



Becoming Like Jesus

Journeying Home Together

May 23, 2021

SONG #1

CALL TO WORSHIP | Psalm 34:3-6 (Sam)

Trust in the Lord, and do good;
dwell in the land and befriend faithfulness
and find safe pasture.

Delight yourself in the Lord,
keep company with God,
and he will give you the desires of your heart.

Commit your way,
your life's journey to the Lord;
trust in him,
and he will do whatever needs to be done.

He'll validate your life in the clear light of day
and stamp you with approval at high noon.

SONG #2

KIDS DISMISSAL

SONG #3

PRE-SERMON READING | 1 John 3:1-3 (Maria)

What marvelous love the Father has extended to us! Just look at it—we're called children of God!
That's who we really are.

But that's also why the world doesn't recognize us or take us seriously, because it has no idea who he is or what he's up to.

But **friends**, that's exactly who we are: children of God. And **that's only the beginning**. Who knows how we'll end up!

What we know is that when Christ is openly revealed, we'll see him—and in seeing him, **become like him**.

All of us who look forward to his Coming stay ready, with the glistening purity of **Jesus' life as a model for our own**.

BECOMING LIKE JESUS | Journeying Home Together

For the last several months, we've been immersing ourselves in the [pastoral words of Jesus](#) to the seven churches in the Revelation, asking Jesus through his Spirit and scripture to pastor this church, Christ City. We've sought out to hear his words of affirmation and admonishment, his promises as motivations for patient endurance, and his encouragement to conquer, to hold fast to his works and his way in our time and place in salvation's story.

Having listened, and [continuing to encourage ears open to what the Spirit says](#) to the churches then and now, we shift our attention to the ways we can “*keep what is written*” (Rev. 1:3) in these pastoral letters lived out among us. After all, we Gather together to set our minds' attention and hearts' affection upon Jesus, so that we might [follow Jesus](#) in and through our everyday roles and relationship. Following Jesus, that's the invitation he extended us when we first encountered him. To travel with him to wherever he is going. And in the Revelation, we see most vividly that place where Jesus journeys.

Revelation 3 ends with Jesus, home. Home on his throne with the Father. But not alone. The final promise to the seven churches is that those who conquer like Jesus—holding fast to the person, work, and way of Jesus—Jesus “*will grant to sit with me on my throne, as I also conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne.*” (Rev. 3:21)

In the conquerors' future is a place with the Father because, in the past, Jesus conquered and is presently in the place they are going. While that may sound too philosophical or churchy for us, being home with Jesus is, after all, what Jesus promised to his apprentices the night before he conquered sin and death,

*“Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. In my **Father's house** are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare **a place for you**? And if I go and prepare **a place for you**, I will come again and will **take you to myself**, that **where I am** you may be also. And **you know the way** to where I am going.”*

Thomas said to him, “Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?”

*Jesus said to him, “**I am the way**, and the truth, and the life. No one comes **to the Father** except through me. If you had known me, you would have known my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him.”*

(Jn. 14:1-7)

It seems that following Jesus takes us somewhere, namely, to the Father. In some way, this is the destination we all long for, the home that beckons us as it did Jesus. A home that is “**some ultimate end in which our whole nature and capacities are fulfilled**,” as we are brought “into contact with the One we seek,” united “to God in a union of wills.”¹ A home where we are truly and wholly who we are made to be. Isn't this the journey our neighbors and we are on? Sure, at times, we are distracted from the aspiration of our end, but aren't most of our actions and decisions, efforts, resources, and plans to wind up in a place where our whole nature and

¹ Thomas Merton, *Bread In The Wilderness*, 13.

capacities are fulfilled? A place, Jesus says, which is a presence. And a paradoxically simple journey, as Thomas Merton put it, “What could be simpler than the search for one whom we have already found?”² “

If you had known me, you would have known my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him

(Jn. 14:7)

This desire for home—for a place where we are truly and wholly who we are made to be by and with God—coupled with Jesus’ promise that in him we find the road and the destination, is why John, the same one who recounted these words of Jesus on the night before the sacrifice which made way for each of us to have the right to become children of God (Jn. 1:12), exclaims with such exuberance the words Maria read for us a few minutes ago,

“that’s only the beginning. Who knows how we’ll end up! What we know is that when Christ is openly revealed, we’ll see him—and in seeing him, become like him. All of us who look forward to his Coming stay ready, with the glistening purity of Jesus’ life as a model for our own.”

(1 Jn. 3:2-3)

Our Jesus’ response to Jesus’ invitation to follow him, to live life with him as we journey with him is only the beginning of our life! It is our “re-birth” into a life we could not experience apart from him going to prepare for us the path and the end. And now, as children of the Father, we discover that life is so much more than we could ask or imagine (Eph. 3:14-21). So how do we make sure we get in on it? Well, Jesus’ pronouncement in the garden with his friends and the gathered in Asia-minor, along with John’s praise for what the “marvelous love” of “the Father has extended to us” in death and resurrection of Jesus, reveal our dual designations as God’s family: **apprentices and pilgrims**. Eugene Peterson describes how these designations help us fully get in on our life together with Jesus this way:

Apprentice “says we are people who spend our lives” following “our master, Jesus Christ. We are in a grow-learning relationship, always. An” apprentice “is a learner, but not in the academic setting of a schoolroom, rather at the worksite of a craftsman. We do not acquire information about God but *skills* in faith.

Pilgrim tells us we are people who spend our lives going someplace, *going to God*, and whose path for getting there is the way, Jesus Christ. We realize that ‘this world is not my home’ and set out for ‘the Father’s house.’”³

How do we get there, to “the Father’s house”? Through and with Jesus. He is “the way.” So we best, as the author of Hebrews encourages us, in step with all those apprentices and pilgrims before us,

² Merton, 11.

³ Eugene Peterson, *A Long Obedience In The Same Direction: discipleship in an instant society*, 17.

“get on with it. Strip down, start running—and never quit! No extra spiritual fat, no parasitic sins. Keep your eyes on Jesus, who both began and finished this race we’re in.”

(Heb. 12:1-2)

Now here is the thing. I would imagine that just about everyone in this space (physically and virtually) today affirms a self-description as an apprentice of Jesus, who is on a pilgrimage to the unhindered presence of our heavenly Father (life in its truest, best, and most beautiful expression). **The issue we tend to run into has to do with how we get there.** You see, the way we become like Jesus in how we live and where we end up, is not congenial to our (solely) human nature nor our societal norms. But then again, as the seven letters of Jesus in the Revelation showed us, it never really has been!

So how did Jesus do it? How did Jesus live his life as a redemptive model for our own? Well, he did it first, by inviting others to follow him, ***inviting others to join him in orienting their lives around relating to the Father***, just as his life was oriented around relating rightly to his Father in love and obedience. We see this clearly in Mark 3.

The chapter begins at the end of a string of interactions (Mk. 1:21-3:12) in which Jesus vividly displayed his baptized and confirmed identity and calling as the beloved Son whose life pleases the Father as he follows the Spirit (Mk. 1:9-13). Already at this point in Mark’s story, we are meant to recognize that Jesus’ life and actions are in step with God the Father—in authority/power and purpose/intention. And so, in verse 13, Jesus *“called to himself those whom **he desired**...and he appointed the twelve...so that they might **be with him and he might send them out**”* (Mk. 3:13-14).

Jesus *desired* these persons to know him and to know them. Jesus *desired* for these persons to join him in his relationship to the Father. Jesus *desired* participation in what his Father was up to in them for the sake of others. Jesus desired them, and he desires you too. *Think about that for just a moment.* Jesus desires you *and* something for you.

These first and unique apprentices, disciples who got to walk with Jesus face-to-face, their lives would orient around Jesus, following Jesus so that they could go do what Jesus did in the way Jesus did it. And what was Jesus doing? He was doing what his Father *desired*; what pleased the Father, which was Jesus living wholly and truly into his identity and calling for the sake of others (all of us!). A few verses later, Jesus says that *everyone who hears the word of God and does it* (Lk. 8:21) is in a kind of **responsive relationship with God called a family of faith.**

*And looking about at **those who sat around him**, Jesus said, “Here are my mother and my brothers! For whoever does the will of God, [who hear the word of God and do it], he is my brother and sister and mother.”*

(Mk. 3:34-35)

Hearing and responding to the will of the Father with others is the way Jesus journeyed to his home, to the place where his (as we've seen him described in Revelation 1-3) whole nature and capacities are fulfilled. And this is the journey he invited others to follow him into. *To be a child of God is not merely a designation of position or honor but [the essential relationship by which we become who we are truly are](#).* And this relationship with God is not isolated. We, like Jesus, did not baptize ourselves but were baptized by others into life with others—Father and Spirit and **sisters and brothers in Jesus who are hearing and responding to God with us.**

So, Jesus shows us straight away in the fullness of his identity and calling that life oriented around the Father is life with a family of faith, but then he shows us that the road to where we are going is “daily taking up our cross and follow[ing him]” (Lk. 9:23-24) *a path of death and resurrection.* The route Jesus took to where he is sitting in wholeness and holiness of his identity and calling, as we know, required him to lay down his life, to lose it, and take it back up again. A life where he is the same but new and more than he was before. Jesus, alive again, still retained the scars of his journey and the voice by which he was known, but he was also different than before. In his post-resurrection interactions, he was mistaken for a stranger and a gardener before recognized as himself, able to eat breakfast and to walk through locked doors, present with his friends in conversation and immediately somewhere else. He was the same and yet more, wholly and truly himself.

The writer of Hebrews finishes out their appeal to keep our eyes on Jesus who starts and finishes the race we are each running to become like him with these words,

Study how he did it. *For the joy set before him, having never lost sight of where he was headed—that exhilarating finishing in and with God—endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.*

(Heb. 12:2-3)

We know Jesus' end act, his physical death and resurrection, which brought him home to the throne of the Father. But the stories that fill our gospels from when he walks out of the baptismal waters in Mark 1 to that never-to-be-forgotten supper with his friends in John 13-17 are a mixed bag of temptations and affirmations, misunderstandings and “aw-ha” moments, ridicule and worship, befriending and betrayals, miracles and death-wishes, true confessions and slander, the Father's audible voice and his felt absence. Through all this muck and beauty, the author of Hebrews says, Jesus became “a high priest” (the one who connects us to God, helping us orient our lives in relationship to the Father) “who is” able “to sympathize with our weaknesses” (Heb. 4:15), dealing “gently with the ignorant and wayward” (5:2) having

learned trusting-obedience by what he suffered, just as we do.

Then, having arrived at the full stature of his maturity and having been announced by God as high priest...he became the source of eternal salvation to all who believingly obey him.

(Heb. 5:8-10)

Through his life of little deaths—the suffering and tribulation of life as it is not meant to be lived at the same time experience the kingdom come while hearing and responding to the One who made us, calls us, and destines

us for life as it should be—Jesus learned trusting obedience as he journeyed with others in and to the presence of the Father. There, in the presence of the Father, Jesus “arrived at the full stature” of his identity and calling—**just as we do**. Together with Jesus and others pilgrimaging to the Father through little deaths and daily resurrections is our journey, too. That is if we want “some ultimate end in which our whole nature and capacities are fulfilled,” and joy along the way.

Only by journeying through life’s little deaths can we arrive at the full stature of our maturity. We’ve got to know that if we’re to stay on the way and not give up or wander off. Only in losing what is not our true selves in Jesus, what is dead & decaying, rebellious & twisting, can we become ultimately, wholly, deeply, and forever, who we are. No wonder we need others to follow Jesus with us! While the journey is simple, it is not easy. And while resurrection (new and forever life) is sure, dying is painful.

Ruth Haley Barton’s description of this pilgrimage journey of ours is most helpful. She says,

“The goal of the Christian journey is surrender—the ability to trust God with our whole selves and our very lives—rather than relying on attempts to achieve safety and security, affection and approval, power and control for ourselves on our own terms. It is an *increasing* capacity to be given over to the love and the will of God in radical trust, just as Jesus was. Beyond potlucks [programs] and pastoral care, *this* is the real journey that **spiritual companions** embark on together...”⁴

The way we become like Jesus in who we are and where we end up is with—and here is the hard part—*others* (spiritual companions following the same path—the same master & means), through (repeated) death and resurrection amid tribulation and kingdom. Historically, this company of spiritual companions is called *the church*. The church, a

“community of people who explicitly and consciously submit themselves to the direction and training of” Jesus through the Holy Spirit (having ears to hear) “so that excellence is pursued in” becoming who they are in Jesus together. As we noticed in the letters from Jesus, within these pilgrimaging packs, “Strengths are recognized and developed; weaknesses are exposed and corrected. We get encouraged (no one is all bad); we get correction (no one is all right); we become motivated, acquiring the inner energy to persevere through the pain of growth to the satisfactions of wholeness and completion.”

The church “...a community created by the descent of the Holy Spirit in which we submit ourselves to the Spirit’s affirmation, reformation, and motivation. There must be no idealization of ‘the church.’” It is nothing more than people becoming who they are meant to be, which assumes they’re not quite there yet! “And lamentations out to be restrained,” as even Jesus experienced spiritual companions, don’t always live up to what you need from them (see Matt. 26:14-75), so should we expect more?

John,” pastor, brother and partner in the tribulation (death) and the kingdom (resurrection) and the patient endurance in Jesus (Rev. 1:9), “neither complains of nor glorifies his churches” in the Revelation. “He accepts them [simply] as facts. They are God’s means for calling persons together so that they can

⁴ Ruth Haley Barton, *Life Together In Christ: experiencing transformation in community*, 107.

realize who their Lord is, and who they are, and develop the relationships that are coherent with those identities.”⁵

That’s all, that’s it. Whatever else the church might be in ideal or ambition or experience, in its God fashioned essence, *the church is a hodgepodge of spiritual companions, a family of faith, following Jesus as the way to home on earth as it is in heaven.*

To discover the depth and breadth of [our core and most essential identity](#)—daughters and sons of God through and in Jesus—we have, it seems, to journey (pilgrimage) together with Jesus through death and resurrection in the ordinary constraints of daily living. The purpose of this faith family listening and responding to the Father is to, as one author put it, “announce to us early and clearly the kind of life into which we can grow, to help us set our sights on what it means to be a human being complete.”⁶ Whole and holy in the presence of our Father. A community of companions, spiritual friends, who help us name what we are seeking when we accept Jesus’ invitation to follow him, and supporting us as we, like the psalmist, said and Sam read for us, “*keep company with God,*” recognizing that “*he will give us the desires of our heart*” (Ps. 37:4)

REFLECTION PRACTICE | Thomas’ Confession & Question

Okay, we’ve talked a lot about the life Jesus invites us into—a life with others who are following him on a pilgrimage to our Father, becoming like him through (little) deaths and resurrections, a life historically called *being the church*. But let’s be honest, this image of church as a community of people walking with us in Jesus as we become like Jesus—and thus most truly and ultimately who we are (identity and calling, children and partners)—is not the first picture that pops into our minds—good, bad, or otherwise!

So, before we spend the next several gathered times practicing ways of journeying together that keep us focused on being apprentices and pilgrims with Jesus, let’s do that thing Jesus kept telling his faith family to do in his pastoral letters, **repent**. Let us turn and let go of what images (and experiences) of life with others in Jesus keep us from the way Jesus has prepared for us to arrive at home. Let us lay down our misunderstandings, unmet expectations, wounds, ideals (which tend to become idols!), and anger *at the cross of Jesus*. Let him take what is ours so we can receive what is his, a resurrected life with others. And let us hold fast, “*Committing our way, our lives’ journey to the Lord; trusting in him, that he will do whatever needs to be done*” (Ps. 37:5) for us to arrive home.

Here’s how’ll we’ll do it, with the admission and question of brave Thomas: “*Lord, we don’t where you are going. How can we know the way?*” (Jn. 14:5).

We don’t usually think of Thomas as brave but as the doubter. Certainly, he doubted, as we all do. Yet, if you follow Thomas in the gospel stories, you see a man who stood up when others did not, to lead and encourage his fellow apprentices to follow Jesus into ushering in God’s kingdom, even if it cost them their lives (see Jn. 11:1:-16). Here, Thomas is the only one willing to be vulnerable before Jesus, admitting his confusion at the

⁵ Eugene Peterson, *Reversed Thunder: the revelation of John & the praying imagination*, 53-54, 55.

⁶ Eugene Peterson, *Run With The Horses: the quest for life at its best*, 30.

kingdom's coming and his way in it. And yes, Thomas doubted when Jesus died. He doubted that words were validation enough, and yet he was brave enough to accept his spiritual friends' invitation to let the presence of Jesus confront his doubt and waited around long enough to let faith become sight (see Jn. 20:24-29).

So, like Thomas, let us be vulnerable enough before Jesus with our doubts and confusion, experiences and ideals, so that we too might see what we long for together.

I'll pray, Chaz will play, then we'll have 2-3 minutes to reflect, repent, and write down what we hear God's Spirit saying and do it. Let's pray.

TO CONSIDER:

What does Jesus encourage you to let go of *and* grab hold to when you pray:

"Lord, we don't know where you are going. How can we know the way?"

SONG #4

COMMUNION

So if you're serious about living this new resurrection life with Christ, *act* like it. Pursue the things over which Christ presides. Don't shuffle along, eyes to the ground, absorbed with the things right in front of you. Look up, and be alert to what is going on around Christ—that's where the action is. See things from *his* perspective. Your old life is dead. Your new life, which is your *real* life—even though invisible to spectators—is with Christ in God. *He* is your life. When Christ (your real life, remember) shows up again on this earth, you'll show up, too—the real you, the glorious you. Meanwhile, be content with obscurity, like Christ.

(Colossians 3:1-4)

Father, you have taught us to abide;
in you,
your Word
and your Love.

In joyous obedience,
to keep company with you;
by loving you, our neighbor,
and one another.

Grant us the grace and strength of your Holy Spirit,
that we may be devoted to you
with our whole heart, mind, soul and body

and united to one another with pure and gentle affection;
until we have all become like Jesus inside and out.

Be present, be present, O Jesus,
who died for our sins
and is alive for our living.

Be present with us as you were with your disciples,
and be known to us as we follow you with one another;

until our real lives in Jesus become the only life seen.

To your glory
and our neighbors' good,
Through Jesus, amen.

SONG #5

BENEDICTION

So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus... (Philippians 2:1-5)