

## Across the Threshold, Into the Questions

### Chapter One

Re-read the passage from Mark 8. As it opens, we meet Jesus and the disciples as they are about to enter the villages of Caesarea Philippi. This is a literal and figurative turning point in the story of Jesus' journey from Nazareth in Galilee. These villages are as far north as his ministry of healing, teaching, and preaching will take him before he changes direction and sets his face south toward Jerusalem.

Enter into the story by seeing yourself among those on the road with Jesus. You see him turn to his disciples and hear him ask, "Who do people say I am?"

You begin pondering the reasons why Jesus might ask this question about what people say. The disciples answer that people say Jesus is John the Baptist, Elijah, or one of the prophets. Take time to explore images, memories, thoughts that may come to mind if you remember stories and information about these biblical characters.

- According to the disciples, what are people not saying in response to Jesus' question?

Next, Jesus asks his disciples, "But who do you say I am?" You notice that only Peter responds.

- What might be reasons and possibilities for the others' silence?

Stay in character as one traveling with Jesus and draw a line down the middle of a blank piece of paper. On one side, record nouns and phrases to answer the question: "Who do I say Jesus is?" On the other side, write down who, in your eyes, he is not.

In ancient times, Jews believed that the role of the messiah—an anointed one—would be to usher in a messianic age that would change the world. In those days, prophets, priests, and kings were anointed. But rather than endowing one with divinity, anointing was a call to take on a mantle of responsibility and receive the authority to be heard and to even make things happen that would result in "sight for all who were blind" and the "release of all who were captive."

- In your own words, how would you reword Peter's answer to Jesus?

As soon as Peter answers, Jesus "sternly" orders all the disciples not to tell anyone. Definitions of the word sternly include rigid, strict, and uncompromising as well as severe and allowing no leeway. Synonyms for the word sternly include strictly, harshly, firmly, hardheartedly, unsympathetically, and austerely. The definitions and synonyms just mentioned are for the word sternly in English. The original Greek *epitimao* is stronger and means rebuke, sternly admonish, censure, and warn.

- Why do you think Jesus might have reacted this way?
- Jesus responds with neither a yes nor a no. Why?
- If you were to imagine Jesus asking himself the question, "Who do I say I am?" how might he answer his own question?

Go back through the chapters of your life.

- Who along the way in your family, among friends, and in other personal and professional relationships helped to define who you were and who you are?
- Are there ones who never understood who you were, who you aspired to be, who you've become, and who you are becoming?

Stop whatever you are doing and sit quietly, or look in the mirror, or go stand in the midst of a crowded room, mall, or a place away from home and ask yourself, "Who do I say I am?"

## Chapter 2

In this passage Jesus calls two sets of brothers to “follow” him. Simon and his brother Andrew are “casting nets.” James and his brother John are “mending nets.” As you think about these jobs, describe them and the ways, in today’s world, that people “cast” and “mend” their nets.

Jesus’ invitation to Simon and Andrew is a clever play—on words. They obediently follow, just as James and John did. Name some of the tugs and pulls that would have pushed them to follow Jesus, and those that would have yanked them back to continuing to “cast” or “mend” their nets.

“Immediately he called them.”

- Outside of a religious or institutional church setting, who or what calls people like you and me?
- What might we be called out of, or called into, or called to do, or called to be, or even called not to do, or not to be?
  - How do we discern where a call comes from or who calls us? External signs of a call might be? And the signs in our hearts or souls that indicate that we hear a call?
- What obstacles appear that can distort, confuse, or impede this discernment?
- Once we hear a call, what forces influence people like you and me and keep us from responding?
- And what are the forces, both external and internal, that have the power to pull us away from “casting” and “mending” to follow the call?

Name the nets that you “cast” and “mend” daily.

- Do other forces call you in another direction?
- If so, why do you continue to cast and mend?
- What might the promise be?
  - What might be the promise of abandoning your nets to follow a calling?
  - And what might the cost be?
- What resources could you employ to discern which path you might choose to follow?

## Chapter 3

The story about Jesus in Matthew’s Gospel opens after King Herod orders John the Baptist to be decapitated. Herod had imprisoned John, the one who baptized Jesus, after the Baptist criticized the monarch for having an affair and marrying his brother Phillip’s wife. Jesus’ disciples get the news, claim John’s body, and bury him before telling Jesus that John is dead. In response, Jesus seeks time alone in a deserted place. However, the crowds hear about this and follow him. Jesus responds by ministering to the sick, and despite the disciples’ pleas to send them away, he tells them instead to feed the crowd. When the disciples complain that there is not enough food and they have only five loaves and two fish, Jesus assures them otherwise, blesses the food, and all get fed. As the story that follows opens, Jesus once again tries to find solitude. He sends the disciples away in a boat and then he goes up a mountain to pray.

Put yourself in Jesus’ place and see this story as though it were a movie. Focus on the scene where Jesus gets the news that John, whom some said (in the Gospel of Luke) was a cousin, whom many considered a prophet as dynamic as Elijah (whom some considered—and some still consider— to be the Messiah), and with whom Jesus had a profoundly spiritual and intimate encounter at the Jordan River, has been murdered for speaking his truth.

Remember a time and place when you received news of the unexpected death of a leader, teacher, mentor, or relative whom you respected for his or her ideals, values, ethics, or truth-

telling. What were

- the first words you thought or said on learning that this person had died unexpectedly?
- the feelings that swirled from your heart throughout your body to your head and the tips of your fingers and toes?
- the places you wanted to go, things you wanted to do next, and people whom you wanted to see and talk to or not see and talk to?

See the disciples as they move far from the shore in a boat. The weather conditions begin to change when evening comes, and the disciples, now alone, find themselves battered by waves, with the wind against them.

- As the sea becomes more turbulent, what might they be saying to one another about Jesus? Being left without him? The day's events? Being far from land? The wind against them? The battering waves?

After a long night, morning comes, and upon seeing Jesus walking on the sea toward them, the disciples become terrified. They believe they are seeing a ghost. As he approaches, Jesus says, "Take heart" and "do not be afraid." Peter replies, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water." Jesus replies, "Come."

- How do you hear Peter's statement: "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water"?
  - Is this a challenge? If so, why might Peter present it?
  - Is this a request? If so, why might Peter make it?
- How might you rewrite Peter's odd statement to Jesus and what he is really asking for?

Peter sets out on the water to meet Jesus, but, noticing the strong wind, he becomes frightened, begins to sink, and calls out to Jesus to save him.

- Although Peter's motive to walk on the water is not revealed, what do you know of garnering up courage to do something unknown, entering into the process of doing it, becoming frightened in the face of strong wind, and finding yourself sinking after setting out?
- Who have you called to—either silently or aloud—to "save" you?
  - What did you want or expect this person to do?

Describe the positive and negative aspects of the power that doubt has had during fearful and challenging times in your life.

- And the power the strong wind had over you during those times?

Jesus refers to "little faith."

- In the context of this story, what does Jesus imply about faith?
- How would you define "faith" during such times in your life?
  - And the ways in which doubt and faith are related?
- When calm came after a time of adverse wind and battering waves, what more did you know about your faith (and your "little" faith), and even doubt, that you didn't know before?

## Chapter 4

"In those days," Martha, a first-century Jewish woman, had her own home. Consider what this suggests about her. Now see Martha as she watches Jesus enter her village and welcomes him into her home.

- As Jesus moves toward the entrance, how might Martha look and feel?
  - And what might her expectations be of this encounter with Jesus?

Many tasks and worries distract Martha. Name them and what they seemingly distract her from.

- In what ways might those distractions have served Martha?

Assuming that an inner Martha and Mary play roles, come alive, and direct your life at certain times and under certain circumstances, wonder about times when one or the other dominates your world.

- How do you use many tasks—working extra hours, housecleaning, shopping, preparing food, attending meetings, mowing the lawn, washing the car, managing finances, or even attending social events— as ways to be distracted?
- Is there a known risk you might have to take, or a fear you would have to face, or a worry you would have to set aside, or an anxiety you would have to manage if you weren't distracted?
- Are there times when your inner “Martha’s” approach to hospitality truly serves you and makes you feel welcome and comfortable in certain circumstances?
  - When does her busyness cause you to resent or be annoyed and even angry with others who do not share your concerns, worries, anxieties?
- And Mary—when and how does she come into the picture and allow you to sit and listen?

Mary sat at Jesus' feet and listened to what he was saying. When Martha complains to him about her sister, he replies: there is need of only one thing. To what might Jesus be referring?

- When given opportunities to welcome a voice that knows more about that one thing and may speak of it, how have your tasks, worries, and other distractions taken over, controlled the moment, and prevented you from listening?
- Why do the distractions that run on auto-pilot within you have that power?
  - When did they claim it?
- Who or what can stop you from being distracted and transform you from a human doing into a human being who makes time to quietly listen with focused attention?

Throughout the story, Mary and Martha never speak to each other and Mary says nothing while she listens to Jesus. Retell this story from Mary's perspective. If Martha and Mary were to have a conversation after Jesus leaves, what might each say to the other?

## Chapter 5

Before entering into this story about Jesus, describe in your words what is taking place in the exchange between Jesus and the Pharisees.

Now read the passages below from the Torah. List or underline verbs and phrases that specify what one should and should not do on the Sabbath.

Remember the Sabbath day, and keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work. But the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God; you shall not do any work—you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your livestock, or the alien resident in your towns. For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but rested the seventh day; therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and consecrated it. (Exodus 20:8–11)

Six days you shall do your work, but on the seventh day you shall rest, so that your ox and your donkey may have relief, and your homeborn slave and the resident alien may be refreshed. Be attentive to all that I have said to you.

But the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God; you shall not do any work—you, or your son or your daughter, or your male or female slave, or your ox or your donkey, or any of your livestock, or the resident alien in your towns, so that your male and female slave may rest as well as you. Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm; therefore the LORD your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day. (Exodus 23:12–14)

Offer reasons why the leader of the Pharisees would have asked Jesus to join him for a Shabbat meal?

As Jesus ventures forth, imagine that you are one of the Pharisees who, along with the lawyers, are watching him closely.

- Watching him for what?

Suddenly, a man with dropsy appears in front of Jesus. Dropsy is an archaic term for edema, an abnormal buildup of fluid between cells. Seeing this man, you make some assumptions about him based upon his appearance.

- Is there anything else you know about him?

According to the Gospel, this man never asks Jesus for anything. However, upon seeing the man, Jesus asks you, the other Pharisees, and the lawyers—all people grounded in Jewish law—a question about curing on the Sabbath.

- How do you explain your silence in response to Jesus' question about the Sabbath?

Describe your reaction to Jesus then taking the man, and when the man was healed, sending him on his way.

Write, in your own words, what you hear in the law and between the lines when Jesus speaks of pulling an ox or a child out of the well on the Sabbath.

- Again, when Jesus makes the comparison, no one says anything to him. Do you have unspoken thoughts and responses?

Explain differences between obeying the letter of the laws that govern our land and institutional religious practices and beliefs—and living into and out of the intent of those same laws.

- Who comes to mind when you think about those who know the law, respect the law, champion the law, and yet interpret and re-interpret the law?
  - Do particular thoughts, actions, or deeds stand out for you?
- Where in your daily life, psyche, and soul do you feel bound up by “authorities”?

Remember a time when you dared to make your own decisions over and against the conventional and established interpretations of laws, and commandments in your home, educational institution, workplace, religious community, neighborhood, or country.

- What prompted your choice?
- In retrospect, was it worth it?

## **Chapter 6**

### **About Samaritans**

On the way to Jerusalem, Jesus was traveling between Samaria, a foreign land, and Galilee—home base. Samaria was the capital of the northern kingdom that dated back to the split of the

united empire in the days following Solomon's reign. According to Biblical scholars, ten of the twelve tribes descended from Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob became a kingdom in the north called Israel. In the south, the two remaining tribes became the kingdom called Judah (later Judea). The Assyrians occupied and destroyed Israel in 722 BCE and afterward they moved part of the native population out and people from elsewhere in the Middle East in. These diverse inhabitants called themselves Samaritans. They practiced the Israelite religion and used their own version of the five books of Moses as their Bible. Instead of worshipping at the Temple in Jerusalem, they built their own version of the Temple on Mount Gerizim in the fourth century BCE. Scholars report that in Jesus' time the Samaritans and the Jews each claimed the same God, the same ancestry, and the same text. Like any religious rivals—Catholics and Protestants in various locations, or Sunni and Shi'ite—the two groups loathed each other.

### **About "leprosy"**

What the Israelites considered to be a "leprous disease" is defined in the Torah (Leviticus 13) and includes a number of various skin ailments and sores. It also prescribes the behavior of one who has been deemed "leprous":

The person who has the leprous disease shall wear torn clothes and let the hair of his head be disheveled; and he shall cover his upper lip and cry out, "Unclean, unclean." He shall remain unclean as long as he has the disease; he is unclean. He shall live alone; his dwelling shall be outside the camp. (Lev. 13:45–46)

However, in Jesus' time, Jews were no longer in a "camp" traveling with the Ark of the Covenant, and people with leprosy were no longer restricted to living alone and dwelling "outside the camp."

Look off into the distance and see the same people with leprosy that Jesus sees. Write down a list of words that describe your immediate impressions of them physically and figuratively.

Upon seeing Jesus, the ten call do not call out, "Unclean, unclean." Instead, they call out "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!" In your own words, define "mercy" and in particular describe the "mercy" that the people with leprosy are asking for.

The text says, "he saw them." Rephrase what Jesus sees besides ten leprous men.

- Jesus tells the lepers to present themselves to the priests in accordance with Jewish law (Leviticus 14). "And as they went, they were made clean. Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, he turned back, praising God with a loud voice." The Greek word for "made clean" is *katharizo*, meaning cleanse or purify or declare ritually acceptable. The Greek word for "healed" is *iaomai*, which means cured of disease or restored. What does this add to your reading?

"[W]hen he saw that he was healed . . . he prostrated himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him. And he was a Samaritan." Only after the healing do we learn that the one who returns was the Samaritan—the foreigner—living in community with nine Jews suffering from the same physical condition. Considering the animosity between the Jews and the Samaritans in those days:

- As a Samaritan, how might he have felt living among Jews?
- As a "leper," how might he have viewed his place in society?
- As a Samaritan "leper," how might he have viewed his relationship to the other "lepers" in his community?

When the Samaritan returns praising God, Jesus says, ". . . your faith has made you well." The Greek word for "made well" is *sozo* and is translated as save, deliver, preserve, cure, and make whole. Express in your own words the relationship between faith and healing in this story.

After telling the Samaritan that his faith has made him well, Jesus tells him to go.

- Go where? To do what? With whom?

Name the men and women in today's world who get labeled the way "lepers" were labeled in the time of Jesus.

- How do those labeled this way in today's world "keep their distance" either alone or in community?
- How do people in your world keep them at a distance?
- To whom are these people shouting, and what are the mercies they ask for?

Expand your perspective by casting people in the world today who get pejoratively labeled "lepers" and "Samaritans" in your own version of this story. Describe the plot, the players, and those who respond to cries for mercy.

Look in a mirror and within yourself, and name parts of you that either you or another may have consciously or unconsciously labeled "leper."

- Can you name ways in which people have kept their distance from you?
  - In what ways have you distanced yourself from this part of you?
- Do these parts of your body, mind, or spirit ever call out for "mercy"?
  - If so, what are they really asking you to do?
- Where must you go or what must you do for that part of you to feel cleansed, healed, and restored?
- How might praising God be a part of your healing and cleansing process?
- And for you, what is the meaning of a "faith" that might cause you to be made well?

## Chapter 7

This passage opens with Jesus saying: "You have heard it said. . . ." When you hear such a phrase, what pops into your mind?

The oft-quoted commandment "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth" is attributed to Moses. It appears in the books of Exodus, Deuteronomy, and Leviticus. Here is the Scripture in context:

Exodus 21:22–24:

When people who are fighting injure a pregnant woman so that there is a miscarriage, and yet no further harm follows, the one responsible shall be fined what the woman's husband demands, paying as much as the judges determine. If any harm follows, then you shall give life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, stripe for stripe.

Leviticus 24:19–20:

Anyone who maims another shall suffer the same injury in return: fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for tooth; the injury inflicted is the injury to be suffered.

Deuteronomy 19:15–21:

A single witness shall not suffice to convict a person of any crime or wrongdoing in connection with any offense that may be committed. Only on the evidence of two or three witnesses shall a charge be sustained. If a malicious witness comes forward to accuse someone of wrongdoing, then both parties to the dispute shall appear before the LORD, before the priests and the judges who are in office in those days, and the judges shall make a thorough inquiry. If the witness is a false witness, having testified falsely against another, then you shall do to the false witness just as the false witness had meant to do to the other. So you shall purge the evil from your midst. The rest shall hear and be afraid, and a crime such as this shall never again be committed among you. Show no pity: life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for

hand, foot for foot.

- How have others—parents, clergy, teachers, media—interpreted this mandate for you?
  - Do you agree with them?
  - What more might you conclude, say, or add?

After quoting Moses, Jesus says, “Do not resist an evildoer.”

- Who might the “evildoers” be in your own life and in the world around you?
- Describe the usual ways in which people like us physically, psychically, and spiritually resist and oppose evildoers overseas, in our communities, homes, and families.
- Normally, how do you defend against and resist evildoers in places far away and as close as your most intimate circles?
  - And those in your psyche and soul—what defenses do you use to resist their voices, urges, and threats?

In your own words, explain or outline the process and the implications of not resisting an evildoer.

Jesus says, “But I say.”

- Does Jesus’ use of the word but serve to clarify, expand, enhance, discount, or imply something overlooked or ignored about the intent of the ancient law?

Setting aside any preconceived notions you may have about this passage, think about the physical and psychic processes involved in turning the other cheek, giving your coat and cloak, and going the extra mile in the face of an evildoer. Think, too, of the potential outcomes.

- Does Jesus call for passivity or something else?
  - If something else, how would you elaborate on his words?

In your lifetime, who, when, where, and why did someone you respect and admire stand firm in the face of an evildoer and then turn the other cheek, give coat and cloak, or go the extra mile?

- And you?

## **Chapter 8**

Jesus breaks this teaching into two parts. The first recalls the literal words of one of the Ten Commandments with Jesus’ additional commentary. The second is a process for bringing one’s gift to the altar.

Think about the word murder and see it as it appears in the headlines, in movies, on the nightly news, and possibly across town, around the corner, or even closer. Describe and explore its causes and effects literally and figuratively.

- How do words, judgments, conscious and unconscious actions and interactions with others cause people like us to feel as though a part of us has been killed?
- Where, when, and how have you experienced such a sudden and dramatic end to a relationship with another person or a part of your life?
  - And your way of reacting immediately or years later?

In the opening sentences of the passage, Jesus relates murder and anger toward one’s brother or sister to judgment, councils, and even the fires of hell. Ponder the psychic implications of those liabilities.

Jesus refers to “the” altar that plays a central role in this passage. Enter into this phase of Jesus’ teaching by recalling that before the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 CE, Jews



took sacrificial gifts such as the fruits of their harvests to the Temple in Jerusalem. If an animal was to be sacrificed, they purchased it upon arriving in Jerusalem. The altar in the Temple was restricted to the Temple priests, who made the offerings. Not all sacrifices related to “moral sins.” Many were thanksgiving offerings, or offerings regarding ritual purity (such as the offering Mary and Joseph make in Luke’s gospel).

Revisit an encounter with an altar that you visited for a specific reason.

- What hopes, beliefs, or expectations went with you that you felt you could not experience another way?
- When, if ever, have you taken a gift with you to place on an altar?
  - Why?

In speaking of one’s journey to placing a gift at the altar, Jesus directs your attention to “something” that a brother or sister may have against you. Name “somethings” that others called “brothers” and “sisters” may have against us.

- When have you known one of them to harbor one or more of those “somethings” toward you?
  - And your response to and feelings about the other’s position?
- What, for you, did it mean or could it mean to be reconciled to that person?
- What, for you, did it mean or could it mean to be reconciled with that person?

Imagine yourself as the prime player in this teaching. Picture an altar you have visited or take time to create one of your own on a table or rug or corner of a room, or in a garden, under a tree, or somewhere else that feels appropriate. Select an item that has a special meaning to represent “your gift,” or draw or make one from clay or found objects. Before moving toward the altar with this gift in hand, reread Jesus’ teaching and specific directions for approaching the altar. Then actually follow his instructions or create a collage or timeline describing it. On the way remember, leave your gift, be reconciled to your “brother” or “sister,” and finally return to make your offering. Once the offering is made, write about the journey.

- Is there something that comes from not leaving the gift first that could not happen in any other way?

## Chapter 9

“And just then some people were carrying a paralyzed man lying on a bed.”

Close your eyes and look at this scene. Describe the paralyzed man’s face, body, and clothes as he lies on the bed others carry.

- Who are the people who carry his bed and how do they look?

Listen in on the conversation between those who help carry the bed, and the conversations they have with the paralyzed man.

- What are they saying to each other?

Consider the possible causes of paralysis for a person in the time of Jesus.

- How would such paralysis limit someone?
- How might that person be treated by family members, friends, neighbors, and strangers?

“When Jesus saw their faith . . .”

- What might the paralyzed man and/or his friends have done or said that Jesus would label as “faith?”

In the world around us people like you and me suffer from physical, emotional, and spiritual paralysis.

- What forces, from outside or from within, may contribute to their inability to function, impair their ability to act on their own behalf, or render them powerless?

In what areas of your life might you be paralyzed?

- How have you been limited by this inability to fully function?
- What physical, emotional, or spiritual trauma or dis-ease may have contributed to your paralysis?

“Take heart, son; your sins are forgiven.” The root of the word sin comes from the Greek hamartia, which is an archery term meaning “falling short of or missing the mark.”

- What might Jesus imply about the relationship between “sin” and paralysis?
- Past or present—what are the “marks” that you fall short of, or miss entirely, that you or others call “sins”?
- How might your “falling short of or actually missing the mark” be related to your paralysis?
- What has to happen for you to believe you are forgiven?
- Where might you have to go, or what might you have to do?
- Upon believing you have received forgiveness of those sins, what might heal in your life?

Name those in your life who might show up, or those whom you might call upon, to help you get to a place where you believe that your sins are forgiven and you can experience healing.

“When the crowds saw it, they were filled with awe, and they glorified God, who had given such authority to human beings.”

- To what does this “authority” refer? The power to forgive sins? To heal? Both? Something else?
- To which “human beings” did God give this “authority”? To Jesus? To the paralytic? To his helpers? To the crowds? To everyone?
- If God has given “such authority to human beings” and that includes you, what can you do with it?

## Chapter 10

See yourself as a poor, hungry, or despairing person who is in the crowd listening to Jesus. In Matthew’s gospel Jesus speaks about people like you and says that they are blessed. In Luke’s gospel Jesus speaks directly to you and says that you are blessed.

As a poor, hungry, or despairing person among others in the crowd, listen closely to Jesus’ words and determine if one Gospel version resonates with your mind, heart, and spirit more than the other.

Economic poverty occurs when one lacks currencies such as money and other kinds of wealth.

- What are other forms of poverty in the world and the currencies that define them?

Look at those around you who are “poor in spirit” and name the currencies that they lack.

People “weep” and “mourn” over losses. List literal and figurative losses that make people weep.

- And what besides the death of loved ones, friends, and even strangers do people mourn?

Physical hunger is satisfied with food.

- How does a “hunger and thirst for righteousness” get satisfied?
  - And other hungers?

Look through windows that let you see the poor, hungry, and despairing people throughout the world. Make note of the social, economic, and political forces that allowed them to become poor, hungry, or despairing and keep them entrenched in their poverty, hunger, or place of despair. Name those people, individually and collectively, who provide a word or deed that tells these people they are blessed.

Closer to home, look around you at people who live in emotional or spiritual poverty, who hunger for relationship, love, and meaning, and who despair over losses real and imagined.

- What words or deeds would tell them: “You are blessed”?

Ask yourself where, when, and how you feel poor today.

- What do you lack that makes you poor?
- In your poverty, has there been someone who recognized your physical, emotional, or spiritual poverty?
- If you had enough currency to relieve your poverty, what would you gain?
  - Would you also feel as though something was lost in the process?

Think about that for which you hunger today.

- What would it take for that hunger to feel satisfied?

And those times when you have wept:

- What caused the weeping?
- Did anyone show up to comfort you as you wept?

Reach back in time and recall when your body, mind, or spirit felt impoverished. Remember how you hungered for something besides food or wept endlessly. Now know that time in another way. Stand, move around, kneel, or curl up as one who is poor, or hungry, or weeping.

Now take a couple of deep breaths and listen for a voice that says: “Blessed are you.” Again, begin to move, stand, or kneel as one who knows they are blessed.

Take time reflect in your journal.

- Has someone ever blessed you when you felt impoverished?
- Who have you called blessed?
- Who in the world around you or in your own house—in their poverty, or hunger, or grief — waits to be blessed by your words or actions?
- What poverty, or hunger, or grief in your life still waits for a blessing?
  - Where might it come from?
  - What would it look like?

## Chapter 11

Throughout Jesus’ lifetime, Judea was ruled by the Roman Empire and occupied by Roman armies. The Temple he entered in Jerusalem was the second of two successive sanctuaries in the holy city. Both replaced the portable sanctuary known as the tabernacle that the ancient

Hebrews used to contain the Ark of the Covenant during their stay in the wilderness. Within the Temple, the innermost chamber—the Holy of Holies— replaced the tabernacle and contained the Ark. In 586 BCE, the Babylonians destroyed the First Temple, built by King Solomon in 957 BCE, and they exiled the Jews to Babylonia. In 538 BCE the Jews returned from exile and by 516 BCE had rebuilt the Second Temple. Around 20 BCE, approximately eighteen years into the reign of Herod, king of the Jews, the monarch enlarged the building and the surrounding area and lavishly adorned the structure with gold and silver. At the time of Mark’s account of Jesus entering the Temple, Pontius Pilate is the Roman prefect (governor). The high priests in the Temple were no longer of priestly descent, but Roman appointees.

The vignette of Jesus going to the Temple takes place immediately after he and his disciples enter the gates of Jerusalem. People greet Jesus by spreading their garments and leafy branches cut from the fields on the road. Those who went before Jesus and the disciples and those who followed cried out words from Psalm 118: “Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.” Hosanna is a cry of praise to God that is also translated from the Hebrew as “save, please” or by extension “save now.” Jesus then enters the Temple.

Pick a religious, political, national, or financial building or monument that symbolizes and even makes concrete one or more of your most deeply held beliefs and the center of your being. Recall as many reasons as possible why it feels so significant to you. Include not only the positive aspects of what it has stood for, undergone, and survived historically but negative and disappointing ones as well.

Now sit or stand quietly. When you are ready, imagine Jesus’ feelings on arriving at an entry gate to Jerusalem after his long journey throughout Galilee. See him finally entering the holy city on a beast of burden. Next, picture him arriving at the Temple and then moving into and through the entryway. The definition of the word everything is “all the items, actions, or facts in a given situation.” Think about, list, or express with art materials what Jesus sees while looking at “everything.”

In your mind or in reality revisit a structure in a major city, your hometown, your house, or your imagination that serves as the definitive symbol of your most deeply held morals and values in the world around you and within. Before entering this space, think about events, hopes, plans, expectations, and dreams that it may embody for you. Look with an eagle’s eye around, above, below, beyond, and within you at everything.

After looking around at everything, literally and metaphorically unpack the phrase “as it was already late.”

- Is it?

## Chapter 12

Jesus says one should “strive” to enter through the narrow door. Describe in your own words what it means “to strive” and to “try.”

Locate doorways in your daily life and see those with and without actual doors. Envision familiar ones that you approach, enter, cross from one side to the other and then exit and, perhaps, close behind you. See others that you routinely avoid in your home, workplace, school, shopping centers, homes of friends and relatives, or when traveling. Popular posters titled “The Doors of San Francisco,” “The Doors of New York,” “The Doors of Cleveland,” even “The Doors of Provence” feature rows and columns of local doors. Sit and imagine what a poster of the significant doorways in your life would look like. Or actually create that poster. Use family photos, drawings, and other resources to express doorways that you strove to enter—whether or not you actually passed through.

Recall the feelings and body language that you experience as you approach or intentionally steer clear of some of these doors.

- Where are the narrow doors that you have striven to enter?
- Figuratively, what made them “narrow”?

Jesus said, “. . . for many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able.”

- When have you tried to go from one place to another in your life and found yourself faced with a narrow door you could not enter?
- Where in your striving did you stop trying? In attempts to get started? When you looked back? Along the way? At the threshold?
- If you strove as far as the threshold but found you could not go one step farther to move beyond it, what real obstacles prevented you? – And imagined obstacles such as memories, old audio and video tapes playing in your psyche, and fears?
- Recalling that time, how did it feel to strive, to see, to stand poised, but not risk taking steps to cross the threshold?
- Among those doorways and their thresholds are there ones you felt thrust into and across?
- Striving to enter through the narrow door has its costs. What did you pay for your decision to enter?
- Did you benefit from the striving even if you did not enter?

Name a narrow door that beckons you today and asks whether or not you are ready to strive to enter it.

- In the beckoning, what rational thoughts, mixed emotions, and potential disappointments prevent you from moving forward?
- If you are in process, what do you expect will change when you get to the other side?

### Chapter 13

This chapter of Jesus' story occurs immediately after his Passover dinner with his disciples. It ends with the legendary scene where Jesus' disciple Judas betrays him and he is arrested. Look again at the text and take note of words that paint vivid pictures of Jesus' emotional state and concerns in Gethsemane, a small olive grove outside of Jerusalem. Now ponder the options or alternative actions or plans that might be available to Jesus at this time.

- Assuming Jesus is a choicemaker, what are the choices he faces?
- What might be some of the costs and benefits of those choices?

As Jesus begins to pray, he calls God “Abba,” which means “father.” Consider all the other names and attributes—positive and negative—that are associated with the word father, and explore what the use of this word says to you about Jesus' relationship to God.

Jesus says, “All things are possible.”

- What is he affirming about God?

Rewrite in your own words what Jesus asks when he says, “Remove this cup.”

- In making that statement, what might Jesus be making known to “Abba”?
- “Not what I want”: Why must Jesus express his own will?
- “What you want”: Is this an inner struggle or a discernment?
- In your estimation does Jesus already know—and affirm his commitment to—God's will? Or is Jesus trying to discern what God's will could be?
- What more might Jesus know about himself and his relationship to “Abba,” as he expresses his will?
- How might Jesus' prayer unfold differences between God's plan and God's will?

Recall how you learned to pray, the times you found yourself praying, and the words you used. Recall the words you use during troubling times.

- What did you—or do you—hope for, want, or expect when voicing those prayers?

## Chapter 14

### de-ni-al *n*

1. a statement saying that something is not true or not correct
2. a refusal to allow people to have something that they want or that they believe they have a right to
3. an inability or a refusal to admit that something exists
4. a state of mind marked by a refusal or an inability to recognize and deal with a serious, personal problem
5. in a court of law, saying that you did not do something that you are accused of

Recalling other stories in the Gospels, how would you describe the relationship between Jesus and Peter? Name projections—thoughts, feelings, qualities, or impulses—that Peter may unconsciously place on Jesus.

All the disciples swear they will not deny Jesus. Peter does so vehemently and even says, “Even though I must die with you, I will not deny you.” The other disciples agree. Yet, when Jesus is arrested and taken to the high priest, Peter is the only one of the twelve who “follows at a distance.”

- What compels Peter to shadow Jesus?
  - Is it devotion? Honor? Fear? Duty? Self-interest? Curiosity? Anxiety? Something else?
- Besides the possibility of being arrested like Jesus, what other risks to his body or spirit might Peter face by following Jesus after his arrest?
  - What might be the risks to Peter’s psyche or spirit in not following Jesus?

As Peter sits among the guards and warms himself by the fire, a servantgirl comments: “You also were with Jesus, the man from Nazareth.” Peter denies the accusation: “And he went out into the forecourt. Then the cock crowed.” The cock crowing would indicate the impending dawn.

- What do those images add to your sense of what might be awakening in Peter?

Peter was accused three times of being an associate of Jesus. After the third accusation, “he began to curse, and he swore an oath.” Write in your own words what Peter might have said.

- To whom do you imagine the cursing is directed? The servant-girl, the guards, himself, Jesus? Someone else?
- And what about the oath—an oath saying what?

“[T]he cock crowed for the second time. Then Peter remembered. . . . And he broke down and wept.”

- In breaking down and weeping, what might Peter now know about himself that he didn’t know before?

Look around you at people you see at the mall, the grocery store, in your place of worship, in your workplace, your neighborhood, or even in your family, and wonder about the roles that denial plays in their lives.

- What does it protect them from, cover up, or keep at a distance?

Ask how and when denial has played a role in your life, and reflect on an event, thought, story, or encounter that may have compelled you, forced you, or seduced you into living in denial.

- What did it take for you to stop living in denial?
- In the days or years since then, what has changed?

Ponder the ways in which you might know or discover what you may be in denial about today and what you would do with that denial once you're aware of it.

- Are the costs of agreeing to live truthfully worth the promises?

## Chapter 15

Jesus prayed, "Father, hallowed be your name."

- When praying, why might it be important to name the Other?
- As for the word Father, what are the positive and negative aspects of this Father's nature?
- What other names or images for this Other are important to you?

"Your kingdom come."

- What might those words tell you or suggest about God's kingdom— then and now?

"Give us each day our daily bread." In your own words, describe the forms and the functions of this daily bread for you.

- Right at this moment, here, now, what is the bread you need the most?  
– Desire the most?

"And forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us." (In Matthew's Gospel this is translated: "Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.") Describe what you hear in Luke's Gospel when you encounter the word sin in your head, or in a Bible, or from a parent, friend, lover, partner, preacher, or rabbi.

- In asking for forgiveness, what are you asking?
- When or how have you known or experienced forgiveness for sins?

Synonyms for indebted include: in somebody's debt, obliged, beholden, and owing a favor.

- What are the economic implications of a debt for both parties?
- When have you been—or felt—indebted?

The prayer yokes our sins to our forgiveness of everyone indebted to us.

- How do you understand the relationship between sin and forgiving those indebted to us?

"And do not bring us to the time of trial."

- To what might the word trial be referring?
- Is there a time of trial in your life that you now face, fear, or deny?

Once again in Matthew's Gospel, the wording is different: "And do not bring us to the time of trial, but rescue us from the evil one." Those words are also translated as "rescue us from evil." In Greek, the word trial can also be translated as test or temptation.

Ponder a trial that you once endured or one that you are undergoing right now.

- How might the words test or temptation expand your ability to explain or comprehend the scope of this trial?

- Do you believe that there was an “evil one” or a particular form of evil that was responsible for bringing you into, thrusting you into, or seducing you into this time of trial?

Matthew’s prayer includes a petition to be rescued from the “evil one” or from “evil.” Other ways of saying that include being saved, freed, set free, liberated, salvaged, or let go.

- In your time(s) of trial, what would being rescued look like or feel like?

Rewrite either this prayer, or a version you remember, line by line in your own words. When you’re finished, sit with it. When you’re ready, in whatever way is comfortable for you, say it or pray it silently or aloud.

## Chapter 16

Go to a quiet, safe place. Take a candle or an oil lamp with you. Light it and focus on the flame to help you expand your awareness of this passage. Reread the first half of Thomas 70: “Jesus said, ‘If you bring forth what is within you, what you have will save you.’” As you ponder what Jesus says, rewrite the passage in your own words.

“If you bring forth what is within you”: What does Jesus’ use of the word what refer to?

- Would you call the “what” that exists “within” your dreams, hopes, desires, passions, and ambitions?
- Or maybe fears, anger, anxieties, obsessions, resentments, questions, and doubts?
- Or. . . .
  - What must you do to become conscious of the “what” that Jesus says “is within”?

Name the reasons you might ignore, deny, and avoid the “what” that is “within.”

- How do you do that?
- What do you protect by ignoring, denying, or avoiding it?
- What might no longer be safeguarded if what is within were to be brought forth?

Think about what it takes to “bring forth what is within you,” and what you have to be, or what you have to do, or where you have to go to be—and to do it.

- What saves you? The capacity to bring forth? The content of what is brought forth? Or both?

Now blow out the flame and focus your attention on the wisp of smoke as it disperses into the air. “[W]hat you do not have within you [will] kill you.” Name that which is lacking within that can kill.

- What must happen to prevent that which we lack within from destroying us?

Jesus says, “[W]hat you do not have within you [will] kill you.” Change the word you to the words I or me. Take a hard look at what you do not have within you and determine what you do have to bring forth that will save you.

- What’s next?