will not be houstrained. Further, there are various ways to consider faithfulness, and the Bible witnesses to these in different ways.

This book is not a work of original biblical scholarship, but it relies on scholars who have investigated the historical, religious, and cultural situation from which the texts emerged, and it draws on insights that come from these studies. Scholars use an array of tools to understand the intent of the author and even how texts themselves work, both in the ancient world as well as ours. Biblical scholars pay attention to literary genres (*form criticism*) such as myth, poetry, historical narrative, exhortation, and so on. They also incorporate historical analysis to their interpretation (*historical-critical method*), where they identify cultural assumptions of the day

and how these affect the text and help us to understand it better. They also address whether and how the text was edited (*redaction criticism*). For example, Mark was a central source for Matthew and Luke, and sometimes they cite Mark verbatim. But other times, they clearly change Mark to meet their own literary or theological interests. There is also *source criticism*, which looks at where the text or tradition came from; *narrative criticism*, which investigates how the text is structured and what themes are emphasized; *ideological criticism*, which addresses how the text imagines power relations; and the list could continue. Among biblical scholars there is often quite a consensus when addressing these various issues.

Many lay Christians resist biblical scholarship, and this is for several reasons. One reason is that the various tools mentioned above tend to make for a very dry reading of the text. One of my students once remarked, “This kind of study just takes the romance right out of the Bible.” It certainly can do that. Others have responded with a wariness that they might “lose their faith”; that is, the Bible gets reduced to critical analysis that seems to gut its revelatory quality altogether. They also seem to fear learning, for example, that some of the narrative may not have happened as written. For them, it undermines the Bible of its assurance of truth. “Can I now even trust the Bible?” they seem to be asking.

One way of dealing with these concerns is to recognize that what we understand as *historical accuracy* is a modern idea. As I have noted in another publication, “When the Bible describes historical figures or events, these descriptions are laden with history, theology, themes of national identity, intercultural conflicts, and so on.”³ The evangelists believed they were writing a true account of the life and ministry of Jesus. They also believed, like everyone else in their day, that they had narrative license in describing the true Jesus. Further, they wrote in the context of their own Christian communities in the late first century. The concerns, piety, conflicts, and religious experiences that these communities had often get set into the narrative itself. This is not a foul, but an opportunity to see how Jesus’s ministry can be even more relevant to them and, by extension, to us.

Even if these worries can be allayed, biblical scholarship can take us only so far. What does the biblical word mean for us? How can the Gospels be revelatory in my life? These questions cannot be fully answered by biblical scholarship alone. One of the leading thinkers

of interpretation theory (hermeneutics), Paul Ricoeur, argues that texts such as the Bible have a *surplus of meaning*.⁴ Ricoeur means by this that once the text has been removed from its author and initial audience, it allows new audiences access to its truths that go beyond its original context. Here, interpretation involves entering into a proposed world unfolded by the text. To interpret is to try to understand the type of being-in-the-world provided by the text. What must be interpreted is the proposed world, which one could inhabit and wherein one could project one's own possibilities. So the text becomes a medium through which we understand ourselves anew. Real appropriation of the text's truths is found in wrestling with this proposed world in one's own life. For Ricoeur, this is how religious texts become revelatory: they occasion an event of encounter with God in the world the text brings us.

The great challenge for an authentic Christian use of the Bible is to honor and respect the original intent of the author and its original circumstance—this is the primary role of scholarship—and how the text can speak to us now, many cultures different and centuries away from that original circumstance. This is where biblical spirituality comes to the fore. This book is a creative expression of biblical spirituality; it is a spiritual reading. As such, I will endeavor always to be an honest broker regarding biblical scholarship, and indeed I am relying on that scholarship to guide me. That will be our foundation. But I also intend this book to express a living text, a living revelation; one that facilitates an encounter with the living Word through the word. *This is what I strongly recommend to the reader: First, read a particular Gospel as a complete story. Then, read my commentary for that particular Gospel. Do this for each of the four Gospels.* In this way, you will first encounter the word of God as it is and as a complete rendering. Then allow my own reading to help you walk through it a second time.

What Is Biblical Spirituality?

The term *spirituality* is used ubiquitously in our culture. Any major bookstore will have a large number of books devoted to the subject, ranging from the New Age movement to mysticism to self-help books. Some seem exotic, others esoteric, and many have little to do with the spiritual life and more to do with skillful activity,

from learning how to play golf to gaining business strategies. In my book *Christian Spirituality*, I suggest that even scholars in the field struggle to agree with what it is. I note, “The famous Anglican theologian John Macquarrie considers that spirituality ‘has to do with becoming a person in the fullest sense.’ Leading Protestant spirituality scholar Gordon Wakefield says that it ‘describes those attitudes, beliefs, and practices which animate people’s lives and help them reach out towards super-sensible realities.’ And finally, the former Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams speaks of ‘each believer making his or her own that engagement with the questioning at the heart of faith.’”⁵ Ewert Cousins, the general editor of the World Spirituality series, concludes that spirituality is “that inner dimension of the person called by certain traditions ‘the spirit.’ This spiritual core is the deepest center of the person. It is here that the person is open to the transcendent dimension; it is here that the person experiences ultimate reality.”⁶ This last definition seems the most useful. Augmenting Cousins’s definition, I would add that spirituality is about religious experience, religious commitments, and interior transformation. Authentic spirituality is also deeply invested in everything that gives meaning to human growth and flourishing. Given this broader set of considerations, spirituality ought to be understood as something holistic that encompasses the environment, justice, prayer, community, and even global relations. It ought not to be purely individualistic.

The English word “spirituality” derives from the Latin *spiritualitas*. This Latin term translates the biblical Greek noun *pneuma* (spirit). We find in the New Testament that *Pneuma Hagion* (Holy Spirit) dwells in us, transforming us to be spiritual (*pneumatikos*) persons (Rom 8:9-11). In John’s Gospel, believers are promised a rebirth in the Spirit and in truth (John 3:2-8; 4:23). The Spirit even establishes the Christian community (Acts 2:32-33). St. Paul understands the very nature of a Christian as being “one spirit” with Christ (1 Cor 6:17), and the indwelling presence of God makes one a “spiritual person” (1 Cor 2:14-15).

Every Christian’s spirituality is necessarily going to be particular, as everyone is unique with different personality qualities, experiences, and lifestyles. I think we can also say, however, that a Christian spirituality has universal and biblically grounded elements. Here are some of the most central. A Christian spirituality is:

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1. A life of grace and faith: God's gift of himself and the whole entrusting of oneself to God;
2. A life in the Spirit: living in and through the Holy Spirit and knowing what Paul calls the fruit of the Spirit (love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control—Gal 5:22-23);
3. Christocentric: real intimacy with Christ and conforming ourselves to Christ in both cross and resurrection;
4. Trinitarian: living through the divine interchange of love;
5. Communal: we know and serve God as a body of Christ;
6. Just: one that advocates actively for those marginalized and seeks the common good;
7. Prayerful: seeking intimacy with God who indwells; and
8. Divinized: ultimately seeking full union with God where one lives in and through the divine.⁷

The Bible is decisive and foundational for a Christian spirituality because it offers core religious framings or patterns of thought that structure Christian identity. Themes in the Old and New Testaments create ways of looking at our lives, our relationships with each other, and, most important, our relationship with God. These patterns are woven throughout the biblical text, and they imply and draw on each other. Taking on these patterns involves making them part of our own spiritual horizon. Consider that the Bible is telling us: “Imagine God *this* way,” “Consider your soul like *this*,” “Engage each other through *these* values.” These themes ground the Christian character and thus Christian spirituality. As I note in *Christian Spirituality*, these themes include the following:

Creation: God made the world out of love, God deemed it “good,” and God created humanity in God’s very image and likeness.

Covenant: In God’s providence, he chose a people for himself with binding faithfulness and with both expectations and promises.

Sin and Redemption: From the start, humanity sought a kind of independence from God that has deeply wounded our souls

and our relationship with him and each other, though God also always sought to heal those wounds and right our relationship with him.

Monarchy: God ceded Israel's wish to form a kingdom, and through David God has promised an eternal reign, which Jesus will fulfill.

Temple and Priesthood: God formed a priesthood and supported a temple for worship where he would be particularly present to his people.

Sacrifice: God ordered sacrifices that atoned for sin, provided divine communion, and sealed covenants.

Prophecy: God has chosen holy men and women to speak God's will and demand covenant fidelity.

Wisdom: The universe was created with an order imbued with purpose and life, and God's Torah or law represents divine wisdom at its height.

Law and Grace: God's favor and blessings can be found in his Torah, and Christ will ultimately complete the Torah.

Kingdom of God: Ultimately, God is king, and God desires a kingdom of justice, flourishing, devotion, and peace.

Prayer: Israel prays to God, praises God, and finds intimacy with God through prayer, with the Psalms being foremost.⁸

A Brief Introduction to the Gospels⁹

The Gospel of Matthew

Scholars generally place the origins of the Gospel of Matthew around 85–90 CE, written in Palestine or Syria for a community of believers that was primarily Jewish. It is overwhelmingly interested in showing how Jesus fulfills Old Testament prophecies and expectations, and it assumes its audience knows and follows Jewish Torah or law. In fact, it is here more than any other Gospel where Jesus shows himself the authentic interpreter of Torah in contrast to the Pharisees and scribes of Jesus's day (and rabbis in Matthew's day). As already noted, one of Matthew's key sources is Mark, whom he

freely uses and yet whose text he also edits for his own purpose. We also see an additional source that Luke uses as well. Scholars refer to this as “Q,” a shorthand for the German word *quelle*, which simply means “source.” Many of Jesus’s sayings were orally transmitted and almost certainly written down by the Christian community. Matthew also has his own independent sources that are unique to his Gospel. Matthew is not Matthew the tax collector, whom we meet in 9:9 and who then becomes an apostle in 10:3. Nowhere does the author suggest having been an eyewitness to Jesus’s ministry, and the ascription of Matthew was appended to the manuscript only in the second century. But he is certainly Jewish, as is most of his believing community. Actually, none of the Gospels originally had the authors’ names assigned to them. None were eyewitnesses, and the ascriptions Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John all came only in the second century.

Matthew begins his Gospel with Jesus as *Immanuel*, God is with us (1:23), and ends it with “And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age” (28:20). The ongoing presence of God through Jesus is a dominant theme. The presence of Christ with them allows Matthew’s readers to embody Christ in who they are and in what they do. His is a Gospel of *doing*. God demands that our lives show concrete fruits of discipleship, evidenced in acts of compassion, love, forgiveness, and attention to those in need. But it is also a Gospel of *being*. One’s inner disposition overwhelmingly matters. Anyone with a modicum of self-discipline can act in certain ways. Jesus demands interior transformation that reveals the deepest message of the kingdom. Jesus calls his listeners to become pure of heart, to live out the fullness of the Torah that he provides, and to live a life whereby “I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me. . . . Truly I tell you, just as you did it to the least of these . . . you did it to me” (25:35-40).

The Gospel of Mark

Most scholars place Mark’s Gospel as originating in Rome around the time shortly after Caesar Nero’s persecution of Christians. This persecution happened during the mid-to-late 60s. Given Mark’s references to the temple’s destruction and the apocalyptic language

and urgency throughout the Gospel, it is usually placed around 70. The world for Christians seemed to be falling apart. Unlike the Jewish audience of Matthew, Mark seems to be primarily addressing a Gentile group of believers, as he has to explain Aramaic terms (5:41; 7:34) and Jewish customs as he understands them (7:3-4).

Jesus tells few parables in Mark's Gospel, but Jesus himself is something of a parable. He is the truth, but an expression of the truth that seems strange to them. Those who follow him, including the twelve apostles, find him an enigma. He knows he is the Son of God: "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased" (1:11). And demons know this: "What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God" (1:24). But the people never really get it, and even the disciples grow in only some understanding. After Jesus calms the sea Mark notes, "And they were utterly astounded . . . but their hearts were hardened" (6:51-52).

Mark's Gospel is meant to *grab* the reader. There is a "you were there" quality to his account. He gives specific names to secondary characters and provides more dialogue for them. Mark also presents those closest to Jesus in very human and flawed ways. His disciples often confound Jesus: "Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?" (4:40), and his family even tried to restrain him (3:21). Mark also provides expressions of Jesus's emotional life, such as compassion, surprise, indignation, and love (1:41; 6:6; 10:14; 10:21).

In Mark there are two great themes: first, Jesus is a Messiah who will die as a ransom for humanity (10:45); second, disciples must take on this very way of the cross as well. Mark is a meditation on suffering as the way to glory. Discipleship is learning this. Mark refers to Jesus's disciples as *mathētās*, learners, and what they must learn is the way of the cross. The context of these two themes is apocalypticism. Jesus is opposed by all who resist the kingdom. His first miracle is an exorcism of a demon, and yet soon enough, "The Pharisees went out and immediately conspired with the Herodians against him, how to destroy him" (3:6). Jesus seems to frame it all in apocalyptic terms, anticipating that "the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken" (13:24-25). Earlier he proclaimed, "Truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will

not taste death until they see that the kingdom of God has come with power” (9:1). I once noted, “To understand Mark’s spirituality is to understand Jesus as mightier than any of these powers even as one might fall victim to them. Christ has ultimately conquered them. In Mark’s Gospel, faith is perseverance especially in times of trial, and confidence that even in one’s suffering the victorious Christ walks with the faithful.”¹⁰

The Gospel of Luke

Like Matthew’s Gospel, the Gospel of Luke is generally believed to have been written late in the first century (85–90), though in his case he primarily addresses a Gentile audience. Like Matthew, Luke draws on Mark and Q along with other sources. In contrast to Mark, he downplays the apocalypticism and sees the Greco-Roman world as ripe for evangelization. Luke, who also wrote Acts, quotes the risen Jesus as promising, “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

The presence of the Holy Spirit dominates both Luke and Acts. John the Baptist promises that “One who is more powerful than I is coming. . . . He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire” (3:16). Upon Jesus’s baptism, he was “full of the Holy Spirit” (4:1), and “filled with the power of the Spirit,” he began his ministry quoting Isaiah, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor. . . . Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing” (4:14, 18-21).

The kingdom of God Jesus proclaims is one of reversal of fortunes. Here the poor and the marginalized will be raised. These are the ones who can depend only on God. In contrast, those wealthy and those in power often resist the kingdom of God, as they seem content relying on their wealth and status. Mary’s Magnificat sets the tone for the whole Gospel:

My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior; for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant. . . . His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered

the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty. He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, according to the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants forever. (1:46-55)

God is faithful to his covenantal promises, and Jesus has come to fulfill them, bringing salvation to his people. This salvation is marked as feeding the hungry and lifting up the poor. Here in Luke we see God's preferential option for the poor played out particularly in his parables. While Jesus certainly calls for repentance from all, it is notable that in many parables, the poor are asked only to believe in the greatness of God's mercy and love for them. The rich, on the other hand, are challenged to see their fate connected to how they have aligned themselves and their goods in service to those in need. Jesus has come "to seek out and save the lost" (19:10). Christians are servants, just as Jesus is a servant: "The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those in authority over them are called benefactors. But not so with you; rather the greatest among you must become like the youngest, and the leader like one who serves. . . . I am among you as one who serves" (22:25-27).

In the Gospel of Luke, God's universal love is expressed best by care for the masses, almost all of whom were poor peasants. Luke's spiritual message is one that requires deep examination of one's values and priorities. Jesus demands repentance and faith, and that faith is borne out by taking the side of the poor and marginalized and by identifying with their plight.

The Gospel of John

The Gospel of John is very different from Matthew, Mark, and Luke. These are known as the *Synoptic* (literally "same eye") Gospels, as they present the teaching and ministry of Jesus similarly. John is different. There are few miracles in John, no parables, and Jesus's teaching style is very different. It is widely believed to have been written around the year 100 and reflects a situation where "Judaism, early Christianity, the complex religions of the Hellenistic and Greek world, and incipient Gnosticism rubbed shoulders—often painfully."¹¹ Many Jews who believed in Jesus were, by the late first

century, being excluded from the synagogue. The technical term *apōsunagōgos* is associated with this eviction and is reflected in the Gospel text (9:22; 12:42; 16:2). Those opposing Jesus as the Messiah are oddly called by John “The Jews.” The Johannine community had to deal with Gnosticism on the other side, which did indeed claim that Jesus was not only the Messiah but a divine figure who did not share the human condition; he only appeared to. The Gnostics are attacked principally in the Johannine letters. John here is walking a tightrope. He assuredly wants us to see Jesus as divine but also as human. He wants us to see Jesus as the face of God. He starts his Gospel, not from Jesus’s infancy like Matthew and Luke, or from the inauguration of his ministry like Mark, but from eternity!

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. . . . To all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God. . . . And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father’s only son, full of grace and truth. . . . No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father’s heart, who has made him known. (1:1-18)

In this description, John associates the eternal Word with Old Testament Wisdom through whom God created the universe (Wis 7–8). He is both God and *with* God. John ends his Prologue by telling us that the Word made flesh makes the Father *known*. John uses the word *exāgāsato*, meaning “interpreted” or “explained.” Jesus is the interpretation of God. Thus, deciding about Jesus is deciding about God. In Jesus’s preaching in John, it is clear that he mediates the spiritual life. He is “the bread of life” (6:48), the “light of the world” (8:12), the “resurrection and the life” (11:25), and “the way, and the truth, and the life” (14:6). One of the most famous passages of the New Testament reads, “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. . . . Those who believe in him are not condemned; but those who do not believe are condemned

already, because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God” (3:16-18).

There are no half-measures in discipleship here. Jesus’s preaching is full of hard contrasts: either saved or condemned, either light or darkness, either truth or falsehood, either spirit or flesh. Are you a child of God or of the devil? It must be one or the other. In one sense, Jesus is not God but works on behalf of God. The works he does are in his Father’s name (5:17; 10:18, 25). But elsewhere he seems to self-identify with God, assuming the identity of the “I Am” or Yahweh (8:58).

For John, unlike the Synoptic Gospels, the cross is the ultimate place of glory, where the Son most reveals the Father, is most glorified, and by which he will “draw all people to myself” (12:32). This radical self-offering is what the Father looks like, and it is a self-offering of love, one that provides deep communion. Thus, to believe in Jesus and to love as he loves is to have intimacy with him and the Father. Love dominates: “I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another” (13:34). The goal, becoming children of God, allows followers divine communion. Jesus prays to the Father that “they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one” (17:22-23).

The Gospel of Mark

Following the Suffering Messiah

Such a Beginning (1:1-13)

In Mark we have no lengthy infancy narrative. Rather, he boldly sends us into Jesus's public ministry. But he does have a short prologue, which starts, "The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God" (1:1). This short sentence says much. Jesus's ministry represents "good news," *euangelion* in Greek. It was a title typically used for Greek announcements on festivals of the emperor, who was imagined to be a kind of god. Mark uses it to announce "Jesus Christ, the [actual] Son of God." And now "Christ," meaning "messiah," has become something of Jesus's surname.

Mark then introduces John the Baptist, whose mission is to "prepare the way of the Lord" (1:3). John's baptism was for repentance, an anticipation to receive the greater baptism. John's clothing, camel's hair and a belt, reminds us of Elijah, "a hairy man, with a leather belt" (2 Kgs 1:8), who was to proceed the Lord's day of visitation and judgment, as we saw in Matthew. He assured the crowd, "The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me. . . . I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit" (Mark 1:7-8). Jesus is *ischuroteros*—stronger and more powerful not only compared to John but, as we will see, stronger than all the powers he must confront. And this will make us stronger too, a strength Mark will progressively assure us will be necessary under persecution. "In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by

John in the Jordan. And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. And a voice came from heaven, ‘You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased’” (1:9-11).

In the biblical mind the “tearing open” (*schizomenous*) of the heavens allowed for God’s communication or even radical presence. Ezekiel notes in his mystical experience that “the heavens were opened, and I saw visions of God” (Ezek 1:1), and Isaiah pleads, “O that you would tear open the heavens and come down” (Isa 64:1). In Jesus’s baptism all this started. Note also that neither the crowd at the Jordan river nor even John experiences this. Jesus saw the heavens torn open and the Spirit descend. And the voice from the Father was heard only by Jesus: “You are my Son, the Beloved.” Jesus knows who he is, and we know who he is. As we shall see, demons also know who he is. But the crowds, the leaders, his family, and even his closest disciples will find him confoundingly difficult to understand. They get it wrong almost all the time. Getting to know Jesus, as Mark shows us, is more difficult than it may seem on the surface.

Jesus’s baptism is pivotal. Mark portrays this event as a “solidarity with the sinful human condition.”¹ It is also an anticipation of our own faith journey. Francis Watson notes that “Jesus’ baptism does not concern him alone. The new identity bestowed on him through the Spirit and the divine voice is open to participation by others . . . and Mark’s Christian readers recognize in it their own experience of turning from the old life to the new.”²

Jesus Begins His Ministry: Announcing and Calling (1:14-20)

“Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, and saying, ‘The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news’” (1:14-16). Jesus begins his public ministry in his native land of Galilee. There is already a foreshadowing in John. The Greek says that John was *paradothēnai*, literally “handed over.” This not only foreshadows John’s death (6:14-29) but also Jesus’s predictions of his own being “handing over” (9:31; 10:33), and that of his followers (13:11).

Just as Mark’s first words were densely potent, so the first words of Jesus. The *time* that is fulfilled is *kairos* (exceptional moment), not

chronos (ordinary time), and the kingdom is imminent. As we saw in the chapter on Matthew, the Jewish world of Jesus was filled with apocalyptic thinking. When the time was ripe God's kingdom would appear. This is the establishment of God's just rule over all creation.³ As we will soon see, Jesus is not only predicting an imminent reign of God but one that he is now inaugurating by his ministry. So, what should we do? "Repent, and believe in the good news." *Metanoia*, the Greek word for repentance, is surely about repenting from our sins. But it has a richer meaning, literally "change one's mind," that is, think differently, see differently, and surely be different; this includes "believing in the good news." More Greek: *pistis*, the term for "faith" or "belief," is not simply an intellectual assent. Rather, it means entrusting oneself or committing oneself personally.

So we must ask ourselves here and now: have we fully entrusted ourselves to Christ and his kingdom, and have we really challenged ourselves to think and see differently? Most Christians think and see through the eyes of culture, a culture that includes racism, sexism, and tolerance for social injustice. Christianity can easily become just an addendum to that. In a comprehensive meta-study on religion in America, *American Grace*, authors Robert Putnam and David Campbell show that there is a correlation between religious devotedness and what they call *good neighborliness*. They found that religiously observant Americans give more, volunteer more, and are more civically active than nonreligious Americans. And the more devout, the better the citizen. This, of course, is good. The compromising fact, however, is that they are only somewhat better, not at all radically better.⁴ How much actual *metanoia* have we engaged in our lives and how much *pistis* do we have? Gerhard Lohfink observes, "Jesus is not just talking *about* the reign of God. He is announcing it. He proclaims it. . . . Repentance, turning back, is a consequence of the salvation that is already present. . . . 'The time is fulfilled,' of course, appears in the garments of solemn biblical language. But it means nothing different from our expression, *the time has come*. . . . Paul means the same thing when he writes: 'See, now is the acceptable time; see, now is the day of salvation' (2 Cor 6:2)."⁵

The first thing Jesus does concretely in his ministry is to call Simon (Peter), his brother Andrew, James, and his brother John, all of whom are fishermen. Now we see something of the power of Jesus's words to Simon and Andrew: "Follow me and I will make you fish

for people.’ And immediately they left their nets and followed him” (1:17-18). The same for James and John: “Immediately he called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men, and followed him” (1:20). *Immediately* he calls and *immediately* they follow. The presence of Jesus is magnetic and powerful.

Preaching and Healing (1:21-45)

Mark tells us that Jesus went to Capernaum, a fishing town on the shores of Galilee. We find him teaching in the synagogue, and “they were astounded at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority, not like the scribes” (1:22). Immediately his power and authority are recognized by a demon who possesses a man at the synagogue. This is the first of four exorcism narratives in Mark,⁶ three of which follow a pattern whereby Jesus engages the demon, the demon tries to resist his divine power, Jesus responds with the command to leave, and at the departure of the demon there is amazement. This was the world of Jesus’s ministry, a struggle between God and the powers of evil. This event is really quite dramatic: “What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God” (1:24). The demon literally says, “What between us and you?” This is his defense: You have your realm, and we have ours. Why are you invading ours? And that is exactly what Jesus is doing—not that he is invading alien territory but that he is taking back what was always God’s. Paul Achtemeier notes, “Jesus is part of God’s final, cosmic battle against the powers of evil. To miss that point is to miss the meaning of Jesus.”⁷

“What between us and you?” On a much less dramatic level we see something of this in our secular culture, where religion has its place and ought to stay in its place. The separation of church and state in America was always meant to ensure religious freedom, not to force the life of faith into a private corner. “What between us and you?” The answer is, everything necessary to combat evil and allow for human flourishing, especially spiritual flourishing. This has to be our core value and perspective. “What between us and you?” Everything to live and proclaim the kingdom of God.

This part of Mark shows the beginning of the first flush of crowds that will come to Jesus for healing or spiritual freedom from evil.

Jesus entered Peter and Andrew's house, curing Peter's mother-in-law. And then, "That evening, at sunset, they brought to him all who were sick or possessed with demons. And the whole city was gathered around the door. And he cured many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons; and he would not permit the demons to speak" (1:32-34). This is part of the *messianic secret* in Mark. Jesus regularly tells both demons and those he healed, and even his disciples, not to reveal him as Messiah or Son of God. He is simply not the kind of messiah (anointed king) they were looking for. We can also see here that the revelation of Jesus simply cannot be contained; it is that powerful. In curing a leper, Jesus tells him, "See that you say nothing to anyone; but go, show yourself to the priest, and offer for your cleansing what Moses commanded. . . . But he went out and began to proclaim it freely" (1:43-45). He just couldn't hold it in.

Five Controversies (2:1–3:12)

From the Greek word *skotōma* (darkening), *scotosis* refers to hardening of the heart or intellectual blindness. This section of Mark is very much about *scotosis*, that is, cultivating a way of thinking that actually blinds us from seeing what is right before us. We see *scotosis* with those scribes and Pharisees who progressively become enemies of Jesus. Mark provides us with five quick and quite different narratives of conflict. We begin with the famous story of Jesus surrounded by a crowd in his Capernaum home base. It is so packed that men who brought to Jesus a paralytic to heal cannot get access to him. So they dismantle the roof and lower him down. "Son," Jesus says to him, "your sins are forgiven" (2:5). For the scribes this is blasphemy. It technically wasn't, but it did appear to them that Jesus was assuming to himself the divine prerogative to forgive sins.⁸ In this sense, they were right; Jesus was doing this. And he demonstrates his authority through healing the paralyzed man. "But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins"—he said to the paralytic—"I say to you, stand up, take your mat and go to your home" (2:10-11). The scribes were baffled, but the people "were all amazed and glorified God" (2:12). Why wouldn't the scribes see that restoring the lame man to health is a sign of God's activity?⁹

Following this, Jesus called the tax collector Levi and said to him, “‘Follow me.’ And he got up and followed him” (2:14). Levi then invites Jesus and his disciples to dine with him and his friends, who were “sinners and tax collectors.” The scribes object: “Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?” (2:16). This is a good question looking at the tradition. Consider: “I hate the company of evildoers, and will not sit with the wicked” (Ps 26:5), and, “In company with those who work iniquity; do not let me eat of their delicacies” (Ps 141:4). Jesus’s reply is “I have come to call not the righteous but sinners” (Mark 2:17). Why could they not recognize (and rejoice at!) the repentance of sinners? “This was a simple message that God loved these people and that they would be part of the kingdom being inaugurated by Jesus.”¹⁰ There is irony here, since the enemies of Jesus are exactly *not* righteous for not recognizing what is going on. And the *scotosis* deepens.

Others ask Jesus why his disciples do not fast like those of the Pharisees and John the Baptist. His answer, “As long as they have the bridegroom with them, they cannot fast” (2:19). The Hebrew Bible is filled with allusions to God calling Israel to be his faithful bride. “On that day, says the LORD, you will call me, ‘My husband.’ . . . I will take you for my wife in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love, and in mercy” (Hos 2:16-20).¹¹ This is a new situation, a new possibility to rejoice, and one must put “new wine into fresh wineskins” (Mark 2:22). And then the Pharisees saw his disciples plucking grain and eating it on the sabbath. A violation of sabbath law, they challenge. He retorts, “The sabbath was made for humankind, and not humankind for the sabbath; so the Son of Man is lord even of the sabbath” (2:27-28). Finally, they spied on Jesus to see “whether he would cure him on the sabbath, so that they might accuse him” (3:2). Before Jesus cures a man with a withered hand, he asks, “‘Is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the sabbath, to save life or to kill?’ He looked around at them with anger; he was grieved at their hardness of heart” (3:4-5). “The Pharisees went out and immediately conspired with the Herodians against him, how to destroy him” (3:6). Now the *scotosis* is complete. The controversies began with wondering whether he had blasphemed.¹² Now they begin to plot his death.

Scotosis is not merely an ancient problem, but one that threatens all of us. We can become habituated in one way of thinking that is

comfortable to us. The more ingrained the habit, the less likely we are to recognize truth that comes in a package different from what we expect. “I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?” (Isa 43:19). We often do not see. We are more addicted to the comfort of seeing the world, our relationships, our faith, and especially God in a certain way. To any other way, we can become increasingly blind.

A New Phase of Discipleship and Parables of the Kingdom (3:13–4:34)

We’ve been introduced to Simon, Andrew, James, and John who were called to follow Jesus. Now Jesus ascends a mountain—a typical place for God to speak—and appoints the Twelve. “And he appointed twelve, whom he also named apostles, to be with him, and to be sent out to proclaim the message, and to have authority to cast out demons” (3:14-15). Unlike what we saw in Matthew, where the twelve were a symbolic expression of future “judges” of the twelve tribes of Israel, this Twelve is not much distinguished from other disciples in Jesus’s ministry. What they do represent for us is decided disciples who learn from Jesus more than what the crowds learn. And, further, they are “apostles,” that is, “those sent” to proclaim the good news. They will be given some of Jesus’s authority and power that they will need to combat evil. But they will indeed have much to learn and they are only just beginning.

It is during this time that Jesus returns to his hometown of Nazareth and to immediate controversy. Crowds came as usual, but some were arguing that he “has gone out of his mind” (3:21), and his family tried to restrain him. He is also challenged that he exorcises demons through the prince of demons, Beelzebul.¹³ As in Matthew, Jesus responds that Satan would not fight Satan. Here, though, we see an additional teaching: “No one can enter a strong man’s house and plunder his property without first tying up the strong man; then indeed the house can be plundered” (3:27). Satan is that strong man, but Jesus is stronger, and he has tied up Satan and plundered his house. The disciples will need to receive the same strength. And so will we.

Then among the crowd is his family who call for him. “‘Who are my mother and my brothers?’ And looking at those who sat around

him, he said, ‘Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother’” (3:33-35). This is the Jesus who demands to know on which side of the fence we stand. To do the will of God makes us part of his family. To refuse to do God’s will is to not be in his family. There is a new loyalty called for here. Obviously, his was an apocalyptic framing, and this is not a manual regarding future “family values” or “family obligations.” Discipleship is doing God’s work, and doing God’s work makes us part of Jesus’s family, a place where we really belong.

Mark immediately brings us back to the shores of Galilee and the crowds there listening to Jesus preach parables of the kingdom:

Listen! A sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seed fell on the path, and the birds came and ate it up. Other seed fell on rocky ground, where it did not have much soil, and it sprang up quickly, since it had no depth of soil. And when the sun rose, it was scorched; and since it had no root, it withered away. Other seed fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it, and it yielded no grain. Other seed fell into good soil and brought forth grain, growing up and increasing and yielding thirty and sixty and a hundredfold. (4:3-8)

He will soon tell his disciples what he meant. The sower is sowing the word of God. The path represents those who do not take in the word fast enough and Satan quickly snatches it. The rocky ground represents those who hear the Gospel with joy but have no staying power with the faith. The thorny ground represents those whose absorption in worldly things, particularly wealth, chokes off the Gospel’s reception.

We’ve seen this everywhere, even in our own lives. Sometimes a truth told just does not register. Our habitual ways of thinking do not give it room. The challenge then is for us to stay with it, to cling to it and not let it quickly be snatched away. It is the challenge to open our hearts enough to give it the room it needs to sink in. If we stay with it, its wisdom will reveal itself when we are ready. But we have to keep it close enough not to let it be “snatched up.”

We also know about hearing things that excite or inspire us, but we drop them soon after the excitement wears out, looking for the next interesting thing. This can even happen to seriously religious

persons. St. John of the Cross writes about *spiritual avarice* insightfully. “Many . . . hardly ever seem content with the spirit God gives them. They become unhappy and peevish owing to a lack of the consolation they desire to have spiritual things. Many never have enough of hearing counsels, or of learning spiritual maxims, or of keeping them and reading books about them. . . . They will now put these down, now take up others.”¹⁴ St. John’s confidant, St. Teresa of Avila, describes some sisters in her convent who lose their staying power, whose “strength gives way . . . and perhaps they were no more than two steps from the fount of living water.”¹⁵ And finally, of course, our preoccupations, our attachments, and our absorption in worldly values—so ubiquitous in a consumerist culture—make integrating the Gospel troublingly difficult.

All three of these possible responses are typical in our lives and experience. And they all have to do with our receptivity, that is, the kind of soul we nurture. Being a fertile ground has to do with being available to God. It has to do with cultivating a heart that is open, spacious, and free. St. Gregory the Great notes, “Good earth . . . brings forth fruit by patience.”¹⁶ It is never too late. St. John Chrysostom, commenting on this parable, notes that “stones can change and turn into fertile soil, the beaten path can be no longer trampled down but may become a productive field; the thorns too can disappear.”¹⁷ We should not miss the end of the parable. For those who are fertile ground the word of God, the seed Jesus sows, produces fantastically: thirtyfold, sixtyfold, a hundredfold. No actual wheat plants do this, of course, but the word of God does; it is a seed capable of developing into a holy life here and eternal life ultimately. The fruitfulness of our labors may not appear clearly. But we must not lose heart. Here is another parable: “The kingdom of God is as if someone would scatter seed on the ground, and would sleep and rise night and day, and the seed would sprout and grow, he does not know how. The earth produces of itself, first the stalk, then the head, then the full grain in the head. But when the grain is ripe, at once he goes in with his sickle, because the harvest has come” (4:26-29). How does God work in our lives? Fundamentally, God works mysteriously and often unbeknownst to our consciousness. A good axiom is that God *normally* works through the normal; God *usually* works through the usual. Few people have extraordinary

religious experiences, and those fortunate to have had them typically experience them rarely. Spiritual transformation is a long project of staying present to God in the ordinary. The graces come—they surely come—but they usually come softly. Because God is Goodness itself and Truth itself, our pursuit of goodness and truth is necessarily a participation in the life of God. And it is all premised on grace, on God’s active presence as goodness and truth. The kingdom is here; it is available and present all the time. To make it ours means to strive unreservedly to pursue it moment by moment, so often in the ordinariness of life itself. Pope Francis reflects, “The fruitfulness is often invisible, elusive, and unquantifiable. We can know quite well that our lives will be fruitful, without claiming to know how, or where, or when. We may be sure that none of our acts of love will be lost, nor any of our acts of sincere concern for others. No single act of love for God will be lost; no generous effort will have been meaningless, no painful endurance wasted. All of these encircle our world like a vital force.”¹⁸

Confronting Chaos and Evil (4:35–5:20)

Jesus and his disciples venture from the “Jewish” side of the Sea of Galilee to its southeastern side, which marks Gentile territory. The area is that of the Decapolis, or the “ten cities.” As we saw in Matthew (8:24-27), Jesus and the disciples experience a windstorm so great it was swamping the boats. Awakened by his frenzied disciples, Jesus “rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, ‘Peace! Be still!’ Then the wind ceased, and there was a dead calm” (4:39). As I noted in the chapter on Matthew, the sea when it was raging often represented chaos and evil, where only the power of God could save.¹⁹ Jesus quickly confronts even more manic chaos and evil on the shore: “And when he had stepped out of the boat, immediately a man out of the tombs with an unclean spirit met him. He lived among the tombs; and no one could restrain him any more, even with a chain; for he had often been restrained with shackles and chains, but the chains he wrenched apart, and the shackles he broke in pieces; and no one had the strength to subdue him. Night and day among the tombs and on the mountains he was always howling and bruising himself with stones” (5:2-6). The man’s demon, whose “name is Legion; for we are many,” begs Jesus not to cast him out indiscriminately but

rather to cast him into the nearby swine that were feeding. He does so, and they all rush over a cliff and drown into the sea.

The swineherds ran off and told it in the city and in the country. . . . They came to Jesus and saw the demoniac sitting there, clothed and in his right mind, the very man who had the legion; and they were afraid. . . . Then they began to beg Jesus to leave their neighborhood. . . . [And to the man Jesus said], “Go home to your friends and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and what mercy he has shown you.” And he went away and began to proclaim in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him; and everyone was amazed. (5:14-20)

There is much to unpack here. The sea rages uncontrollably, and the demoniac rages uncontrollably. The wind and sea overwhelm the disciples, and the man is overwhelmed with a legion of demons. Through Jesus’s word the sea becomes “dead calm,” and the man becomes perfectly calm. The details about the man and the legion are additionally interesting. Tombs were seen as a regular place for demons to dwell, and Legion’s request not to be simply sent out would align with not wanting to be sent to their eternal place of punishment. They want to stay in the area. But, of course, they invaded pigs that drowned themselves. This certainly heightens the drama. And, for Jews pigs are unclean animals, so the Jewish mind would have no qualms about their deaths.²⁰ Finally, we see that the man becomes a kind disciple and apostle, spreading the good news throughout the ten cities.

Rather than seeing these two stories or *pericopes* only as Jesus’s powerful confrontation with chaos and evil, we might also see them representing dynamics in our own lives. There is no shortage of challenges from the vicissitudes of life. Life is often unfair, and even when it is not it can be dauntingly challenging. Children exhaust their parents’ patience (and vice versa); workloads can be overwhelming; faithfulness, love, and constancy in our relationships test our metal. Francis Fernandez wisely reflects,

Each person has to work in his own environment, in spite of the hostility we will meet and the misunderstandings of people who cannot or do not want to understand. Walk therefore, *in nomine Domini*, with joy and security in the name of the Lord. If

difficulties arise, then the grace of God will come more abundantly as well. . . . Divine help is always proportionate to the obstacles with which the world and the devil oppose apostolic work. . . . We can use this opportunity to purify our intention, to be more attentive to the Master, to strengthen our faith. . . . It is enough to be in his company to feel we are safe.²¹

It is possible to have real equanimity in dealing with the challenges of life. But, unless this is through the power and presence of Christ, it is more likely that we only bury our frustrations, guaranteeing that we will see them come out sideways at a later date. Christ's grace allows us to even lean into our suffering. "Peace! Be still," he says to the storm. Peace, he says to our souls. I am here, I am with you. My grace will carry you.

The Kingdom and the Power of Faith (5:21–6:13)

Mark's narrative unfolds with three pericopes that seem quite unrelated but have a central theme, that is, the direct relationship between faith and the kingdom of God. First, he tells of a synagogue leader named Jarius who begged Jesus to come to his house. "My little daughter is at the point of death. Come and lay your hands on her, so that she may be made well, and live" (5:23). We later learn that she is twelve years old. Surrounded by a crowd, Jesus begins the journey to Jarius's house only to encounter a woman who for the same twelve years had the "scourge" of hemorrhaging blood (perpetual gynecological spotting). This made her continuously unclean and untouchable (Lev 15:19-30). She touches Jesus's cloak and is healed. His response is to assure her, "Your faith has made you well." Jarius's daughter dies in the meantime, and Jesus calls for a similar faith. "Do not fear, only believe" (5:36). He comes to the bedside, takes her hand, and says to her, "'Talitha cum,' which means, 'Little girl, get up!'" (5:41). By giving us the Aramaic words, Mark allows us to experience the intimacy and affection Jesus brings to those to whom he ministers. *Talitha cum* literally means *little lamb, arise*.²²

The contrast between these relative strangers' experiences (and faith!) and those in Jesus's hometown of Nazareth could not be clearer. Mark tells us that they found his teaching in the synagogue impressive: "What is this wisdom that has been given to him?" Nonetheless, they ultimately questioned that, since they knew him and his

family, how special could he be? “‘Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon, and are not his sisters here with us?’ And they took offense at him. . . . And he could do no deed of power there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and cured them. And he was amazed at their unbelief ” (6:2-6). As I once noted,

Jesus’ miracles only make sense in the context of anticipating the kingdom and in some way already participating in it. Without faith, Jesus’ healings would make him more a magician than a Messiah. Failing in his hometown, Jesus remained the perfect prophet, making clear that he was not a court jester to amuse or amaze. And in witnessing to the imperative of faith, he reminds us to scrutinize our own relationship with him. Do we have the proper awe? Do we hang on his word? Do we seek merely the consolations of God; or do we, rather, pursue the God of consolations?²³

Jesus says something else interesting in this encounter: “Prophets are not without honor, except in their hometown, and among their own kin, and in their own house” (6:4). We tend to be unimpressed with those we think we know well. I know two pastors who were friends. They had a hard time getting parishioners to come to adult education opportunities in their parishes. So they simply went to each other’s parish representing a kind of “visiting expert.” Parishioners now came out in high numbers. Here is someone they hadn’t seen week after week at church or someone they hadn’t seen buying gas, getting groceries, or getting their hair cut alongside them.

Finally, Jesus sends the Twelve “two by two, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits” (6:7). He demands that they rely on God’s providence and the generosity of potential hosts in the towns they visit. The two usually go together: God’s providence corresponds with our willingness and cooperation. Jesus alerts them that in some towns it may not go well: “If any place will not welcome you and they refuse to hear you, as you leave, shake off the dust that is on your feet as a testimony against them.” Still, they were willing to trust Jesus and be entrusted by him to proclaim the kingdom just as Jesus had done from the beginning of his ministry: “So they went out and proclaimed that all should repent. They cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them” (6:11-13).

What is striking here is that we will find the disciples not really understanding Jesus or his kingdom. Later in chapter 6 the disciples find themselves in another squall on the Sea of Galilee and Jesus walking on water to meet them and calming the winds. “They thought it was a ghost and cried out; for they all saw him and were terrified. But immediately he spoke to them and said, ‘Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid.’ . . . And they were utterly astounded . . . but their hearts were hardened” (6:49-52). There will be much that they have to learn about Jesus, a Messiah who “came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (10:45). So they continue to misunderstand both Jesus and his kingdom. And yet, to their credit they were willing to go to unknown towns with trust in God’s providence.

Jesus had instructed them to take “nothing for their journey except a staff; no bread, no bag, no money in their belts” (6:8). This can be instructive for us. We do not have to wait until we understand everything about our faith to minister on behalf of Jesus. We rely on Christ, that is all. And this faith is a powerful witness in and of itself and a condition for God’s grace to flow through us. Paul addresses the Corinthians with this same conviction:

Consider your own call, brothers and sisters: not many of you were wise by human standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. . . . God chose what is low and despised in the world, things that are not, to reduce to nothing things that are, so that no one might boast in the presence of God. . . . When I came to you, brothers and sisters, I did not come proclaiming the mystery of God to you in lofty words or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and him crucified. And I came to you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling. My speech and my proclamation were not with plausible words of wisdom, but with a demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith might rest not on human wisdom but on the power of God. (1 Cor 1:26–2:5)

Herod, John, and Jesus (6:14-44)

Herod Antipas was the son of Herod the Great, and he ruled the Galilee region on behalf of Rome. He had put John the Baptist in prison for denouncing Herod’s unlawful marriage to Herodias, his

Notes

Introduction

1. See Jerome's Commentary on Isaiah, cited in the Roman Office of Readings on his feast day, September 30.
2. *Dei Verbum*, nos. 2 and 4, in *Vatican Council II: Constitutions, Decrees, Declarations; The Basic Sixteen Documents*, ed. Austin Flannery (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2014).
3. Peter Feldmeier, *The Christian Tradition: A Historical and Theological Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 13.
4. I am broadly relying on Paul Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning* (Fort Worth: Texas Christian University Press, 1976), and Paul Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences: Essays on Language, Action and Interpretation*, ed. and trans. John B. Thompson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).
5. Peter Feldmeier, *Christian Spirituality: Lived Expressions in the Life of the Church* (Winona, MN: Anselm Academic, 2015), 7.
6. Ewert Cousins, "Preface," in *Christian Spirituality*, ed. Bernard McGinn, John Meyendorff, and Jean Leclercq (New York: Continuum, 1988), 1:xiii.
7. Feldmeier, *Christian Spirituality*, 14–19.
8. Feldmeier, *Christian Spirituality*, 45–46.
9. Feldmeier, *Christian Spirituality*, 48–53, and *Christian Tradition*, 42–47.
10. Feldmeier, *Christian Spirituality*, 51.
11. Francis Moloney, *The Gospel of John* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1998), 5.

The Gospel of Matthew

1. See Matthew 2:5-6, 15, 17-18, 23; 4:14-16; 8:17; 12:17-21; 13:35; 21:4-5; 26:56; 27:9.
2. "A star shall come forth out of Jacob, and a scepter shall rise out of Israel" (Num 24:17).
3. This quip actually has several layers. That Herod had a stall of pigs while claiming to be Jewish shows his actual lack of Jewish observance. The obvious reference

is that he slaughtered more of his children than his swine, thus the pigs were safer. And then there is the pun: Better to be Herod's pig (*hus*) than his son (*huios*).

4. Pope Francis, Angelus, Feast of the Baptism of the Lord, January 12, 2014, in *The Gospel of Matthew: A Spiritual and Pastoral Reading* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2020), 36. Herein, this collection will only be cited by the occasion of Pope Francis's addresses.

5. Israel as God's son or children is a regular Old Testament theme. See Exodus 4:22-23; Deuteronomy 14:1; 32:6; 32:18-20; and Hosea 11:1.

6. The five are the *Sermon on the Mount* (5:3-7:27); the *Mission Sermon* (10:5-42); the *Sermon in Parables* (13:3-52); the *Sermon on the Church* (18:1-35); and the *Eschatological Sermon* (24:3-25:46).

7. John of the Cross, *The Dark Night* 12.4, in *The Collected Works of Saint John of the Cross*, trans. Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez, rev. ed. (Washington, DC: ICS Publications, 1991).

8. John of the Cross, *Dark Night* 13.3.

9. Pope Francis, Homily, Solemnity of All Saints, November 1, 2015.

10. *Lumen Gentium*, no. 31, in *Vatican Council II: Constitutions, Decrees, Declarations; The Basic Sixteen Documents*, ed. Austin Flannery (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2014).

11. Gerhard Lohfink, *The Our Father: A New Reading*, trans. Linda Maloney (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2019), 6-7.

12. This is no isolated theme: "Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people that produces the fruits of the kingdom" (21:43).

13. Pope Francis, Morning Meditation, Chapel of Domus Sanctae Marthae, "Founded on Rock," December 4, 2014.

14. See also Psalm 107:23-29, where God stills the waters, and Psalm 74:23-29, where God crushes the heads of Leviathan.

15. Francis continues, "Mercy first means treating the wounds. When someone is wounded, he needs immediate treatment, not tests for such things as cholesterol level and glucose tolerance. . . . There is a wound." Address to the Parish Priests of the Diocese of Rome, March 6, 2014.

16. Pope Francis, "Introduzione," in *Cambiamento (Le parole di Papa Francesco, 19)* (Milan: Corriere della Sera, 2014), 5-13.

17. Gerhard Lohfink, *The Forty Parables of Jesus*, trans. Linda Maloney (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press Academic, 2021), 53.

18. We see this in 1 Enoch 56:8, an influential intertestamental text, as well as Revelation 11:7; 17:8.

19. John Paul II, Homily at Belo Horizonte, July 1, 1980, cited by Francis Fernandez, *In Conversation with God*, 7 vols. (London: Scepter, 2000), 4:443.

20. Deut. Rab. 3.17. See *Jewish Annotated New Testament*, ed. Amy-Jill Levine and Marc Zvi Brettler, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 42.

21. Raymond Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 194.

22. *Lumen Gentium*, nos. 39-40.

23. Amy-Jill Levine, *Short Stories by Jesus* (New York: HarperOne, 2014), 216.
24. Lohfink, *Forty Parables*, 92–93.
25. See Jeremiah 25:15; Lamentations 4:21; Isaiah 51:17; Habakkuk 2:15-16; and Psalm 75:8.
26. Daniel Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2007), 295.
27. St. Bonaventure, *The Tree of Life*, cited in Father Gabriel of St. Mary Magdalen, *Divine Intimacy*, 4 vols. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1987), 2:106.
28. See Isaiah 62:4-5; Ezekiel 16:8-14; and Hosea 2:16-20.
29. See also Revelation 3:4-4:4; 6:11; 19:8; 22:14.
30. Here Jesus cites first Deuteronomy 6:5 and then Leviticus 19:18.
31. *Talmud Shabbat* 31a, cited in *The Talmud: Selected Writings*, trans. Ben Zion Bokser (New York: Paulist Press, 1989), 87.
32. Daniel Harrington and James Keenan, *Jesus and Virtue Ethics: Building Bridges between New Testament Studies and Moral Theology* (Lanham, MD: Sheed and Ward, 2002), 84–85.
33. Pope Francis, Angelus, October 26, 2014.
34. See, for example, Isaiah chapters 5, 10, 28, 30, 31; Amos 2:4-8; 4:6–5:6; 6:1-8; and Micah 2:1-2.
35. *Talmud Yoma* 72b in Levine and Brettler, *Jewish Annotated New Testament*, 23–24.
36. Thomas Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation* (New York: New Directions, 1961), 21.
37. We see apocalyptic texts in the book of Daniel, the Dead Sea Scrolls, the Sibylline Oracles, 1 and 2 Baruch, 2 Enoch, the Assumption of Moses, the Book of Jubilees, the Testament of Benjamin, and the Psalms of Solomon. In the Christian tradition, there is the book of Revelation, which obviously made it into the New Testament. But there is also the Apocryphon of James, the Apocryphon of John, the Apocalypse of Paul, the First Apocalypse of James, the Second Apocalypse of James, the Apocalypse of Adam, and the Apocalypse of Peter.
38. See 1 Enoch 99:4-7; Jubilees 23; Sibylline Oracles 3:796–808; 4 Esdras 4:51; 8:63–9:6; and 2 Baruch 25-27. In 2 Ezra 9:3-4 we read, “There shall appear in the world earthquakes, tumult of peoples, intrigues of nations, wavering of leaders, confusion of princes.” See Harrington, *Matthew*, 334.
39. See Isaiah 62:4-5; Jeremiah 2:2; Ezekiel 16:6-8; and Hosea 2:19-20.
40. See John 3:29; 2 Corinthians 11:2; Ephesians 5:21-33; and Revelation 21:2, 9; 22:17.
41. T. S. Eliot, *Four Quartets* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1971), 59.
42. Think of this as both real and symbolic. By anointing his body, this really does seem to anticipate a preburial practice. Initially, though, Matthew says that she anointed his head, which is how kings were anointed when they took office. Here the kingship of Jesus, his being the Messiah, i.e., *anointed*, is united to his sacrificial death.

43. This may be a symbolic number. Zechariah acted as a shepherd to a doomed flock in imitation of God's dooming his people for faithlessness. Zechariah's pay was thirty shekels of silver, which he put into the treasury of the temple (Zech 11:12). Thirty pieces of silver is also the amount paid to a slave owner if his slave is gored by another's ox (Exod 21:32).

44. Raymond Brown, Joseph Fitzmyer, and Roland Murphy, eds., *New Jerome Biblical Commentary* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1990), 670.

45. See Genesis 9:4; Leviticus 17:10-14; and Deuteronomy 12:23-24.

46. Recall his rebukes: "Then he began to reproach the cities in which most of this deeds of power had been done, because they did not repent. 'Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida!'" (11:20-21).

47. Week Three, Second Contemplation: *From the Last Supper to the Agony in the Garden*. See *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius*, trans. and ed. Louis J. Puhl (Chicago: Loyola Press, 1951), 83-84.

48. Two witnesses were necessary for a conclusive judgment of guilt. See Deuteronomy 19:55.

49. The great Jewish theologian and philosopher Philo describes Pilate's personality as "naturally inflexible, a blend of self-will and restlessness." Philo also charged him with briberies, insults, theft, cruelty, and executions without trial. See Harrington, *Matthew*, 391-92.

50. There is no extrabiblical text that references this practice, but amnesties on special occasions did sometimes happen in the ancient Roman world. See *New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, 671.

51. Pope Francis, "Croce e senso bellico della vita," in *Pace (Le parole di Papa Francesco, 5)* (Milan: Corriere della Sera, 2014), 31-46.

52. See Daniel 12:2 as well as John 11:23-26.

53. *Prayer of St. Bonaventure*, cited in Fernandez, *Conversation with God*, 2:289.

54. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (London: SCM Press, 2015), 4.

55. Peter Feldmeier, *Christian Spirituality: Lived Expressions in the Life of the Church* (Winona, MN: Anselm Academic, 2015), 179.

The Gospel of Mark

1. John Donahue and Daniel Harrington, *The Gospel of Mark* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2002), 65.

2. Francis Watson, *The Fourfold Gospel: A Theological Reading of the New Testament Portraits of Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2016), 54.

3. We see this in 1 Enoch 93:1-10; 91:12-17; and the Assumption of Moses 10. See Raymond Brown, Joseph Fitzmyer, and Roland Murphy, eds., *New Jerome Biblical Commentary* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1990), 599-600.

4. See Robert Putnam and David Campbell, *American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2010).

5. Gerhard Lohfink, *Jesus of Nazareth: What He Wanted, Who He Was*, trans. Linda Maloney (Collegetown, MN: Liturgical Press, 2012), 30–31.

6. Jesus heals the Gerasene demoniac in 5:1–20, the Syrophenician’s daughter in 7:24–30, and the boy with an unclean spirit in 9:14–29.

7. Paul Achtemeier, “Invitation to Mark,” in *Invitation to the Gospels* (New York: Paulist Press, 2002), 126–27. Interestingly, in the noncanonical Testament of Moses (10.1) the messianic age is one where Satan will be finally conquered and diseases cured. See Donahue and Harrington, *Mark*, 84.

8. See Exodus 34:6–7; Isaiah 43:25; 44:22.

9. See Isaiah 35:6; Jeremiah 31:8; Micah 4:6; and Zephaniah 3:19.

10. Donahue and Harrington, *Mark*, 104.

11. See also Jeremiah 2:2; 3:1, 14; Ezekiel 16:8–21; and Hosea 2:2–7.

12. This will be their charge against him when he is condemned to death (14:64).

13. This is an unusual name for the equivalent of Satan and probably goes back to the idolatry in ancient Canaanite worship.

14. John of the Cross, *The Dark Night* 1.3.1, in *The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross*, trans. Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez, rev. ed. (Washington, DC: ICS Publications, 1991).

15. Teresa of Avila, *The Way of Perfection* 19.2, in *The Collected Works of St. Teresa of Avila*, trans. and ed. Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez, vol. 2 (Washington, DC: ICS Publications, 1980).

16. Gregory the Great, *Forty Gospel Homilies*, cited in *Journey with the Fathers: Commentaries on the Sunday Gospels, Year A*, ed. Edith Barnecut (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1994), 106–7.

17. Chrysostom was commenting on this same parable in Matthew’s Gospel. See Chrysostom, *Commentary on Gospel of Matthew*, cited in Father Gabriel of St. Mary Magdalen, *Divine Intimacy*, 4 vols. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1987), 3:116.

18. Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium*, nos. 278–79, https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html.

19. See Psalms 18:16; 69:2, 14–15.

20. *New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, 607.

21. Francis Fernandez, *In Conversation with God*, 7 vols. (London: Scepter, 2000), 3:638–39.

22. Donahue and Harrington, *Mark*, 178.

23. Peter Feldmeier, “Strength in Weakness,” *America Magazine*, July 2, 2012, 30.

24. *Erāmos*, literally “desert,” helps us to connect this feeding to God’s feeding of Israel with manna in the desert.

25. *Dote* (give) *autois* (to them) *umeis* (yourselves) *phagein* (to eat).

26. See Josephus, *Antiquities* 13.297, cited in *The Pharisees*, ed. Joseph Sievers and Amy-Jill Levine (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2021), 56.

27. This comes from two of Pope Francis’s reflections: “Two Identity Cards,” Morning Meditation, February 10, 2015, and Angelus, September 2, 2018.

28. Peter Feldmeier, “It’s About Holiness,” *America Magazine*, August 27, 2012, 29.

29. See 1 Samuel 17:43; Isaiah 56:10-11; Matthew 7:6; 2 Peter 2:22; Philippians 3:2; and Revelation 22:15.

30. See Deuteronomy 18:20-22; 2 Kings 20:8-9; Isaiah 7:11-14; 55:13; and Ezekiel 12:11; 24:27.

31. Exodus 10:1, 20, 27; 11:10; 14:8; Ezekiel 3:7; 11:19. See Donahue and Harrington, *Mark*, 252.

32. Vincent Pizzuto, *Contemplating Christ: The Gospels and the Interior Life* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2018), 38.

33. Matthew has John *as* Elijah in 11:14; and Luke has John “with the spirit and power of Elijah” (1:17).

34. Donahue and Harrington, *Mark*, 273.

35. Pope Francis, Angelus, Second Sunday of Lent, March 16, 2014.

36. Matt Baglio, *The Rite: The Making of a Modern Exorcist* (London: Pocket Books, 2010), 175–92.

37. William Barry, *God and You: Prayer as a Personal Relationship* (New York: Paulist Press, 1987), 72–73.

38. Peter Feldmeier, “Standard Thinking,” *America Magazine*, September 10, 2012, 38.

39. Deuteronomy 24:1-14; Joshua 22:8; Isaiah 61:6; and Wisdom 8:18.

40. Pope Francis, Angelus, October 11, 2015.

41. John of the Cross, *Collected Works*, 111.

42. John of the Cross, *Living Flame of Love* 3.10, in *The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross*, trans. Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez, rev. ed. (Washington, DC: ICS Publications, 1991).

43. *New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, 619.

44. John Barton and John Muddiman, eds., *Oxford Bible Commentary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 909.

45. Josephus, *Josephus: The Essential Works*, trans. and ed. Paul Maier (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1988), 265–66.

46. See Daniel 12:2; 2 Maccabees 7:9, 14, 29; and Wisdom 3:1-7.

47. Peter Feldmeier, “Love Grounds All,” *America Magazine*, October 29, 2012, 31.

48. G. E. H. Palmer, Philip Sherrard, and Kallistos Ware, trans. and eds., *The Philokalia*, vol. 1 (London: Faber & Faber, 1979), 92.

49. See Isaiah 1:17, 23; Jeremiah 7:6; Ezekiel 22:7; and Zechariah 7:10.

50. See, for example, Jubilees, 1 Enoch, 4 Ezra, and 2 Baruch.

51. NRSV reads “like a human being,” but most translations have it “like a Son of Man.”

52. Peter Feldmeier, “Apocalyptic Vision,” *America Magazine*, November 12, 2012, 31.

53. Cited in Donahue and Harrington, *Mark*, 400.

54. See also Isaiah 51:17 and Ezekiel 23:32-34.

55. Gerhard Lohfink, *No Irrelevant Jesus: On Jesus and the Church Today*, trans. Linda Maloney (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2014), 101–2.

56. Lohfink, *No Irrelevant Jesus*, 99.

57. Lohfink, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 265.

58. Patrick Hartin, *Exploring the Spirituality of the Gospels* (Collegetown, MN: Liturgical Press, 2011), 37.
59. Donahue and Harrington, *Mark*, 414.
60. Jesus is identifying himself according to Daniel's vision in 7:13-14.
61. Donahue and Harrington, *Mark*, 445-46.
62. Donahue and Harrington, *Mark*, 446.
63. Cited in Donahue and Harrington, *Mark*, 428.
64. Donahue and Harrington, *Mark*, 429.
65. Venantius Fortunatus, "Sing, My Tongue, the Glorious Battle," trans. John Mason Neal (1818-1866), <https://hymnary.org/hymn/GG2013/225>.

The Gospel of Luke

1. Luke Timothy Johnson, *Living Jesus: Learning the Heart of the Gospel* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1999), 161-63.
2. Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke* (Collegetown, MN: Liturgical Press, 1991), 39.
3. The presence or work of the Holy Spirit is mentioned in Acts almost fifty times.
4. Raymond Brown, Joseph Fitzmyer, and Roland Murphy, eds., *New Jerome Biblical Commentary* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1990), 685.
5. Pope Francis, Angelus, December 13, 2015, in *The Gospel of Luke: A Spiritual and Pastoral Reading* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2021), 36. Herein, references from this collection will only be cited by the occasion of Pope Francis's addresses.
6. John Barton and John Muddiman, eds., *Oxford Bible Commentary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 932.
7. See also Exodus 9:29; Deuteronomy 10:14; Psalm 50:12; and 1 Corinthians 10:26.
8. See Gregory of Nazianzen, Homily 40, cited in *Journey with the Fathers, Year A*, ed. Edith Barnecut (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1992), 37.
9. Johnson, *Luke*, 75.
10. See Luke 1:77; 3:3; 5:20; 24:47.
11. Brendan Byrne, *The Hospitality of God: A Reading of Luke's Gospel*, rev. ed. (Collegetown, MN: Liturgical Press, 2015), 60.
12. John Paul II, February 6, 1983, cited in Francis Fernandez, *In Conversation with God*, 7 vols. (London: Scepter, 2000), 3:236. I have adjusted the text for inclusivity.
13. John Henry Newman, *Meditations on Christian Doctrine* 1:2, cited in Father Gabriel of St. Mary Magdalen, *Divine Intimacy*, 4 vols. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1987), 1:236.
14. Byrne, *Hospitality of God*, 70.
15. *New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, 695.
16. See Luke 4:18; 7:22; 14:13, 21; 16:20-22.
17. Gustavo Gutierrez, *We Drink from Our Own Wells: The Spiritual Journey of a People* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1983), 125.

18. John's ministry far outlasted John himself. In Acts, Paul discovers John's disciples as far away as Ephesus (see Acts 19:1).
19. See Isaiah 26:19; 25:5; 61:1.
20. Byrne, *Hospitality of God*, 85.
21. Pope Francis, General Audience, August 9, 2017.
22. Gerhard Lohfink, *The Forty Parables of Jesus*, trans. Linda Maloney (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2021), 188.
23. Lohfink, *Forty Parables of Jesus*, 188.
24. Johnson, *Luke*, 113.
25. Johnson, *Luke*, 155.
26. John of the Cross, *Living Flame of Love* 1.19, in *The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross*, trans. Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez, rev. ed. (Washington, DC: ICS Publications, 1991).
27. Luke reminds the reader a dozen times that he is on the way to Jerusalem.
28. Johnson, *Luke*, 164–65.
29. Byrne, *Hospitality of God*, 109.
30. Lohfink, *Forty Parables of Jesus*, 119.
31. Amy-Jill Levine, *Short Stories by Jesus* (New York: HarperOne, 2014), 81.
32. Origen, *On Luke's Gospel*, cited in *Journey with the Fathers: Commentaries on the Sunday Gospels, Year C*, ed. Edith Barnecut (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1994), 99.
33. Emerson Powery, *The Good Samaritan: Luke 10 for the Life of the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2022), 155.
34. Elizabeth of the Trinity, *Letter* 133, February 24, 1903, cited in Father Gabriel, *Divine Intimacy*, 3:138.
35. Pope John Paul II, Homily, July 27, 1980, cited in Fernandez, *Conversation with God*, 4:239.
36. *New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, 703.
37. Pope Francis, Angelus, July 24, 2016.
38. Pope John Paul II, cited in Fernandez, *Conversation with God*, 4:241.
39. Byrne, *Hospitality of God*, 126–27.
40. Johnson, *Luke*, 201.
41. Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*, no. 223, https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html.
42. Johnson, *Luke*, 209.
43. Pope Francis, Angelus, August 18, 2013.
44. Consider other claims of Paul: Christ's cross leads to "justification and life for all" (Rom 5:18); God plans to "be merciful to all" (Rom 11:32); God will "unite all things in him" (Eph 1:10); God reconciles all things to himself (Col 1:19-20); and all will be made subject to God so that "God may be all in all" (1 Cor 15:20-29).
45. See Matthew 7:13-14; 10:28; 13:36-43. The ancient mind understood destruction not as eternal torment but *actual* destruction.
46. Byrne, *Hospitality of God*, 138–39.

47. Francis de Sales, *Introduction to the Devout Life*, trans. and ed. John Ryan (New York: Image Books, 1989), 135.
48. G. E. H. Palmer, Philip Sherrard, and Kallistos Ware, trans. and eds., *The Philokalia*, vol. 3 (London: Faber & Faber, 1984), 239.
49. Fernandez, *Conversation with God*, 4:514.
50. *Oxford Bible Commentary*, 947.
51. Robert Karris, "Invitation to Luke," in *Invitation to the Gospels* (New York: Paulist Press, 2002), 276.
52. Lohfink, *Forty Parables of Jesus*, 82.
53. Gerald O'Collins, *Jesus: A Portrait* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2008), 115-19.
54. O'Collins, *Jesus*, 95-97.
55. Lohfink, *Forty Parables of Jesus*, 177.
56. Pope John Paul II, General Audience, July 28, 1999.
57. Some ancient manuscripts read, "I saw one like a human being," but the Septuagint, which the evangelists relied on, has it literally as "Son of Man."
58. Cited in Father Gabriel, *Divine Intimacy*, 4:160.
59. Johnson, *Luke*, 312.
60. Johnson, *Luke*, 318.
61. Pope Francis, Homily for the Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe, November 20, 2016.
62. This was just as Jesus did in feeding the five thousand (9:16) and in the Last Supper (22:19).
63. See Acts 2:42, 46; 20:7.

The Gospel of John

1. The specified *signs* are: (1) turning water into wine (2:1-11); (2) healing a royal official's son (4:46-54); (3) healing the paralyzed man at the pool (5:1-15); (4) feeding the five thousand (6:1-15); (5) walking on the water (6:16-21); (6) healing the blind man (9:1-41); and (7) raising Lazarus from the dead (11:1-44).
2. Augustine, *Harmony of the Evangelists*, cited in Francis Watson, *The Fourfold Gospel: A Theological Reading of the New Testament Portraits of Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2016), 94.
3. Stephen J. Binz, *Panorama of the Bible* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2016), 47.
4. Luke Timothy Johnson, *Living Jesus: Learning the Heart of the Gospel* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1999), 182.
5. Francis J. Moloney, *The Gospel of John*, ed. Daniel J. Harrington (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1998), 40.
6. Moloney, *John*, 41.
7. Around the time of Jesus there were Jewish miracle workers, such as Hone the "circle-drawer" and Hanina ben Dosa, both referred to as "Son of God."

8. In Revelation 19:7 we find: “Let us rejoice and exalt and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready.”

9. Demetrius R. Dumm, *A Mystical Portrait of Jesus: New Perspectives on John’s Gospel* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2001), 110.

10. Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Sabbath: Its Meaning for Modern Man* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1951), 87–88.

11. Moloney, *John*, 170.

12. Consider Isaiah’s denunciation of such presumption: “I will ascend to the tops of the clouds, I will make myself like the Most High” (Isa 14:14). Or Ezekiel’s denunciation: “You have said, ‘I am a god; I sit in the seat of the gods’ . . . yet you are but a mortal, and no god” (Ezek 28:2).

13. Moloney, *John*, 171.

14. See Exodus 12:15–20; 23:14–15; and Leviticus 23:6–8.

15. Moloney, *John*, 212.

16. Moloney, *John*, 222.

17. Raymond Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, 2 vols. (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966, 1970), 1:292–93, cited in Dumm, *A Mystical Portrait*, 122.

18. Moloney, *John*, 224.

19. This section is adapted from Peter Feldmeier, *The Christian Tradition: A Historical and Theological Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 84–85.

20. Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies* 4.17.5–18.5, in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, rev. ed. (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1996).

21. See Philadelphians, no. 4; Smyrnaeans, no. 6; and Ephesians, no. 20, in *The Apostolic Fathers*, trans. and ed. Michael Holmes, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006).

22. Justin Martyr, First Apology, chap. 67, in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*.

23. Augustine, *Confessions* 6.10, trans. Henry Chadwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 123–24.

24. See Deuteronomy 16:13; Leviticus 23:34; and Nehemiah 8:13–19.

25. Michael Buckley, *What Do You Seek?: The Questions of Jesus as Challenge and Promise* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2016), 41–42.

26. Buckley, *What Do You Seek*, 49–50.

27. C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Macmillan, 1952; San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2001), 223–25.

28. Johnson, *Living Jesus*, 54.

29. Psalm 23:1; Isaiah 40:11; Jeremiah 31:10; and Sirach 18:13.

30. Jeremiah 3:15; 23:5; Ezekiel 34:23–24; and Micah 5:2–3.

31. Moloney, *John*, 314.

32. Moloney, *John*, 318.

33. Sandra Schneiders, *Written That You May Believe: Encountering Jesus in the Fourth Gospel*, rev. ed. (New York: Herder & Herder, 2003), 179–80.

34. Schneiders, *Written That You May Believe*, 183.

35. Buckley, *What Do You Seek*, 108.

36. Buckley, *What Do You Seek*, 110.
37. Buckley, *What Do You Seek*, 28–29.
38. Schneiders, *Written That You May Believe*, 194.
39. Cyril of Alexandria, *On John's Gospel*, cited in *Journey with the Fathers: Commentaries on the Sunday Gospels, Year C*, ed. Edith Barnecut (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1994), 56–57.
40. Moloney, *John*, 395.
41. Ambrose, *Death as a Blessing*, cited in *Journey with the Fathers: Commentaries on the Sunday Gospels, Year A*, ed. Edith Barnecut (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1994), 64–65.
42. Bernard of Clairvaux, *On the Song of Songs*, cited in Barnecut, *Journey with the Fathers, Year C*, 59.
43. Here are some examples: In chapter 2 we have the first sign, and chapter 4 we have the second sign, but in between people believed in Jesus because they saw the signs he was doing (2:23). In 2:23 Jesus is in Jerusalem until 3:21. But in 3:22 we read that Jesus then went into the land of Judea (where he already was). In 5:1 Jesus is in Jerusalem, but “after this, Jesus went to the other side of the Sea of Galilee.” In the last discourse, Thomas asks Jesus where he is going (14:5), but in 16:5 Jesus states that “none of you asks me, ‘Where are you going?’” In 14:31 Jesus tells them to “Rise, let us be on our way.” Then he immediately launches into another long discourse and lengthy prayer only to repeat himself in 18:1: “Rise, let us go.”
44. Patrick Hartin, *Exploring the Spirituality of the Gospels* (Collegetown, MN: Liturgical Press, 2011), 66–67.
45. John of the Cross, *Living Flame of Love* 3.10, 79, in *The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross*, trans. Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez, rev. ed. (Washington, DC: ICS Publications, 1991).
46. See John 3:14; 8:28; 12:32–33 and 2:4; 7:6, 30; 8:20 and 17:1.
47. Brown, *Gospel According to John*, 2:917, cited in Moloney, *John*, 502.
48. George MacRae, “Invitation to John,” in *Invitation to the Gospels* (New York: Paulist Press, 2002), 395.
49. Moloney, *John*, 497.
50. Pius XI, *Quas Primus* (1925), nos. 4, 20, 33; https://www.vatican.va/content/pius-xi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xi_enc_11121925_quas-primas.html.
51. *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 39, in *Vatican Council II: Constitutions, Decrees, Declarations; The Basic Sixteen Documents*, ed. Austin Flannery (Collegetown, MN: Liturgical Press, 2014).
52. Peter Feldmeier, “Living the Kingdom,” *America Magazine*, November 19, 2012, 38.
53. Brown writes, “Other scholars (with whom I agree) theorize that the Beloved Disciple was a minor figure during the ministry of Jesus, too unimportant to be remembered in the more official tradition of the Synoptics. But since this figure became important in Johannine community history (perhaps the founder of the community), he became the ideal in its Gospel picture, capable of being contrasted

with Peter as closer to Jesus in love” (Raymond Brown, *Introduction to the New Testament* [New York: Doubleday, 1997], 369).

54. *Parédōken* (gave over) to (the) *pneuma* (spirit): notice the definite article “the.”

55. Moloney, *John*, 506.

56. Buckley, *What Do You Seek*, 57.

57. Pope Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, no. 18, https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20051225_deus-caritas-est.html.