



# Become Like Jesus

## Noticing Jesus, Together

June 6, 2021

### SONG #1

#### CALL TO WORSHIP | Psalm 37:1-7 (Lexi)

Fret not over braggarts  
or wish you could succeed like wicked.  
In no time they'll shrivel like grass clippings  
and wilt like cut flowers in the sun.

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 act,  
doing whatever needs to be done.

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

Be still before the LORD and wait  
patiently for him.

### SONG #2

KIDS DISMISSAL

### SONG #3

#### PRE-SERMON READING | Philippians 2:12-13 (Rori)

What I'm getting at, friends, is that you should simply keep on doing what you've done from the beginning. When I was living among you, **you lived in responsive obedience**. Now that I'm separated from you, keep it up. Better yet, **redouble your efforts**.

**Be energetic** in your life of salvation, reverent and sensitive before God. **That energy is God's energy**, an energy deep within you, God himself willing and working at what will give him the most pleasure.

## BECOME LIKE JESUS | Connecting the Dots

[Over the last couple of weeks](#), we've tried to paint a picture of "church" in its simplest—and I think biblical—form as *of spiritual companions (apprentices and pilgrims), a family of faith (listening and responding to the Father), following Jesus as the way to home on earth as it is in heaven.*

This [journey home with Jesus](#) to an "ultimate end in which our whole nature and capacities are fulfilled," as we are being brought "into contact with the One we seek," united "to God in a union of wills,"<sup>1</sup> as Thomas Merton beautifully describes it—is no stroll through the park. It's a hike that takes us to the heights of kingdom peaks and weaves through the valleys of the shadow of death. Along the trek through tribulation and kingdom, [we become who we really are](#), who we truly are in the relationship from which all life flows, responding to the One who formed us, knows us, and desires us to live abundantly into His image of us as we abide in his love and word ([1 Jn. 3:1-4](#), Mk. 3:34-35, Jn 15:1-17). But the only way we get there is the way Jesus got there (Jn. 14:1-7), learning obedience through what we suffer (Heb. 5:8-9), taking up our cross and following him (Lk. 9:23-24) through (little) death(s) and (daily) resurrection(s), with our siblings and partners (Rev. 1:9) on the same path.

We don't always like that! Either the narrowness of the road home—who wants to lose their life, even to gain a new and better one? Nor are we always fond of the biblically-never-idealized-or-bemoaned fact that the journey necessarily involves companions, some whom we might not have chosen if we'd been the ones selecting the expedition's crew.

Following Jesus as the way home to earth as it is in heaven, to life whole and holy, full and forever, doesn't always take us the route we expect. Which is why we need the courage to [ask Jesus Thomas' question](#), "*How do we know the way?*" (Jn. 14:5), confessing to Jesus in the company of our fellow travelers that where and the way Jesus is taking us doesn't exactly look like we thought it would.

The fantastic thing about asking Jesus this question is that Jesus responds! And he does so in a manner that draws us into his vision for our lives and draws out of us the faith we need to believe (to trust) even when we don't see so clearly. But we are meant to see ever more clearly where Jesus is going and how we are getting there.

Jesus said as much in that famous final conversation before the cross. The same chat in which Thomas humbly and boldly questioned Jesus. Jesus said that we are friends who have been let in on all that the Father is doing (Jn. 15:15), we're no longer ignorant of the world as it really is. Jesus tells us and shows us through his life (and soon-to-be death and resurrection) the what, where, and how of life with God—the only life there is. So we best get in on it(!) as the apostle Paul said, act in ways that get what we are after in this resurrected life, this new, whole, and holy life that we are seeking when we respond to Jesus' invitation to follow him, what we desire in life with God our Father (Col. 3:1-4).

The problem is, we don't always know what we want, and even when we do, our desires seem mixed, muddled, or mostly immediate. So, [Jesus asks us a question](#): "*What do you want?*" (Matt. 20:20-34)

He asks us not to condemn or dismiss—no matter how naïve or self-absorbed or obvious our initial response might seem. **He asks to draw us into the depths of our desires, to the God-fashioned, Jesus-freed place where**

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Merton, *Bread In The Wilderness*, 13.

**we are who we truly are.** A place where God is working (“his energy deep within you”) and willing for his good pleasure. What is God’s good pleasure, you ask? Well, it is “*all things whether on earth or in heaven...reconciled to himself...through Jesus...in whom all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell...making peace by the blood Jesus’ cross.*” (Col. 1:19-20).

Or, as one translation puts it,

*We look at this Son [Jesus] and see the God who cannot be seen. We look at this Son and see God’s original purpose in everything created...everything got started in Jesus and finds its purpose in him. He...holds it all together right up to this moment. And when it comes to the church [those spiritual companions and family of faith], he organizes and holds it together, like a head does a body.*

*He was supreme in the beginning and—leading the resurrection parade—he is supreme in the end. From beginning to end he’s there, towering far above everything, everyone [as we saw in the Revelation]. So spacious is he, so roomy, that everything of God finds its proper place in him without crowding. Not only that, but all the broken and dislocated pieces of the universe—people and things, animals and atoms—get properly fixed and fit together in vibrant harmonies, all because of his death, his blood that poured down from the cross.*

(Col. 1:15-20).

Colossians 1 outlines for us what the writer of Hebrews calls the “elementary doctrine of Christ,” the “basic foundational truths” put in place by God himself (Heb. 6:1), on which our entire lives are lived. Our eating and sleeping, working and worship, our marrying and divorcing, our playing and praying, our calling and our cancer, our faithlessness, and our faith—everything experienced “in the context of a good creation [started in Jesus, supreme in the beginning] and an intended salvation [the resurrection parade, supreme in the end through Jesus]. Everything.”<sup>2</sup> Everything of God finds its proper place in relation to Jesus.

We probably think we’d stop here, and we should, often, in worship and awe of the Lamb Slain, alive and on the throne, “towering far above everything and everyone.” But worship is dynamic, not static. It is a lived response to all Christ is and is doing (Rom. 12:1-2), which is why John the beloved disciple said of these foundational truths, “*that’s only the beginning. Who knows how we’ll end up!*” (1 Jn. 3:2)

The author of Hebrews agrees, urging us to “*leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again a foundation*” (Heb. 6:1) because you are already standing on it! Jesus Christ is, as the apostle Paul said, the only foundation on which we can be built up to full maturity, into “the temple,” God’s dwelling (1 Cor. 3:10-17) the place where we are whole and holy. We know this! And while there are times when we forget, and need others to remind us, the truth is that we are not apt about building our lives on this foundation—at least not *skilled* at it like “master builders.”

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<sup>2</sup> Eugene Peterson: Working the Angles, 

The author of Hebrews points out this all-too-common problem on our journey home with Jesus and others. He says,

*About this we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become **dull of hearing**. [We don't [listen to see](#).] For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God [sayings of God]. You need milk, not solid food, for everyone who lives on milk is **unskilled** in the word of righteousness [relating rightly to God by hearing God's word and doing it (Lk. 8:21).], since he is a child [an infant]. But solid food is for the mature for those who have their **powers** [faculties, "organ of sense"] **of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil**. [To become like Jesus in seeing clearly what the Father is up to, the outcome of a 'union of wills' where what pleases God is the desire of our heart he satisfies.]*

(Heb. 5:11-14)

Remember that Jesus leads us to "the Father's house" (Jn. 14:1-7) to the presence of the One in whom we find "our whole nature and capacities are fulfilled." The apostle Paul describes what happens in this place which Jesus leads us, when "We look at this Son and see...God...and...God's original purposes in everything..." (Co. 1:15).

*But when one turns to the Lord [Jesus], the veil is removed. [The veil which hides what God is up to in our lives, in the lives of those we are following Jesus with, and the world we inhabit.]*

*Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. [Freedom in relational proximity, in the life Jesus came that we might have—life forever where our whole nature and capacities are fulfilled when face to face with God.]*

*And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. [As another translation describes it: "our lives gradually becoming brighter and more beautiful as God enters our lives and we become like him."]*

*For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit. [From the will, the desire of God to be near us.]*

(2 Corinthians 3:16-18)

When we see Jesus when we recognize God and his purposes in our daily living and in the lives of one another. Over time, we begin to see more and more clearly, discerning both what God is up to and who we are—what part we play, what our life in its fullness truly is in his unfolding drama of salvation, his gracious operations, and persistent will at work.

Discernment, according to Ruth Haley Barton, "is an increasing capacity to recognize and respond to the presence of [Jesus]—in ordinary moments and also in the larger decisions in our lives."<sup>3</sup> As the author of Hebrews noted, discernment is the *skill* of noticing Jesus with us developed by constant practice. A *skill* in faith

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<sup>3</sup> Ruth Haley Barton, *Life Together In Christ: experiencing transformation in community*, 138.

that helps us see clearly the path no matter how high or low, treacherous or smooth, confined or open the terrain at the moment.

And, as always, we need spiritual companions to help us hone this skill, building one another up by maturing our faculties through practice. We see an example of this in [John 9:1-41](#).

This story takes place after one of those “aw-ha” moments with Jesus when we see Jesus and through him see what God is up to:

*Jesus spoke to them, saying, 'I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.*

*I have much to say about you and much to judge, but he who sent me is true, and I declare to the world what I have heard from him.*

(John 8:12, 26)

The disciples, and many others, saw and discerned Jesus—“the light of the world”—as the One shining a light on the paths that lead to harm, loss, and death, as well as the way to the Father and what the Father takes pleasure in (Jn. 8:12-32)—

*So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him, 'If you abide in my word you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.'*

(Jn. 8:31-32)

only to have their discernment immediately challenged (Jn. 8:33-59)

*They said to Jesus, 'We were not born of sexual immorality (like the stories about your birth)...*

*...you are a Samaritan and have a demon...*

*...Who do you make yourself out to be?*

(John 8:41, 48, 53)

The challenge is internal and external. Like you and me, the disciples were challenged by their own or others ignorance (what we think we know but don't), and pride (what we think we don't need), and our enemy (who still trying to make God out to be against us, not for us). Have you ever been there, in a place where you thought you could see Jesus, discerning what God was up to, only to find yourself pushing back on what you discerned, questioning if you had seen clearly, heard accurately, were following the right spirit?

How did you feel afterward, specifically about your ability to live by faith? Infantile? Unsure? That's how I imagine the disciples felt after Jesus' interactions in John 8, especially the final skirmish that escalates when Jesus lets a large part of the crowd around him know that the reason they are hard of hearing is because they are listening to the wrong voice, the devil's voice. Of course, they didn't like that, so they, and I quote, “*picked up stones to throw at Jesus, but Jesus hid himself and went out of the temple.*” (8:59).

We now enter the scene of John 9. Jesus' apprentices are a bit apprehensive about their ability to distinguish good and evil, even in a rather ordinary situation. To their credit, they are at least not afraid to ask for help.

Here they are, walking out of the temple and passing by a known blind man. While this might sound strange to us, a blind man at the temple, whether begging for money (an acceptable trade for the handicap) or looking for healing, would have been a common scene. Most likely, he is a beggar, a regular who is there, probably brought by his family to contribute to the family good in the only way he could. We know this because the disciples know him, at least a bit of his story. Listen to their question in verse 2,

*And Jesus disciples asked Jesus, 'Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?'*

How do they know he was born blind? The only answer is that they knew him or of him and that this was not an unexpected situation but a rather ordinary or familiar interaction. Wearied, confused, and feeling a bit unsure from the previous see-saw interactions, the disciples are unable to discern heads from tails in how life in the kingdom works (and thus their place within), so they ask Jesus for some help. And he does. Verse 3

*Jesus answered, 'It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him.'*

Not “through,” as if he was some mere illustration, but “in him,” as one loved by the One who lovingly formed, fashioned, and makes him whole. Having discerned that this man’s trouble was not the result of sin (evil), **Jesus distinguishes that he is good and meant for good (as we’ll see) and that Jesus’ role (and that of his apprentices) was to participate in God working to bring about that goodness.** Verse 4

*We [Jesus and his apprentices] must work the works of him who sent me while it is day [while we can see clearly]; night is coming, when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.'*

Jesus encourages the disciples to hold fast to what they saw of Jesus, what they discerned, before the ignorance and pride of others (including their own), in tandem with the enemy, made them question who/what they saw. Jesus is indeed the light of the world, the light of life, who shows us what the Father is up to and how we can respond. And then Jesus does what he desired, what the Father wanted, willed, purposed. Verse 6

*Having said these things, Jesus spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva. Then he anointed the man’s eyes with the mud and said to him, 'Go, wash in the pool of Siloam' (which means Sent). So he went and washed and came back seeing.*

This man saw so clearly that though he was being pressed by those who were not listening (dull of hearing), and thus missing Jesus completely (v. 13-29), trying to convince the newly sighted that he didn’t see straight, trying to get him to question what he discerned God was doing in the presence of Jesus, he could not help but provide a most vivid witness. Verse 30

*The man answered, 'Why this is an amazing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. We know that God does not listen to sinners, but if anyone is a worshiper of God and does his will, God listens to him. Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a man born blind. If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.'*

Like Jesus in the previous chapter, this man’s discernment of good and evil did not sit well with the ones in the temple (for the same issues). So they responded similarly (albeit without a little less vitriol, but no less consequential for his daily living) as they did to Jesus, “they cast him out.” (v. 34)

But Jesus wouldn't let this man get too far (v. 35-38).

*Jesus heard that they had cast him out, and having found him, Jesus said, 'Do you believe in the Son of Man?' The no-longer-blind man answered, 'And who is he, sir, that I may believe in him?' Jesus said to him, 'You have seen him, and it is he who is speaking to you.' The once-blind man said, 'Lord, I believe,' and he worshiped Jesus.*

Jesus searched this man out, found him, and affirmed and confirmed what this once-blind man saw, that the discernment he witnessed to before the temple leaders was true. And that indeed, Jesus came for that very purpose (v. 39):

*Jesus said, 'For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see, and those who see may become blind.'*

So, if we want to discern what God is doing and how we join in at this moment, in our lives, the lives of our fellow apprentices and pilgrims, and even what he is doing with us collectively, we need to help one another notice Jesus, together. Affirm and confirm what we are seeing, discerning with Jesus *"For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit"* (2 Cor. 3:18).

Now I think I know what many of us thinking when we hear the word "discernment." We are thinking about discerning what to do regarding those significant decisions around life. Job opportunities, pursuing our calling/desires, facing a difficult situation, etc. And while that is undoubtedly an aspect of discernment, the method to train up our faculties in discernment is to do so in our everyday moments and ordinary life with others.

Barton helpfully explains it. She says,

*"Growing in the habit of recognizing the presence of Jesus and what he is up to—in our lives, our community and the world around us—is the best possible preparation for discerning larger decisions when they come along. Surrounding ourselves with at least a few folks who are cultivating discernment and staying with them for the long haul so that we have a history of recognizing Christ together is the surest foundation for discerning the larger decisions we face."<sup>4</sup>*

In our group of spiritual companions, we develop a habit of noticing Jesus' presence in our lives individually and collectively. Pointing out and affirming what he is up to at this moment. And it takes time together and at length (over time) to really see him clearly (and to notice what keeps us from not seeing so clearly as many in the story from John 8-9 didn't).

Noting Jesus together requires two things from/for each other. **One**, "a growing friendship with Jesus," which hones our attentiveness and can be developed individually using the following Jesus practices. And **two**, a relational commitment (like Ally, Rori, Leslie, Reagan, Catherine, Ally C. have done—shout out to [the podcast](#)). A willingness and persistence in being together, so we can take note of what God is up to, and join him! Here is a practice to help us begin to make noticing Jesus together, a normal thing.

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 140.

## TOGETHER PRACTICE<sup>5</sup> | [Taking Note of Jesus](#)

### SONG #4

#### COMMUNION

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, 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 who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

(Philippians 2:1-11)

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<sup>5</sup> This practice is adapted from several practices and suggestions in Barton, 141-147.