

Discussion Guide

Study: Freeing Jesus

Week 4: July 16 – 22

Chapter: Savior

Study Big Idea: Freeing Jesus is an invitation to meet Jesus again for the first time by encountering many Jesuses. Regardless of your religious (or non-religious background) you'll be inspired to get Jesus out of the unhelpful confines you (or the religious traditions you've experienced) constructed for him. Allow yourself to rediscover Jesus as Friend, Teacher, Savior, Lord, Way, and Presence.

Chapter Big Idea: Jesus saves. The image of Jesus as Savior is among the most talked about concepts in American Christianity. Within American Protestantism, Evangelicals and those in Mainline traditions have widely differing understandings of what this means and how it should impact the daily lives of Jesus' followers.

Icebreaker: Tell us about a time you found yourself in a situation you didn't know how to get out of, but escaped or overcame it when you were rescued (or saved) from it by someone else.

Opening Prayer: Jesus come among us and be real for us as we gather today. Save us from our aimlessness and sin. Save us from our limited understandings – even those we have of you as Savior. Amen.

Scripture Reading: The angel said, "Don't be afraid. I'm here to announce a great and joyful event that is meant for everybody, worldwide: A Savior has just been born in David's town, a Savior who is Messiah and Master (Luke 2:10-11, The Message).

Freeing Jesus Reading: Years later, I would come across these words from Jesus scholar Marcus Borg: "Some people do not feel much guilt . . . guilt is not the central issue in their lives. Yet they may have strong feelings of bondage. Or strong feelings of alienation and estrangement." For such people, the conventional rendering of Jesus as Savior, the one who takes away whatever is sinful and unclean in their lives, makes no sense.

Borg insists, however, that there are other things from which one needs to be saved: victimization, meaninglessness, suffering. Jesus offers the "good news of 'coming home,'" from exile in the wilderness. He continues, "For some, the need is liberation; for others, the need is homecoming; and for still others, the need is acceptance." No matter our experience or our deepest needs, Jesus saves (p. 76).

Discussion Questions:

1. According to Diana Butler Bass, “‘Savior’ may well be the most ubiquitous term Christians use to describe Jesus. This is especially true in Western Christianity, and Protestant churches in particular. Where the emphasis on Jesus as the One who saves us from sin and death is a primary focus of both preaching and piety . . . Yet, oddly enough, “Savior” appears only twice in the gospels to describe Jesus” (p.69). Why do you think such an infrequently used descriptor of Jesus as “Savior” has become the primary means of identifying who Jesus is for so many people today?
2. How have faith communities you experienced prior to Cathedral of Hope talked about Jesus as “Savior?” What has your experience of this language been at Cathedral of Hope?
3. When you think about salvation do you tend to focus more on this life or on life after death?
4. In this lesson’s book reading, Diana Butler Bass quotes the well-known progressive Jesus scholar Marcus Borg to provide some alternative ideas about salvation. Later, on that same page (p. 76), she goes on to explain that “The word ‘salvation’ comes from the Latin *salvus*, which originally referred to being made whole, uninjured, safe, or in good health. *Salvus* was not about being taken out of this life; it was about this life being healed.” Are these ideas new or familiar to you? What, if anything, about them do you find to be helpful?
5. Share something from this week’s reading that captured your attention – a passage that provided you with new insight, an idea that you’re struggling with, something that is unclear or just doesn’t make sense, or a concept you’d like to hear more about from the perspective of another group member. What about this passage interests you?

Reflection: Jesus is available to all as Savior – one who desires our transformation and wholeness. Many Protestant traditions emphasize (or even overemphasize) one aspect of salvation; salvation, however, is much bigger than this (as is our Savior). Salvation is not simply about the afterlife; it is also about living well in the here and now.

Closing Prayer: Jesus we’re learning about you in community. We now know you better as Teacher and Savior. We recognize that our studies cannot stop here. Help us to grow in our relationship with You and with one another. This we pray in the name of Jesus, who alone is the head of the church. Amen.