



# WHO IS THIS JESUS?

## His Identity, Our Calling

### 2024 LENTEN GROUPS STUDY GUIDE

*"Who Is This Jesus: His Identity, Our Calling"*

Welcome to Bethany's Lenten Groups Study Guide designed for groups or individuals to follow our Lenten Sermon Series, *"Who Is This Jesus: His Identity, Our Calling."* In this study guide you'll find each week's sermon theme and scripture focus, followed by discussion questions and suggestions for further study and reflection.

For group leaders and participants, you are encouraged to begin with a brief time of welcome and opening prayer, followed a reading of the scripture text for each week and then discussion questions. Close by praying for each other.

#### WEEK ONE: February 18 – *Who Is This Jesus?* *Baptized And Tested Like We Are*

**STATEMENT OF IDENTITY AND PURPOSE:** *"I am called to remember that I am BELOVED."*

**SCRIPTURE TEXT:** Mark 1:9-15

1. **Opening Sharing Question:** What does baptism mean to you—either personally or conceptually? How connected are you to your baptism? What fosters that connection? What impedes that connection? Spend a few moments sharing the stories of your baptism and reflection on what it has meant to you.
2. What stood out to you about the sermon on Sunday? Was there a point that was particularly resonant for you?
3. This text recounts Jesus' baptism and consequent testing and temptation in the desert. It is the shortest of all the baptism stories in the gospels, so it is interesting to make note what is included in this brief account. What stood out to you about this text? What questions do you have?



4. When Jesus is baptized, he hears the words, "you are my son, the Beloved, with you I am well pleased." Each week during Lent we are reflecting on a statement of identity—one that also gives us a purpose of how to do what we are called to do. This week we named that we too are Beloved by God. What does it feel like to wear that label: Beloved? Is that a hard concept for you to connect with? What stands in the way of you accepting that name? What helps you to accept it?
5. Immediately after his baptism, Jesus is driven by the Spirit out into the wilderness and is tempted and tested. What stands out to you from this brief description? What feelings or images come up as you think of Jesus with "wild beasts?" What are some of the wild beasts that you are facing today? Where are there "angels" waiting on you? Or where do you long for the assistance of heaven in that way? Name some of these things as you turn towards prayer requests and praying for each other.

**Close** in prayer.

**For further study and reflection:** Compare and contrast the other baptism and testing accounts in the other gospels. See Matthew 3:13-17, Matthew 4: 1-11; Luke 3:21-22, Luke 4:1-13, John 1: 29-34.

## WEEK TWO: February 25 – *Who Is This Jesus? Owning His Cross*

**STATEMENT OF IDENTITY AND PURPOSE:** *"I am called to follow Jesus."*

**SCRIPTURE TEXT:** Mark 8:31-38

1. **Opening Sharing Question:** This is one of the great Petrine (fancy word for things relating to Peter) texts. Right before our scripture text, Peter has been the first to correctly identify and name Jesus as the Messiah. A shining moment. Now, Peter is rebuking Jesus for talking about his suffering, death, and resurrection, to which Jesus responds, "Get behind me, Satan!" A dramatic turn, indeed. With Peter, there is never a dull moment. Based on your knowledge of this bold disciple, what is your favorite Peter story?
2. What stood out to you about the sermon on Sunday? Was there a point that was particularly resonant for you?
3. Why do you think Peter is so upset with Jesus about foretelling his future suffering, rejection, and death? Why do you think Jesus gets so upset with Peter? (vs. 31-33)
4. What stands out to you about Jesus' call to follow him? What does this text tell us about our statement of identity and purpose for this week? (vs. 34-38) What comes up for you as you read this? What is the cost of being Jesus' disciple? In the context of this passage, "take up your cross" has life and death implications. *"The Romans used crucifixion as a gruesome means of terrorizing subject peoples by hanging rebels and agitators from crosses for several days until they suffocated to death."*



*They required condemned provincials to carry the crossbeam on which they were about to be hung." (The New Oxford Annotated Bible, NRSV 4<sup>th</sup> Edition) How does this knowledge change this passage for you?*

5. In what ways does being a discipleship cost you something? What are those costs? What does it cost others that you know or have heard about? What about our ministry partners, some of whom are in danger as they share Christ's love with others?

**Close** in prayer. *(This week, spend some time specifically praying for our partners and for those for whom following Jesus could cost them their very lives.)*

**For further study and reflection:** If you have the time, read the classic book, *The Cost of Discipleship*, by Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Bonhoeffer uses the Sermon on the Mount as one of his grounding biblical texts which can be found in Matthew 5-7. What do you learn about following Jesus from this sermon that Jesus preached to those who were to become his followers? Where is there an invitation for you?

WEEK THREE: March 3 – *Who Is This Jesus?*  
*The Temple Where Heaven and Earth Meet*

**STATEMENT OF IDENTITY AND PURPOSE:** *"I am called to be made new."*

**SCRIPTURE TEXT:** John 2:13-22

1. **Opening Sharing Question:** In our text for today, Jesus identifies himself as the ultimate "thin space," the place where heaven and earth meet. In the Celtic tradition, thin spaces are those spaces or places where the "distance between heaven and earth collapses," to use Eric Weiner's description. Where are some of those thin places for you?
2. What stood out from the sermon on Sunday? Was there a point that was particularly resonant for you?
3. This story about Jesus rather violently driving out the money changers from the temple comes at the end of Jesus' ministry in all three of the synoptic gospels, but comes at the beginning of John's gospel. By including it at the beginning, what do you think the writer of John wants readers to know about Jesus right from the beginning? What do you learn about Jesus from this text?
4. How would you articulate the reason for Jesus' righteous anger? (vs 14-18)
5. From the text, how do people respond to Jesus' actions? (vs 18-20) Is their response understandable in your opinion?





6. We learn from John's explanatory comments that Jesus equates his body with a building—that HE is the new temple and that his body will be destroyed but will be raised up in three days. Later, Jesus will equate his body with bread, his blood with wine, and himself as the sacrifice—as opposed to the sacrificial lamb. What significance is there for you in the way Jesus uses himself as metaphor (new temple, new Israel, bread, wine, lamb)? How do you respond to this tension between these earthly elements with the heavenly perspective that Jesus is bringing? Even his disciples weren't able to understand until after Jesus had died. Do you ever find yourself in the position of the people in the story—not quite understanding what Jesus is saying at the moment?
7. As you close and turn towards prayer, lay before Jesus those things you are longing to be made new—earthly realities that you are longing to be transformed by the inbreaking of heaven. Where are you longing for a thin space and place? The place where earth and heaven meet?

**Close** in prayer.

**For further study and reflection:** Compare and contrast John's account of this story with the Synoptic Gospels. See Matthew 21:12-27, Mark 11:15-19, Luke 19:45-46. How do these other accounts impact the way you understand this story?

#### WEEK FOUR: March 10 – *Who Is This Jesus? Gift of Love and Salvation*

**STATEMENT OF IDENTITY AND PURPOSE:** *"I am called to believe and walk in the light."*

**SCRIPTURE TEXT:** John 3:14-21

1. **Opening Sharing Question:** This passage has perhaps the most used verse in the entire Bible: John 3:16. Where is the strangest place you've seen this Bible reference? Do you remember the first time you encountered this verse?
2. What stood out to you about the sermon on Sunday? Was there a point that was particularly resonant for you?
3. Our text comes in the midst of a late-night conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus—a Pharisee and leader of the Jews. It is a fascinating conversation and well worth the read (see below under "for further study and reflection"). This part of the conversation is about belief. What has been your relationship with belief? Was it a moment, has it been a journey? Is it easy for you to believe, or are you like the father of a boy who was demon possessed who uttered the famously contradictory (but accurate) phrase, "I believe. Lord, help my unbelief." (Mark 9: 23-25) What compels you to believe? What impedes your belief?
4. John 3:16-17 and filled with love and hope. What do these verses tell you about God's motivation and God's purposes?



5. The text shifts from Jesus talking about the importance of belief—specifically believing in his name—to talking about light. What role does light play in this text? What role does light play in your life? As you turn towards closing in prayer, what are some ways the Spirit is inviting you to walk in the light this week?

**Close** in prayer.

**For further study and reflection:** Read the first part of John 3, and Jesus' entire conversation with Nicodemus. What stands out to you about their conversation? Nicodemus brings some big questions to Jesus, reminiscent of St. Anselm's summary of the Christian life; "Faith seeking understanding." What are some of the big questions you are asking Jesus right now?

### WEEK FIVE: March 17 – *Who Is This Jesus?*

#### *Magnet to Outsiders*

**STATEMENT OF IDENTITY AND PURPOSE:** *"I am called to reflect Jesus' love to everyone."*

**SCRIPTURE TEXT:** John 12:20-33

1. **Opening Sharing Question:** Our text today is all about how Jesus draws people to himself—that there is something compelling about this Jesus that compels people to follow him. The Pharisees have just exclaimed with exasperation, "You see, you can do nothing. Look, the world has gone after him!" Who are some of those people in your life who have compelled you towards Jesus? Who drew you to Jesus with the way they lived their lives? Spend some time sharing about those people.
2. What stood out to you about the sermon on Sunday?
3. At this point in John's gospel, word has spread about the power of this Jesus—he has raised Lazarus from the dead and crowds are clamoring to meet him. Some Greeks, who would have been outsiders from this community, come to the disciple, Phillip, with a simple request: "Sir, we wish to see Jesus." How does Jesus respond to this request?
4. Jesus admits that his "soul is troubled" (verse 27). What do you make of these next few verses? What stands out about this very public prayer/conversation with the Father?
5. We are told that the crowd is there witnessing this. What are some of the responses of onlookers?
6. Jesus asserts that in his death and resurrection, he will "draw all people to himself." (vs. 32) What do you think our role as followers of Jesus is? What about our lives compels people to Christ? How do we sometimes stand in the way of that? As you



turn towards prayer, how might you reflect Christ's love to those on the margins or on the outside of Christ-centered community?

**Close** in prayer.

**For further study and reflection:** Read Mark 14:34-36. What are the differences between that prayer of Jesus and the one in John?

### WEEK SIX: March 24 – *Palm Sunday*

**STATEMENT OF IDENTITY AND PURPOSE:** *"I am called to shout Hosanna—to praise and cry out for Jesus' help."*

**SCRIPTURE TEXT:** Mark 11:1-11

1. **Opening Sharing Question:** There is one word that dominates Palm Sunday—Hosanna!! It is Bethany tradition to not sing songs with the word Hosanna until Palm Sunday. (For Hallelujah or Alleluia, you'll have to wait one more week for Easter!) There are so many songs with the word, Hosanna. What is your favorite?
2. What stood out to you about the sermon on Sunday? Was there a point that was particularly resonant for you?
3. Jesus' triumphal entry in Jerusalem was not the typical entrance of a king. Instead of a war-chariot, Jesus rode a donkey. How else would you characterize Jesus' kingship in contrast with earthly kings? Either the earthly kings in 1<sup>st</sup> century Palestine or the earthly leaders of today?
4. This whole pericope has a lot of visual imagery—it is almost cinematic. Read the text a few times and imagine this scene. Is there anything that stands out that you hadn't noticed before? What do you imagine it sounds like? Smells like? What colors do you see? How do you imagine the crowds? How do you imagine Jesus? Where do some of those images come from? What about verse 11—a verse I hadn't really noticed before. How do you imagine that?
5. Hosanna literally means "Save us!" which gives it so much more depth, power, and significance than just a shout of praise. As you turn towards prayer, where are places in your life and places in our community and our world that need God's saving power? Places that shout, "Hosanna!"

**Close** in prayer.

**For further study and reflection:** Compare and contrast the other accounts of this triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem. See Matthew 21:1-9, Luke 19:28-38, and John 12:12-15. What differences do you notice? What impact do those differences make?



WEEK SEVEN: March 31 – *Easter Sunday: Where Will Jesus Show Up?*

**STATEMENT OF IDENTITY AND PURPOSE:** *"I am called to worship a Lord who is Risen Indeed!"*

**SCRIPTURE TEXT:** Mark 16:1-8

1. **Opening Sharing Question:** How did you celebrate Easter when you were growing up? How do you celebrate now?
2. What stood out to you about the sermon on Sunday? Was there a point that was particularly resonant for you?
3. Imagine being in the position of these women. Using the text and asking the Holy Spirit to guide your imagination, what do you think they are feeling?
4. There is always a tension between what Jesus says to people and how much they comprehend. The young man in white who is sitting in the empty tomb references this reality, "there you will see him, just as he told you." As a group, spend some time thinking about all that Jesus has told his followers about what is going to happen. Why is it so hard to believe?
5. This text is known more for its ending than for its beginning. We simply don't know how the book of Mark ends after verse 8. Does it make a difference for you, for Christianity as a whole, how this book ends? If so, what difference does it make?

**Close** in prayer.

**For further study and reflection:** Compare and contrast the other resurrection narratives. See Matthew 28: 1-8, Luke 24: 1-11, John 20:1-18. What differences do you notice? What impact do these differences make to you?

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**Songs for the Journey – 2024 Bethany Lenten Playlist on Spotify**

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