

Christoformity: Entering into the Life of Jesus
John Mark Hicks
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The Gospels draw us into the narrative world of God in Christ by the power of the Spirit so that we might “see” the God who is at work in the world for the sake of the world. God’s work through Jesus in the Spirit calls us to participate in the mission of God as disciples of Jesus. By this, in the power of the Spirit, we are conformed to the image of Christ, who is the image of God. Through reading the Gospels, we hear the story of Jesus, confess his identity, and are apprenticed into the life of Jesus and become disciples of Jesus.

These sessions are pursued against the backdrop of the “Mission of God: Theodrama in Fives Acts” (page 2 below).

1. Jesus, the Dwelling of God -- the Incarnate God

We are the dwelling of God in order to commune with God.

2. Jesus, the Anointed of God -- Israel Redux

We follow Jesus into the renewed life of Israel.

3. Jesus, the Sanctified -- Led by the Spirit

We are empowered by the Spirit for renewed life.

4. Jesus, the Liberator -- Reversing the Curse

We are participants in the mission of God.

5. Jesus, Living in Community -- Points of Connection

We flourish as human beings when we live a full life.

6. Jesus, Sharing in Intimacy -- Deep Friendships

We are profoundly human when we are intimate with others.

7. Jesus, Participating in Assembly -- The Significance of Gathering

We participate in the heavenly assembly when we gather here.

The Mission of God: Theodrama in Five Acts
John Mark Hicks

God's story is about *dwelling and filling*—God dwells in order to fill. This is God's missional agenda. The mission of God is performed in communities *grounded in, shaped by, and moving towards* the goal of God's creation.

1. *Creation*: God—the Father, through the Son, in the power of the Spirit—**created a blessed community** with whom God *dwelt* in communion and with whom God *partnered in order to fill, develop, and care* for God's good and blessed creation toward the divine goal and to *enjoy* God's blessed seventh day. *Yet*, humanity created a rival story with its own agenda, but God pursued humanity.
2. *Israel*: Then God **blessed Abraham in order to** bless all peoples. God *dwelt* with Israel, and God *called* Israel into a partnership to live redemptively among the peoples in order to illuminate God's intent for the creation, *draw* all the peoples to God, and *fill* the earth with the knowledge and glory of God. *Yet*, Israel embraced the way of the peoples rather than pursuing God's agenda, though God's redemptive purposes were not thwarted.
3. *Messiah*: Because of this brokenness, the **Father sent the Son** to reconcile all things. The Son *dwelt* in the flesh for common-union, *ministered* as Israel's Messiah in the power of the Spirit for the in-breaking of the kingdom, *was put to death* in the flesh for sin, *was made alive* in the Spirit for righteousness, and *enthroned* as new humanity at the Father's right hand for the beginning of new creation in order to place every power under the rule of God.
4. *Church*: Then the **Father, through the Son, sent the Spirit to dwell among and renew**, through faith in the Messiah, God's partnership with renewed Israel, which heralds, embodies, and performs God's mission. God's people, filled with the Spirit, are *sent* into the world for the sake of the whole creation in order to lift up the Son to draw everyone to God and to *fill* the earth with the knowledge and glory of God through missional communities. *Yet*, these communities often fail, though God's renewing work in the power of the Spirit is not thwarted.
5. *New Creation*: These missional communities, embodying the divine mission, lead to God's *goal*: the mutual indwelling of the Triune God with redeemed humanity as **God dwells within a renewed, redeemed creation** where righteousness, justice, and peace *fill* the new creation.

This is the missional story of God—begun in (1) *creation*, restarted in (2) *Israel*, climaxed in (3) *Jesus*, continued in the (4) *church*, and fully realized in the (5) *new heaven and new earth*. This is the five-act drama of God's narrative—a *theodrama*.

Outline Session 1. Jesus, the Dwelling of God: Incarnate God

Not for these alone do I pray, but also for those believing in me through their word.

*THAT all may be **one***

AS you, Father, in me and I in you

THAT they may also be in us

THAT the world may believe that you have sent me.

The glory that you have given me I have given them

*THAT they may be **one***

*AS we are **one**, I in them and you in me,*

*THAT they may be completed into **one***

*THAT the world may know that you have sent me
and have loved them AS you have loved me.¹*

Father,

*I desire that those whom you have given me,
may be with me where I am*

to see my glory,

which you have given me

*because you **loved** me before the foundation of the world.*

Righteous Father,

the world does not know you,

but I know you, and

these know that you have sent me.

*I made your name known to them and I will make it know,
so that the **love** with which you have **loved** me*

may be in them and I in them.

	John 13:31-35	John 17:20-26
Eschatological Language	The Father will glorify the Son	That the disciples might see the glory of the Son
Comparative Language	As I have loved you	Father loved them as the Father loved the Son
Relational Language	Love one another	That the disciples might be one
Missional Language	By this everyone will know that you are my disciples	That the world may believe that the Father sent the Son

Observations/Theses:

1. Creation (the world) arises out of the love between the Father and the Son.
2. The goal of God is to include humanity within the orbit of divine love.
3. This experience of this love is characterized by mutual indwelling.
4. The oneness of the Father and Son is shared with those who believe and know.
5. The unity of believers is found in the shared communion of the Father and Son.
6. This unity is experienced around the table as communion with the life of God.
7. This oneness includes a missional purpose that the world might believe and know.

¹ Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday 1970), 2:769.

Outline Session 2. Jesus, the Anointed: Israel Redux

From birth to entrance into the Galilee, Matthew's narration of the life of Jesus is a retelling and appropriation of the history of Israel.

Birth: a son named Jesus to save "his people from their sins" whose name is Emmanuel (1:20-23, quoting Isaiah 7:14).

Messiah: born a son of David in Bethlehem, he will shepherd Israel, God's people (2:5-6, quoting Micah 5:1-2).

Egypt: the family flees to Egypt for refuge and is called back to Israel from there (2:13-15, quoting Hosea 11:1).

Lament: the cries of Rachel for her children are the cries of Israel for liberation (2:17-18, quoting Jeremiah).

Crossing the Sea: the baptism of Jesus in the wilderness identifies him with the crossing of the Red Sea by Israel (3:13-17)

Wilderness Testing: Jesus is tested for 40 days in the wilderness just as Israel was tested for 40 years (4:1-2, alluding to Deuteronomy 8).

Entrance into the Land: Jesus enters Galilee from the wilderness to begin his ministry (4:13-17, quoting Isaiah 9).

Event	Israel	Jesus
Birth	A Levite woman conceives and gives birth to a savior, Moses.	A virgin conceives and gives birth to a savior.
Messiah	David is a shepherd ruler from Bethlehem.	A ruler is born in Bethlehem who will shepherd God's people.
Egypt	Jacob's family flees from famine for safety in Egypt.	Joseph's family flees from violence for safety in Egypt.
Lament	Rachel weeps over the violence done to Jerusalem by Babylon.	She also weeps over the violence done to the infants of Bethlehem.
Water	Israel receives her identity as God's firstborn through crossing the sea.	Jesus is anointed as God's child at his baptism in the river Jordan.
Wilderness	Israel is tested in the wilderness for 40 years.	Jesus is tested in the wilderness for 40 days.
Land	Israel enters the land promised Abraham as a light to the nations.	Jesus enters Galilee as a light in the darkness.

Outline Session 3. Jesus, the Sanctified: Led by the Spirit

Baptism: *Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heaven opened, and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.*

Luke 3:21-22

Wilderness: *Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, where for forty days he was tempted by the devil.*

Luke 4:1-2a

Ministry: *Then Jesus, filled with the power of the Spirit, to Galilee, and a report about him spread through all the surrounding country. He began to teach in their synagogues and was praised by everyone.*

Luke 4:14-15

Mission: *"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."*

Luke 4:18-19 (quoting Isaiah 61:1-2)

Intimacy with God: *He came out and went, as was his custom, to the Mount of Olives; and the disciples followed him. When he reached the place, he said to them, "Pray that you may not come into the time of trial." Then he withdrew from them about a stone's throw, knelt down, and prayed, "Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me; yet, not my will but yours be done." Then an angel from heaven appeared to him and gave him strength. In his anguish he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down on the ground. When he got up from prayer, he came to the disciples and found them sleeping because of grief, and he said to them, "Why are you sleeping? Get up and pray that you may not come into the time of trial."*

Luke 22:39-46

Surrender: *It was now about noon, and darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon, while the sun's light failed; and the curtain of the temple was torn in two. Then Jesus, crying with a loud voice, said, "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit."*

Luke 23:44-46

Outline Session 4. Jesus, the Liberator: Reversing the Curse

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, for he has anointed me to bring Good News to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim that captives will be released, that the blind will see, that the oppressed will be set free, and that the time of the Lord’s favor has come.”

Luke 4:18-19 (quoting Isaiah 61:1-2)

Early the next morning Jesus went out to an isolated place. The crowds searched everywhere for him, and when they finally found him, they begged him not to leave them. But Jesus replied, “I must preach the Good News of the Kingdom of God in other towns, too, because that is why I was sent.”

Luke 4:42-43

“Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have good news brought to them. And blessed is anyone who takes no offense at me.”

Luke 7:22-23

One day Jesus called together his twelve disciples and gave them power and authority to cast out all demons and to heal all diseases. Then he sent them out to tell everyone about the Kingdom of God and to heal the sick...So they began their circuit of the villages, preaching the Good News and healing the sick.

Luke 9:1-2, 6

Whenever you enter a town and its people welcome you, eat what is set before you; cure the sick who are there, and say to them, “The kingdom of God has come near to you.”

Luke 10:8-9

The seventy returned with joy, saying, “Lord, in your name even the demons submit to us!” He said to them, “I watched Satan fall from heaven like a flash of lightning. See, I have given you authority to tread on snakes and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy; and nothing will hurt you. Nevertheless, do not rejoice at this, the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.” At that same hour Jesus rejoiced in the Holy Spirit . . . Then turning to the disciples, Jesus said to them privately, “Blessed are the eyes that see what you see! For I tell you that many prophets and kings desired to see what you see, but did not see it, and to hear what you hear, but did not hear it.”

Luke 10:17-21a, 23-24

Outline Session 5. Jesus, Living in Community: Varied Connections

Solitude. Jesus took time to be alone with God—the Father and Spirit. This was foundational for everything else in his life. This time confirmed his identity and focused his mission. In this time we face our true selves and learn to love ourselves because we are loved by God.

Intimacy. Jesus shared life and feelings with Peter, James and John. They were his intimates with whom he could share experiences, burdens and fears that perhaps he could not share with others. We need people who know our secrets, to whom we confess our sins, and who will hold us accountable. We need people who know our stories, our true selves and before whom we are emotionally and spiritually “naked and unashamed.” Many have “covenant groups” but sometimes they are too large. Intimacy happens with three or four people, perhaps six, but rarely much larger than that.

Relationship. Jesus traveled with the twelve and a few female supporters. He ate with them, prayed with them, recreated with them, and served with them. They were his “small group” – a group of people which numbers between 10 and 20. These groups are not intimacy groups, but they are relationships which supply mutual support, social interaction, and even fun. These are the people who surround us with their love in times of tragedy and join us in celebration in times of joy. They share life with us. These are the people with whom we eat the “last suppers” or the “Passovers” of our life.

Community. Jesus also spent time with larger groups of disciples than the twelve. He gathered seventy disciples to send out two by two in Luke 10. In the setting of most of our congregations, these are the Bible classes we attend or the ministries in which we serve. They are twenty to a hundred people whose names we know and with whom we share a common interest or task. This level of community is generally task-oriented with less focus on inter-personal interaction.

Assembly. Jesus also went to the Temple to worship with the people of God, with the crowds and multitudes. He attended the festivals and synagogue assemblies. He stood in the congregation and praised the Father. Assemblies, of course, range in size from small communities (10-100 people) to crowds of people (thousands). But the focus of community here is not interpersonal interaction as much as the presence of God within the community. Here, together, we encounter God as one people; here we join the heavenly assembly of saints and angels to praise Father, Son and Spirit. And we are thereby encouraged and empowered as a community to embrace and pursue the mission of God in the world.

Outline Session 6. Jesus, Shaped by Intimacy: Deep Friendships

Intimacy happens in smaller groups. Sometimes Jesus took his disciples aside with him to pray: "One day Jesus left the crowds to pray alone. Only his disciples were with him" (Luke 9:18). But there were other times when Jesus took only three disciples with him.

Intimacy defies definition. It is a subjective, personal experience of being in relation with another. It enables one to actually see into the other: "into-me-see" or intimacy. It is sharing ourselves, our experiences, our feelings, our secrets, our lives. It is letting another person into our real selves--to let them see how we see truly see ourselves. Obviously, then, intimacy needs safety. It only happens in safe places with safe people. It only happens where there is trust. And it usually only happens within a small group (three to five people) or with a few people.

We build intimacy with others through *shared experiences*.

When they arrived at the house, Jesus wouldn't let anyone go in with him except Peter, John, James and the little girl's father and m other. Luke 8:51

We build intimacy with others through *shared strength*.

Jesus took Peter, John and James up on a mountain to pray. And as he was praying, the appearance of his face was transformed, and his clothes became dazzling white. Luke 9:28-29

We build intimacy with others through *shared feelings*.

He took Peter, James and John with him, and he became deeply troubled and distressed. He told them, "My soul is crushed with grief to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me. Mark 14:33-34

Outline Session 7. Jesus, Shaped by the Gathering: The Significance of Assembly

Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about him spread through the whole countryside. He taught in their synagogues, and everyone praised him. He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. And he stood up to read.

Luke 4:14-16

Sometime later, Jesus went up to Jerusalem for a feast of the Jews.

John 5:1

That is why he is not ashamed to call them brothers, saying, "I will tell of your name to my brothers; in the midst of the congregation I will sing your praise."

Hebrews 2:11b-12 (quoting Psalm 22:22)

Again, truly I tell you, if two of you agree on earth about anything you ask, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.

Matthew 18:19-20

But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel."

Hebrews 12:22-24

Session 1. Jesus, the Dwelling of God: Incarnate God

Not for these alone do I pray, but also for those believing in me through their word.

*THAT all may be **one***

AS you, Father, in me and I in you

THAT they may also be in us

THAT the world may believe that you have sent me.

The glory that you have given me I have given them

*THAT they may be **one***

*AS we are **one**, I in them and you in me,*

*THAT they may be completed into **one***

THAT the world may know that you have sent me

and have loved them AS you have loved me.²

Father,

I desire that those whom you have given me,

may be with me where I am

to see my glory,

which you have given me

*because you **loved** me before the foundation of the world.*

Righteous Father,

the world does not know you,

but I know you, and

these know that you have sent me.

I made your name known to them and I will make it know,

*so that the **love** with which you have **loved** me*

may be in them and I in them.

John 17:20-26

Soteriology as Participation in the Life of God

As the conclusion to the Farewell Discourse, which began in 13:31, this prayer (or liturgical act) is a theological commentary on the incarnation, introduces the passion of Jesus, and probably reflects Eucharistic prayer practices in the Johannine community, especially the climax of the prayer in John 17:20-26. Newbigin believes that the prayer “reflects the early church’s understanding of what happened in the Upper Room.” It is, then, a “representation of what Jesus was doing when he prayed in the presence of his disciples during the Supper” and reflects the “continuous experience of the community which gathers week by week to rehearse again the words and actions of Jesus on that night.”³

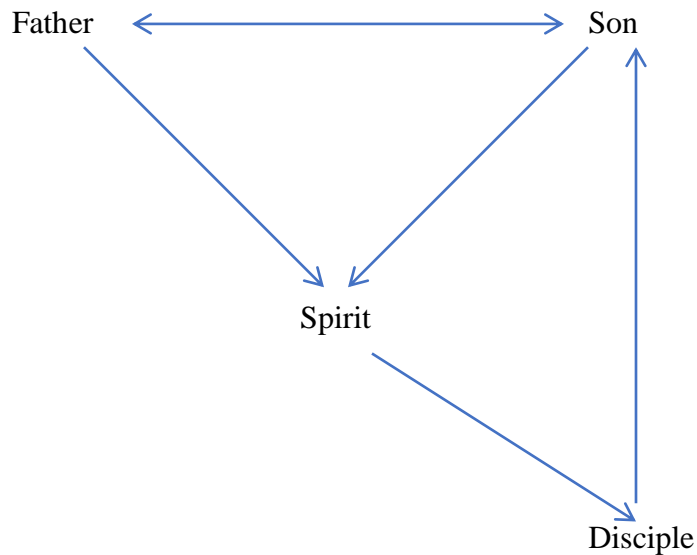
² Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John* (The Anchor Bible; Garden City, New York: Doubleday 1970), 2:769.

³ J. E. Lesslie Newbigin, *The Light Has Come: An Exposition of the Fourth Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982) 224.

Following Raymond Brown and Oscar Cullmann,⁴ Ario Duba has cogently argued that John 13:31-17:26 functions as a Eucharistic word and prayer that emphasizes the “complementarity of anamnesis (remembrance of Christ, JMH) and epiclesis (invocation of the Spirit, JMH).”⁵ Invoking the themes of glorification, asking and receiving, the coming of the Spirit, the centrality of the Word, interpenetrating presence (or, mutual indwelling), and memory with inaugurated presence, Duba’s work permits a reading of the Farewell Discourse that envisions the beloved community sharing a Eucharistic meal in union with the Triune God and each other.

The Gospel of John depicts a “perichoretic soteriology reminiscent of the Orthodox doctrine of deification” or *theosis* (sharing in the life and likeness of God).⁶ The language of mutual indwelling is rooted in the relationship of the Father and Son, but the disciples are included in this perichoretic experience through the Son by means of the Spirit (particularly the Spirit’s indwelling of disciples).

Through the indwelling of the Spirit in the disciple (14:17), the Son dwells in the disciple (14:18, 20, 23; 15:4-5; 17:23, 26), and the disciple dwells in the Son (14:20; 15:4-5; 17:21). Moreover, this mutual indwelling includes the disciple in the Father as well (14:20; 17:21 [“us”]). The role of the Paraclete (Spirit) in John is the “christianization or the divinization” of disciples as they are included in the perichoretic experience shared by the Father and the Son.⁷



⁴ Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John* (The Anchor Bible; Garden City, New York: Doubleday 1970), 2:656 and Oscar Cullmann, *La Foi et Le Culte de l'Eglise Primitive* (Neuchatel, Switzerland: Editions Delachaux Niestlé, 1963), 200.

⁵ Ario D. Duba, “Hints for a Morphology of Eucharistic Praying: A Study of John 13:31-17:26,” *Worship* 57.4 (1983) 365.

⁶ David Crump, “Re-examining the Johannine Trinity: Perichoresis or Deification,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 59.4 (2006) 395-412. I have copied the chart from Crump’s article (p. 412).

⁷ Lawrence J. Lukemeyer, “The Role of the Paraclete (Jn. 16:7-15),” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 8 (1946) 227.

Crump summarizes his diagram (provided above) in this way: “To that end, the mutually indwelling Father and Son send the Spirit to indwell disciples as the living presence of the glorified Jesus. In this way, every disciple participates in the divine interpenetration of the Son and the Father, producing the Johannine, perichoretic trio of Father-Son-disciple, a divine bi-unity perichoretically incorporating believers within the Son and the Father through the Spirit.”⁸

Theologically, the inclusion of the disciples into the perichoretic life of the Father and Son is the reunion of the communal life God created. God created the world that the world might know God’s love and experience life with God. But the world, by whatever means, became dominated by powers hostile to God, and the inhabitants of the world did not recognize the Son when he came to dwell among them. Salvation—the divine rescue—is the reunion of God and humanity. Johannine soteriology is mutual indwelling, that is, inclusion in the perichoretic life of the Father and the Son through the Spirit.

Unity and Ecclesiology

The Gospel of John does not use the language of mutual indwelling to describe relationships between disciples. Rather, the mutual indwelling characterizes the relationship between disciples and God. In other words, the Gospel never explicitly identifies the relationship among disciples as perichoretic.

However, Jesus’ prayer anticipates that the disciples will share a oneness that reflects or mirrors the oneness the Father and Son share. This oneness is experienced perichoretically as the Father and Son love each other. In the same way, Jesus prays for a oneness that the disciples experience through loving each other precisely *because* they themselves experience the perichoretic life of the Father and the Son. It is because the disciples know (indeed, are included in) the love the Father and the Son have for each other that they also love each other. The disciples share a common bond, that is, the common experience of the perichoretic life of the Father and Son through the Spirit. Consequently, they love each other because of and through that common bond.

At the table where Jesus demonstrated his kenotic, self-giving love for the disciples by washing their feet, Jesus gives the disciples a “new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:34-35).

The model and root of loving one another is, at the beginning of the Farewell Discourse, the love Jesus has for the disciples (13:34). At the end of the Farewell Discourse, the model and root of loving one another is the love the Father has for the disciples which is the same love the Father has for the Son (17:23). This table talk between Jesus and his disciples begins and ends with the central value of love.

⁸ Crump, “Re-examining the Johannine Trinity,” 412.

	John 13:31-35	John 17:20-26
Eschatological Language	The Father will glorify the Son	That the disciples might see the glory of the Son
Comparative Language	As I have loved you	Father loved them as the Father loved the Son
Relational Language	Love one another	That the disciples might be one
Missional Language	By this everyone will know that you are my disciples	That the world may believe (know) that the Father sent the Son

I think we must take the context of this “table talk” seriously. The actions at the table embody the “talk.” John’s Farewell Discourse, climaxed by a liturgical prayer, functions as commentary on the saving event of God in Christ through the Spirit. This commentary “happens” (a communication event) at the table (a meal in 13:2, 4), which John depicts as a fellowship of loving service. This event embodies the perichoretic love of the Jesus for his disciples. This table and its “talk” interpret the passion and resurrection of Jesus in a Johannine sense.⁹

If we read John 6 as a theological understanding of the Eucharist, the language of mutual indwelling and eternal life reflects that the Johannine community regarded the sacred meal as a means of experiencing the divine life itself. John 6:56-57 is explicit: “Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them. Just as the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever eats me will live because of me.” In the Gospel of John, sacramental eating and drinking nourishes disciples with the eternal life of the one who lives and abides in the Father. The table, then, is not simply or even primarily about memorializing the *death* of Jesus but experiencing eternal life in the hope of the resurrection. “Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day” (John 6:54). In effect, it is a concrete experience, in community, of the perichoretic life of the Triune God.

What sort of unity, then, does John 17 envision? The text is a banner one for the Stone-Campbell Movement as well as the Ecumenical Movement. Both desire the visible unity of the church, and both have struggled for a unity that visibly represents the oneness of the body of Christ.

I suggest that within the Farewell Discourse this “oneness” is expressed in a Eucharistic love feast even where diversity continues. When believers gather together around the table in self-giving love, they experience in a concrete and sacramental way the common bond that unites

⁹ Hans-Ulrich Weidemann, “Eschatology as Liturgy: Jesus’ Resurrection and Johannine Eschatology,” in *The Resurrection of Jesus in the Gospel of John*, ed. Craig R. Koester (Tübingen: Mohr, 2008), 277-310.

them, that is, the perichoretic love of the Triune God. Unity, then, is not best expressed in forms, institutions, and extended theological declarations as much as it is by the reality of the Eucharist in a loving community where we are nourished by the life of divine perichoresis.

This also propels the church to mission. “The *theosis* of the church is constituted by the radical identification between Jesus the ascended Lord and the gathered people of God. The church’s participation in this pneumatological union with the life of the enemy-loving God by virtue of its participation in the particular history of Jesus [and by the indwelling, outpoured life of the Spirit, JMH] allows for the church to share in Jesus’ life of radical generosity and enemy love through practices of baptism, prayer, incorporation, and table fellowship. To share life with Jesus, by the power of the Spirit, is to get in [participate, JMH] on God’s objective assumption of humanity in Christ.”¹⁰

Observations/Theses:

8. Creation (the world) arises out of the love between the Father and the Son.
9. The goal of God is to include humanity within the orbit of divine love.
10. This experience of this love is characterized by mutual indwelling.
11. The oneness of the Father and Son is shared with those who believe and know.
12. The unity of believers is found in the shared communion of the Father and Son.
13. This unity is experienced around the table as communion with the life of God.
14. This oneness includes a missional purpose that the world might believe and know.

Questions for Discussion:

1. What is the nature of the “oneness” or unity envisioned by Jesus’ prayer?
2. How does the prominence of love in the conclusion of the prayer connect and embody the call to love in the Farewell Discourse?
3. What is the meaning of the “mutual indwelling” so prominent in John’s language in the Farewell Discourse? How does this include the disciples, and what is the nature of that experience?
4. How does the “table” frame and shape our understanding of the Farewell Discourse and the climax of the prayer?
5. What is the content of “missional” in the light of the prayer and its Farewell Discourse table context? What is missional in this context? How does it call disciples into the life of God?

¹⁰ Aaron Kuecker, “‘You Shall be Children of the Most High:’ An Inquiry into Luke’s Narrative Account of *Theosis*,” *Journal of Theological Interpretation* 8, no. 2 (Fall 2014) 223.

Session 2. Jesus, the Anointed: Israel Redux

From birth to entrance into the Galilee, Matthew's narration of the life of Jesus is a retelling and appropriation of the history of Israel.

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Messiah: born a son of David in Bethlehem, he will shepherd Israel, God's people (2:5-6, quoting Micah 5:1-2).

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Lament: the cries of Rachel for her children are the cries of Israel for liberation (2:17-18, quoting Jeremiah).

Crossing the Sea: the baptism of Jesus in the wilderness identifies him with the crossing of the Red Sea by Israel (3:13-17)

Wilderness Testing: Jesus is tested for 40 days in the wilderness just as Israel was tested for 40 years (4:1-2, alluding to Deuteronomy 8).

Entrance into the Land: Jesus enters Galilee from the wilderness to begin his ministry (4:13-17, quoting Isaiah 9).

Event	Israel	Jesus
Birth	A Levite woman conceives and gives birth to a savior, Moses.	A virgin conceives and gives birth to a savior.
Messiah	David is a shepherd ruler from Bethlehem.	A ruler is born in Bethlehem who will shepherd God's people.
Egypt	Jacob's family flees from famine for safety in Egypt.	Joseph's family flees from violence for safety in Egypt.
Lament	Rachel weeps over the violence done to Jerusalem by Babylon.	She also weeps over the violence done to the infants of Bethlehem.
Water	Israel receives her identity as God's firstborn through crossing the sea.	Jesus is anointed as God's child at his baptism in the river Jordan.
Wilderness	Israel is tested in the wilderness for 40 years.	Jesus is tested in the wilderness for 40 days.
Land	Israel enters the land promised Abraham as a light to the nations.	Jesus enters Galilee as a light in the darkness.

Water (Matthew 3:13-17)

God sent John the Baptizer to prepare Israel to receive their Messiah. John called Israel to repent and invited them into the water of repentance. They came to the water confessing their sins, penitent, and submitting to a baptism for the forgiveness of sins.

Jesus, Israel's Messiah, was also baptized by John.

This is rather startling. Jesus submitted to a ritual designed for sinners. But, perhaps, it is not so startling. Jesus ultimately died a death designed for sinners. Jesus was numbered with the transgressors, both in his death and baptism. Through baptism, Jesus joined sinners in the water just as he would later share a cross with them.

More specifically, Jesus identified with Israel. He submitted to God's command as part of faithful Israel. Jesus joined other obedient believers in submitting to God's command as preparation for the coming kingdom. In fact, in his baptism, Jesus actually represented Israel, just as he did on the cross.

But there is more.

Jesus was anointed by the Holy Spirit. God tore open the heavens and the Spirit descended upon Jesus as a dove. In this way, God came to Israel once again. God poured the Spirit upon Jesus, and this was the beginning of God's kingdom presence in the world. When Jesus received the Spirit, this anticipated the future moment when God would pour the Spirit on all flesh at Pentecost. The Spirit empowered the Messiah for his ministry. Just as Israel crossed the Red Sea and enjoyed the descent of God into the tabernacle, so Jesus came up out of the water and God descended upon him and anointed him as Israel's Messiah.

But there is more.

God affirmed Jesus at his baptism. God said, "You are my Son, whom I love, and I am delighted with you." Coming up out of the water, the Father loves on the Son, pours the Spirit on him, and speaks over him. And God uses this same language to describe Israel in the Psalms and in Isaiah. The Messiah is Israel's faithful remnant and the representative of Israel. The baptism of Jesus is a new beginning for Israel. It is a new crossing of the Red Sea. And just as this language belongs to Israel, so it also belongs to those who believe in Jesus.

We enter this same story through our baptism.

Just as Jesus is immersed in water, the Spirit is poured on him, and the Father affirms Jesus, that is our baptism, too! When we are baptized, the Father pours the Spirit on us and we, too, are anointed. When we are baptized, God says over us, "This is my child." When we are baptized, God delights in us and rejoices over us. In our baptism, just as in Jesus's baptism, the Trinity is at work: the Father loves us in the Son and anoints us with the Spirit.

The baptism of Jesus is our model. Jesus invites us to follow him, and if we would be disciples of Jesus, we will follow him into the water and experience God's gracious delight and gifts. It is an act of obedient discipleship, but it is also a moment when God acts—God delights in us, God declares us the children of God, God anoints with the Spirit, and God forgives our sins.

The Wilderness (Matthew 4:1-11)

Why did the Spirit throw Jesus into the wilderness? Jesus passed through the water, just as Israel passed through the sea, and just as they spent 40 years in the Sinai wilderness, so Jesus spends 40 days in the Judean wilderness. Jesus is reliving the history of Israel.

Deuteronomy 8 provides some insight into the meaning of the wilderness for Israel. Jesus himself quotes from that chapter during his time in the wilderness. Deuteronomy describes the wilderness as a place where God humbled Israel and disciplined them. God's firstborn among the nations was tested to reveal what is in their hearts. They were humbled in their dependence upon God. They were spiritually formed by the wilderness experience.

This, I think, is the meaning of the wilderness for Jesus as well as for us. Jesus is tested in a hostile environment—Satan was there. Jesus was tested, humbled, and disciplined in the wilderness.

And so are we. The wilderness comes in many forms—depression, grief, loneliness, and sickness. While those come to us without our consent, sometimes we also chose the wilderness as a place to know God more fully. The wilderness tests us in order to reveal our hearts, it humbles us as we recognize our powerlessness and dependency on God, and it disciplines us as it trains us for the mission of God.

The wilderness revealed Israel's identity and formed them as the people of God. In the same way, Jesus affirmed his identity the wilderness, and he chose the way of the cross rather than the consumerist path of wealth and power. Jesus refused the offers of Satan and submitted to the path God had set before him.

We are not abandoned in the wilderness. Israel was not left alone as God journeyed with them. Jesus was not alone as angels ministered to him and the Spirit rested upon him, and angels and the Spirit minister to us as well (cf. Hebrews 1:14). God is present with us in the wilderness and that presence strengthens us and empowers us to not only endure it but to be formed by it.

The wilderness story of Israel is also Jesus's story, and Jesus' story is our story. Just as we followed Jesus into the water, so we follow him into the wilderness. Or, perhaps, like Jesus, God will sometimes lead us into the wilderness. Whatever the case, God will be there, too. And, through the wilderness experience, God will form us into the image of Jesus.

Land (Matthew 4:12-17)

"Galilee of the Gentiles"? Is that not part of the land of promise? Indeed. That is the point. It is occupied land. The Assyrians invaded and annexed it in 738 B.C.E. The land was seized by an alien power, by an ungodly nation from an ungodly nation that was supposed to be a light to the nations. Darkness enveloped Galilee, and it was still occupied when Tiberius reigned in

Rome and John the Baptist went into the wilderness to preach and practice a "baptism of repentance."

Now a new light dawns. The people living in the darkness see a bright light coming from the future; the people living in the shadow of death see the light of life. God makes an appearance; he visits his people to reveal to them the future and enter their brokenness in order to redeem it. They see the coming of the kingdom of God in the person of Jesus; they see the future in Jesus. Darkness and death, though present in Galilee, will dissipate through the presence of the King of Israel.

After his baptism (his own "red-sea" experience parallel to Israel's), the Spirit led Jesus into the Judean desert for forty days (his own "wilderness" experience parallel to Israel's), and in the face of opposition to John the Baptist, Jesus "withdrew to Galilee." Making "his home in Capernaum by the sea," Jesus located his ministry in the land of "Zebulun and Naphtali." There Jesus begins his ministry, heralding the good news of the kingdom of God, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near."

The light has dawned in the darkness. The ministry of Jesus enacts the presence of the kingdom in the world, and this is the light Jesus brings into the darkness. The shadow of death is dispelled by the light of Jesus's ministry where the dead are raised, the sick are healed, the demons are expelled, and chaos is subdued.

"Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people." Matthew 4:23.

"...people brought to him all who were ill with various diseases, those suffering severe pain, the demon-possessed, those having seizures, and the paralyzed, and he healed them." Matthew 4:24b.

The conjunction of the words and deeds of Jesus proclaim the kingdom of God. Jesus heralds the good news of the kingdom through teaching in the synagogues and then enacts the good news of the kingdom through a healing ministry.

Israel crosses the Jordan to become a nation that will light up the world for other nations. They are to become a new Eden in God's creation. They are to model life with God and how people live together in peace, joy, and righteousness. They enter Canaan commissioned by God to realize God's kingdom on the earth. But, as we know (and as we well know in our own lives), they failed to fully realize that mission.

The biblical story invites us to see Israel's Jordan River crossing as our own. This is not simply the history of Israel, it is the story into which we plunge as well. It is the story of Jesus.

We remember how Jesus passed through these waters in his own baptism. John the Baptizer immersed in these same waters--probably even in the same vicinity--where Israel crossed into the new land. For Jesus to step into those waters was to step toward the cross; the shadow of the cross hung over the waters of Jesus's baptism. It was the moment when he embraced his future suffering for the sake of the future of the world.

Jesus, through his own baptism, experienced God's redemptive love and heralded a new Exodus and a new inheritance for the whole world. We follow Jesus into that same water. We, too, have stepped into the water in order to proclaim the one true, living God who defeats the powers that enslave and oppose us. Through our baptism we become God's new creation and herald the coming of the new heavens and new earth, our own inheritance. Entering the waters of baptism is to take up our own cross, and consequently we must count the cost.

Jesus, through Jordan's waters, entered into a new world, the world of the kingdom of God. Jesus embraced the ministry of the kingdom in order to bring the reign of God into the world so that the will of God might be done on earth as it is in heaven. We who have followed Jesus into the water also embrace this new world, the kingdom of God. We become the instruments of that kingdom. We, like Israel, embrace the mission of God in the world. We follow Jesus into the ministry of the kingdom for the renewal of God's good creation and the transformation of the world. We are people who have stepped into the water with Israel, with Jesus, to embrace the newness of the Kingdom of God

Questions for Discussion:

1. What is the significance of Jesus's participation (even "re-doing") the history of Israel? What is the theological meaning of this theme in the Gospels, especially Matthew?
2. Which connection to Israel do you find most significant for your own discipleship, and why?
3. What is the function of Rachel's lament in the context of Jesus's redoing the story of Israel? How does this factor into Jesus's own life and ministry?
4. In what ways do we also participate in the renarration of Israel's history? How does the story of Israel provide a trajectory for our own participation in the mission of God?

Session 3. Jesus, the Sanctified: Led by the Spirit

Then Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from [being baptized in] the Jordan River. He was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, where he was tempted by the devil for forty days. Luke 4:1-2a

Before daybreak the next morning, Jesus got up and went to an isolated place to pray. Mark 1:35

One day soon afterward Jesus went up on a mountain to pray, and he prayed to God all night. At daybreak he called together all of his disciples and chose twelve of them to be his apostles. Luke 6:12-13

Baptisms are a time for celebration and community. It is time to party. And we see some of that at the baptism of Jesus—God affirms the belovedness of Jesus. But then there is no party. The Holy Spirit immediately leads Jesus...not to town, not to a palace, not to a party, but into the desert, the wilderness. Jesus is alone, that is, without human companionship. It seems the Holy Spirit must have thought there was something valuable about solitude.

Throughout his ministry Jesus returned to the desert, to the desolate place. He experienced something there that strengthened him and energized him. He found renewal in the desolate places. It is where he went when he felt pressed by the crowds, when he felt “busy.” It is where he went when he had to make a significant decision like choosing his apostles. It is where he went when he felt overwhelmed by his feelings like in the Garden of Gethsemane.

Sometimes we simply need to be alone. Even with his disciples, Jesus would separate himself from them. Sometimes it is important to be alone even when intimate, close friends are available.

Jesus was comfortable with himself and could be alone. *His “alone time” was not loneliness, but solitude.* Some people are lonely when they are alone—they are uncomfortable with themselves and they cling to others in needy desperation. Some people are too busy to be alone and even when they are alone they are easily distracted by the busy-ness of life. Some people don’t want to be alone (certainly not silent) because they are afraid to face their suppressed selves and consequently they need the distractions.

Being alone, however, is more than just being with oneself. Being alone is not loneliness when we find companionship with God in those times. It is not withdrawal in the sense of isolation but the pursuit of God through communion (by whatever formative spiritual practices one might use) for the sake of renewal or recreation.

When we are too busy to “recreate” with God, then life has distracted us from our true essence. When we are too uncomfortable with ourselves, then we have not faced the truth

about ourselves in God's presence. When we are lonely when alone, then we have not embraced the joy of solitude with God.

Jesus pursued God in that solitude. Some of Jesus' vigils would be early morning, some would be all night. Sometimes something (or someone) is more important than sleep (yes, it is true!). Sometimes prayer was more important than sleep. Has it ever been for you? It was for Jesus.

Jesus found time for solitude. His discipleship began in the desert alone with God. His solitude—his companionship with God—fueled his ministry; it energized his other relationships. If he was disciplined by solitude and apprenticed through solitude, perhaps...just perhaps...so should we.

When life is so busy that I am too tired to pray, too tired to sit quietly, too tired to seek God in solitude, then life is too busy. My fatigue has not only a physical but a spiritual root. I have no energy because I am not plugged into the one who is Energy. I have no spiritual power because I have no time for God—no time for just God. That is not only too busy, it is idolatry.

Questions for Discussion:

1. Do you think Jesus "needed" those times alone with the Father? What did he "need" and why did he "need" them?
2. Why is it so hard for human beings to be alone without being lonely? Why do we find it so difficult to be alone with God? What distracts us or repels us about spending time alone with God?
3. Do you remember those "all-nighters" you pulled at work or in college in order to get something done, to meet a deadline? Have you ever felt that way about prayer or solitude with God? If you remember an occasion, share it with others.
4. Share with the group what practices or routines you have found helpful? What helps you ignore the distractions and focus on being with God?

Session 4. Jesus, the Liberator: Reversing the Curse

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, for he has anointed me to bring Good News to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim that captives will be released, that the blind will see, that the oppressed will be set free, and that the time of the Lord’s favor has come.” **Luke 4:18-19 (quoting Isaiah 61:1-2)**

Early the next morning Jesus went out to an isolated place. The crowds searched everywhere for him, and when they finally found him, they begged him not to leave them. But Jesus replied, “I must preach the Good News of the Kingdom of God in other towns, too, because that is why I was sent.” **Luke 4:42-43**

One day Jesus called together his twelve disciples and gave them power and authority to cast out all demons and to heal all diseases. Then he sent them out to tell everyone about the Kingdom of God and to heal the sick...So they began their circuit of the villages, preaching the Good News and healing the sick. **Luke 9:1-2, 6.**

These texts raise some interesting questions.

What is the good news of the kingdom of God?

What is the mission of Jesus?

How does healing the sick embody the good news?

What does it mean to not only proclaim but to practice the kingdom of God?

All these texts in Luke come before Jesus ever turns his face toward Jerusalem; they come long before Jesus announces to his disciples that he must die and rise again. So, the questions cannot be answered in terms of the death and resurrection of Jesus except that the death and resurrection of Jesus are the climatic fulfillment of what it means to preach “good news and heal the sick.” After all, the death and resurrection of Jesus are God’s Yes to the prayers “Your Kingdom Come.”

But the ministry of Jesus is also significant for mission in addition to his death and resurrection. The mission for which Jesus was sent into the world is summarized as declaring the good news of the kingdom and—to say it broadly—“heal the sick.” If the good news in the ministry of Jesus is not the death and resurrection of Jesus, it is the announcement of the coming reign of God and the in-breaking of that reign through Jesus’ healing ministry, through his ministry to the poor and oppressed, through his ministry to the “outsider” in Luke.

Jesus practiced this ministry; he was apprenticed into this ministry. He took it as a mission from God and lived it out in his life. Disciples are called to do the same.

At the "big picture" level, this is the reversal of the curse. All that the curse means in the broken creation is reversed in the ministry of Jesus. It is his mission; it is why he was sent. *It is what he preaches and what he does!*

His ministry is the "good news of the kingdom of God," that is, that the kingdom of God has come near and when the kingdom comes near the brokenness of the world is healed. The curse is reversed.

The "kingdom" here is not the structures and organization of an institutionalized church. Rather, the kingdom is the reign of God in the world; when God reigns and overcomes the curse, when God reigns and destroys fallen barriers, when God reigns and overcomes diseases, demons and death, when God reigns and reconciles people groups, when God reigns and the poor and oppressed get justice.

The ministry of Jesus is a proleptic enactment of the eschaton. In other words, the new heaven and new earth (where there is no curse) has broken into the fallen cosmos in a way that declares and promises the future. The ministry of Jesus is the presence of the future; the future breaks into the present as Jesus proclaims the good news of the kingdom and heals the sick. The ministry of Jesus is God's promise of a different kind of world, a future world where there is no more curse.

The "good news" (gospel) of the "kingdom of God" is not, at this point in the ministry of Jesus, the death and resurrection of Jesus. In fact, the death and resurrection of Jesus is the means toward the end of the reality of the kingdom of God. That reality is "good news." It is the good news that God intends to redeem, renew, and restore his creation and community. God does this through the ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus; these are means by which God inaugurates, implements, and consummates his reign in the world.

"Heal the sick who are there and tell them, 'The kingdom of God is near you'" (Luke 10:9).

"I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven...Blessed are the eyes that see what you see" (Luke 10:18, 23b).

The Gospel of Luke calls disciples of Jesus to participate in the mission of Jesus. Just as Jesus declared the message that the "kingdom of God is near" (which is the "good news of the kingdom") and healed the sick (reversing the curse), his disciples follow him into the world to announce the nearness of the kingdom and to participate in curse reversal. Disciples proclaim the good news of the kingdom and heal the sick.

The disciples of Jesus are a missional community. The disciples take up the mission of Jesus himself. They are also to declare the good news of the kingdom and heal the sick. Jesus sent out the twelve on this mission, and then also the seventy (Luke 10). Ultimately, he sends his church.

The mission of Jesus is the mission of the church. The church discovers its mission by immersing itself in the life and ministry of Jesus. The church, as the body of Christ, continues the mission of Jesus himself. The book of Acts tells the story of how the church continued what Jesus himself “began to do and to teach” (Acts 1:1).

Healing the sick, releasing the imprisoned, freeing the oppressed—the mission of Jesus—is the mission of the church. The good news (the gospel; the evangelistic message) is not simply about saving souls but also about saving the whole person, body and soul. It is good news for the poor not only in their spiritual emptiness but also in their material poverty as the church feeds, clothes and heals.

If the church really took up the mission of Jesus in its wholeness, what would “doing church” look like? This is the challenge for the church and its mission in the 21st century—the challenge to embody the ministry of Jesus in our world and to become Jesus to our world.

Just as Jesus was sent into the world for the sake of the world, so the church is also sent into the world for the sake of the world. Jesus was blessed to bless others, and so the church--blessed with the riches of God's grace and mercy--is sent into the world to bless others with the good news of God's reign.

Questions for Discussion:

1. What was the mission of Jesus? What is the good news of the kingdom of God? (Caution: Jesus is preaching this good news long before he ever begins to tell anyone that he is going to Jerusalem to die and rise again.)
2. How was Jesus apprenticed in this mission? Was Jesus ever tempted to shift his mission or emphasis? What kinds of temptations do you think he might have faced?
3. If the disciples were sent to tell the good news and heal the sick, how does that epitomize Jesus' mission? How do we implement this mission as we follow Jesus? What does that look like?
4. What are the implications of saying “the mission of the Jesus is the mission of the church”? How might that change the way we “do church” or think about “church”?

Session 5. Jesus, Living in Community: Varied Connections

The Triune God, of course, lives together in perfect unity, transparency, and intimacy. The Father loves the Son, the Son loves the Spirit and the Spirit loves the Father. They are one (John 17:20-25). Their community is unbounded; it is infinite.

Living life as a human, however, Jesus learned to live in community in bounded ways. He lived as a finite human being. He could not be intimate with everyone. He could not share his day-to-day life with everyone. He could not even speak to everyone. Rather, he lived out his humanity as we live out ours—he connected with others at different expressions of community, different spaces, and different moments.

We may call these “circles of fellowship” or “levels of community.” Whatever we call them the Gospel narratives indicate that Jesus experienced communal life in various ways and at different times and spaces. His experience is a model for reflecting on our own experience as we seek to become fully and authentically human ourselves.

The Levels

Solitude. Jesus took time to be alone with God—the Father and Spirit. This was foundational for everything else in his life. This time confirmed his identity and focused his mission. In this time we face our true selves and learn to love ourselves because we are loved by God.

Intimacy. Jesus shared life and feelings with Peter, James and John. They were his intimates with whom he could share experiences, burdens and fears that perhaps he could not share with others. We need people who know our secrets, to whom we confess our sins, and who will hold us accountable. We need people who know our stories, our true selves and before whom we are emotionally and spiritually “naked and unashamed.” Many have “covenant groups” but sometimes they are too large. Intimacy happens with three or four people, perhaps six, but rarely much larger than that.

Relationship. Jesus traveled with the twelve and some female supporters. He ate with them, prayed with them, recreated with them, and served with them. They were his “small group” – a group of people which numbers between 10 and 20. These groups are not intimacy groups, but they are relationships which supply mutual support, social interaction, and even fun. These are the people who surround us with their love in times of tragedy and join us in celebration in times of joy. They share life with us. These are the people with whom we eat the “last suppers” or the “Passovers” of our life.

Community. Jesus also spent time with larger groups of disciples than the twelve. He gathered seventy disciples to send out two by two in Luke 10. In the setting of most of our congregations, these are the Bible classes we attend or the ministries in which we serve. They are twenty to a

hundred people whose names we know and with whom we share a common interest or task. This level of community is generally task-oriented with less focus on inter-personal interaction.

Assembly. Jesus also went to the Temple to worship with the people of God, with the crowds and multitudes. He attended the festivals and synagogue assemblies. He stood in the congregation and praised the Father. Assemblies, of course, range in size from small communities (10-100 people) to crowds of people (thousands). But the focus of community here is not interpersonal interaction as much as the presence of God within the community. Here, together, we encounter God as one people; here we join the heavenly assembly of saints and angels to praise Father, Son and Spirit. And we are thereby encouraged and empowered as a community to embrace and pursue the mission of God in the world.

Living Community in Levels

At different times in our lives we emphasize different levels. Someone who has been hurt or abused by intimacy may only desire anonymity in the assembly for a period of time. Someone who has experienced loneliness in assembly may want to focus on developing intimacy with others. Someone who has for years focused on community tasks may discover a need to focus on solitude for a period of time.

There is no single way to slice this pie. Everyone is different and at different times have different needs. That is fine and leaders should have the patience to let people be where they are instead of forcing them into particular molds or programs. At the same time while community can happen naturally at all these levels, leaders may encourage believers to seek out community at every level in appropriate ways at appropriate times. Healthy congregations provide opportunities for the experience of community at every one of these levels. Leaders strategize how to best promote these experiences for their flock.

We cannot expect one form of community to supply the need for which another level is designed. We cannot expect a Bible class (community) to provide the intimacy that a group of three or four friends can. If we do expect it, then we will be sorely disappointed. Neither can an assembly be a “small group” where we know everyone. However, we can seek out each level of community so that our lives find balance, nurture and fulfillment just as Jesus found in his human relationships.

Questions for Discussion:

1. Identify what you find most valuable and helpful about each level of community?
2. What do you think makes each level of community different from the other in terms of experience and value? Why is it important to recognize those differences?
3. On what level of community do you need to focus more of your attention at this moment in your life?
4. How can the church guide people to or help them discover these different levels of community as part of body life.

Session 6. Jesus, Shaped by Intimacy: Deep Friendships

Jesus lived with twelve disciples. He travelled with the twelve, ate with the twelve, taught the twelve, sent the twelve out to herald the good news and heal the sick, and prayed with the twelve. There were times when he prayed with the twelve and no one else. "One day Jesus left the crowds to pray alone. Only his disciples were with him" (Luke 9:18). But there were other times when Jesus was only with the three.

We might compare the twelve to a kind of task-oriented small group. It was training ground for the twelve and Jesus was their discipler and teacher. But the three is something different. In a group of three or four, intimacy can happen in ways that does not typically happen in a group of twelve or more.

Intimacy defies definition. It is a subjective, personal experience of being in relation with another. It enables one to actually see into the other: "into-me-see" or intimacy. It is sharing ourselves, our experiences, our feelings, our secrets, our lives. It is letting another person into our real selves--to let them see how we see truly see ourselves. Obviously, then, intimacy needs safety. It only happens in safe places with safe people. It only happens where there is trust. And it usually only happens within a small group (three to five people) or with a few people.

Jesus built this kind of intimacy with Peter, James, and John. He shared life with them in more intimate ways than he did the twelve, according to the record we have. He took them places and did things with them that he did not do with others. Jesus built an intimate trust with those three.

We build intimacy with others through *shared experiences*.

When they arrived at the house, Jesus wouldn't let anyone go in with him except Peter, John, James and the little girl's father and m other. Luke 8:51

For some reason, which is not explained in the text, Jesus did not take the twelve into the daughter's room. He only took Peter, James, and John. He shared something with them that deepened their friendship and developed intimacy through shared experience. We partner with each other in a task, or spend time with each other in personal, tragic, or thrilling moments. Through the shared experiences we learn to trust each other as we see each other coping with reality.

On this occasion Jesus took Peter, James, and John into the inner sanctum of his miracle-working. He shared this liberating, amazing, and thrilling moment with them. The shared experienced bonded them in ways that only experiences can. The utter ecstasy and joy of seeing this adolescent girl come back to life seared this moment in their group consciousness. It was an intimate moment between them.

We build intimacy with others through *shared strength*.

Jesus took Peter, John and James up on a mountain to pray. And as he was praying, the appearance of his face was transformed, and his clothes became dazzling white. Luke 9:28-29

The Transfiguration takes place immediately after Jesus begins to tell his disciples that he is going to Jerusalem to die. This moved their relationship to a deeper level and it must have generated stress, confusion, and alarm among them. As he faced this final journey to Jerusalem, Jesus needed affirmation and blessing. The Transfiguration was a divine affirmation and blessing: "This is my Son whom I love."

Jesus brought Peter, James, and John with him as a small prayer group, and God showed up. Together, as an intimate group, the four are strengthened, renewed, and affirmed by the divine presence. Jesus finds strength not only in the divine presence but a divine presence experienced in community with his intimate friends. They share this moment of strength, affirmation, and blessing. They are mutually encouraged and strengthened.

We build intimacy with others through *shared feelings*.

He took Peter, James and John with him, and he became deeply troubled and distressed. He told them, "My soul is crushed with grief to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me. Mark 14:33-34

Jesus had just come from an emotional last supper with the twelve (Judas had betrayed him, the disciples had argued about who was the greatest, and Jesus had washed their feet) and had walked over to the Garden of Gethsemane with eleven disciples during which Peter and the rest pledged their loyalty to the death (but then they failed to keep their promises). He took the three deeper into the garden than the other disciples. He would lean on them for support in a more intimate way than the other eight.

Walking with the three Jesus begins to feel the enormity of what is about to happen. His spirit is troubled--even frightened--and overwhelmed. Grief and sorrow flood his heart; it crushes him to the point that he wishes he were dead. He agonizes over his decision to submit to the will of the Father. Astoundingly, he confesses the depth of his feeling to his intimate friends. He reveals his true self. He shares his feelings with them. He wants his friends to "watch with him"-to share his feelings, to pray with him, to be there for him. He needs a listening ear; he needs the support of his intimates.

Jesus needed the intimacy of human companionship.

He would not be authentically human otherwise. God did not create us to live in isolation from others. Rather, God built into us a bonding mechanism that connects with other people. This can become unhealthy (as in codependency), but connection with other people is necessary for

personal, mental, and spiritual health. Humans are meant to live in relation with others just as the Triune God is community-in-relation. When these relationships remain superficial we lose what God intended intimacy to provide.

Human intimacy provides authentic relationship, accountability in living, support in times of need, companions to share the joys, and the ability to live without secrets. Jesus nurtured this kind of intimacy with Peter, James, and John. His apprenticeship in human intimacy offers us a model.

The journey into intimacy is difficult. It is sometimes disappointing--even as it was for Jesus himself. But any other journey is lonely, fearful, and isolating. We cannot become what God intends without intimacy with others. Without intimacy--at some level--we become a facade, a Hollywood front and we live with a divided self. We let others see one self, but the real self we keep hidden. We really don't want anyone to see us as we really are--we really don't want intimacy--because we fear their rejection and disappointment. But we cannot truly be ourselves without others--a few--knowing us.

Do you have people with whom....

- you can express your deepest and most authentic feelings?
- you can tell your darkest secrets?
- you feel safe talking about your relationships?
- you can confess sin?
- you can let your guard down and be truly real?

Questions:

1. Why do think Jesus sometimes separated the "three" from the rest of the "twelve"? What was significant about each of the three occasions noted in the lesson?
2. Why does Jesus "need" intimacy? Or, does he? What does his need for human companionship tell us about our need for intimacy?
3. What does intimacy mean for you? Why is it so difficult to experience? Why do many fear it?
4. What parameters are necessary for authentic intimacy? What are the "ground rules" of intimacy?
5. How might we develop intimate relationships with others? What strategies would be useful?

Session 7. Jesus, Shaped by the Gathering: The Significance of Assembly

*Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about him spread through the whole countryside. He taught in their synagogues, and everyone praised him. He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. And he stood up to read. **Luke 4:14-16***

*Sometime later, Jesus went up to Jerusalem for a feast of the Jews. **John 5:1***

*That is why he is not ashamed to call them brothers, saying, "I will tell of your name to my brothers; in the midst of the congregation I will sing your praise." **Hebrews 2:11b-12 (quoting Psalm 22:22)***

Jesus habitually attended weekly Sabbath synagogue meetings (Mark 1:21; 6:2; Luke 4:16; 6:6; 13:10). The synagogue functioned as a community center throughout the week, but on the Sabbath it was a place of prayer, Scripture reading, and teaching. Jesus participated in the weekly communal life of the people of God.

Jesus celebrated the mighty acts of God at the festivals in Jerusalem (John 2:13, 23; 5:1; 7:14; 10:22; 11:55). Jesus joined other believers for the priestly rituals of sacrifice, praise and prayer in the temple. He ate the Passover lamb, prayed in the temple, and discussed the kingdom of God with the people and their leaders. Jesus participated in the communal life of Israel.

In community—both at the local synagogue and at the national temple—Jesus communed with his brothers and sisters through word (teaching), table (sacrificial meals), prayer, and praise. In the temple he stood with his brothers and sisters to hear the reading of the Torah. He listened to the praises of the Levitical choir that reverberated through the temple courts. He watched the sacrificial rituals and ate with his community at God's table. In the synagogue he repeated the benedictions, said the prayers and listened to the reading of Scripture. He was both student and teacher at the synagogue. Jesus entered the presence of God at the temple with thousands and prayed with tens and hundreds in the synagogue. Jesus worshipped the Father with his brothers and sisters.

This communal life rehearsed the mighty acts of God in the history of Israel. As a participant, Jesus was shaped by this hearing and rehearing of God's redemptive work in history. Again and again Jesus renewed his mission, remembered his identity, and communed with fellow-believers as he stood for prayer and praise in the both the temple and synagogue.

This communal life was no mere addendum to his mission nor was it incidental to his faith. It was an intricate part of his spirituality. Participation in the larger community is an anticipation of the community that surrounds the throne of God. Indeed, it is more than an anticipation, it is a foretaste—an actual participation—in that heavenly assembly. Our earthly assemblies are

participations in the heavenly reality; to gather here is to assemble there. To praise God in the midst of the congregation here is to stand before the face of God there.

Assembling before the face of God is not the by-product of God's salvation or our solitude with God. It is actually the goal of God's creative and redemptive work. God celebrates victory over sin and death by gathering people into the divine presence. When we assemble, we celebrate that victory with God.

This is the experience of Jesus himself. As he hung on the cross, he felt forsaken as the darkness enveloped him. God himself mourned as Jesus lamented, "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?" But embedded in the lament is also a hope, an expectation. Jesus hoped in God's redemption; he knew God would deliver him. Jesus' lament is the first verse of Psalm 22, and that lament also cries out for rescue and salvation (22:21). Jesus expects to again stand in the midst of the congregation of God's people and praise the Father. He will declare the name of God to his brothers and sisters as he testifies about God's redemption (22:22). In the assembly Jesus will celebrate his deliverance and the victory over sin and death.

This is one of the reasons I love to assemble with the saints. As part of a community, I remember that I am not alone. Worshipping as community, I am reminded of the story. And especially when I have a difficult week--whether with grief, or resentment, or anger, or tragic circumstances, or job hassles, or family strife--intentionally coming before the throne with others encourages me, empowers me, and ultimately transforms me. The move from Friday to Sunday, the move from hurt to praise, the move from loneliness to community is what I experience when I assemble with my brothers and sisters; it is where I, like Jesus, join the communal anthem of praise and testify to the mighty works of God in the past, my present experience of them, and the coming of God's kingdom.

The preacher of Hebrews encourages his hearers that Jesus is honored to call us his brothers and sisters and even now stands in the midst of the assembly to declare the praise of God. As we assemble and sing God's praises, Jesus sings with us. He stands at the center of the assembly to declare the victory and praise the Father. When we assemble, we gather around him and follow him in celebration and praise. Wherever two or three are gathered together, Jesus is present with them (Matthew 18:20).

Questions for Discussion:

1. What did you find interesting about the habits of Jesus in terms of gathering with his larger community?
2. Why do you think this was important to Jesus? How did it shape him as a human being?
3. How does the use of Psalm 22 on the lips of Jesus and in Hebrews 2 give you a vision for what assembling (gathering) means?
4. What is your experience of assembly? What does it mean to you?
5. What is the function of the assembly for the people of God today?

A Christological Statement: What is the Gospel?
John Mark Hicks

The good news is this: *God has fulfilled the Abrahamic promise in Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God who is both King of Israel and Enfleshed God.*

The Synoptics open with this announcement, whether it is the genealogy in Matthew, or Mark's title, or Luke's songs. The expanded salutation in Romans summarizes it (Romans 1:1b-4): "the gospel of God, which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy scriptures, concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh and was declared to be Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness by resurrection from the dead, Jesus the Messiah our Lord."

This good news was announced to Abraham (Gal 3:8) and anticipated by the exiles (Isa 52:7; Rom 10:15), but it arrived in the ministry of Jesus (Mark 1:15). The early church proclaimed the good news that Jesus is the Messiah (Acts 5:42; 8:12) who confirmed the good news of the promise (Rom 15:8), through whom the story of Israel came to its fulfillment (Acts 2; 3; 10; 13; 26:6), and by whom the Gentiles are included in the promise (Eph 2:17; 3:6-8). The Abrahamic promise is fully realized when God invites those who have persevered in faith ("overcome") to "inherit these things, and I will be their God and they will be my children" (Rev 21:7).

The good news is this: *God has acted through Jesus the Messiah in the power of the Spirit to reverse the curse by inaugurating, effecting, and guaranteeing new creation.* Or, more simply, Jesus the Messiah is both the good news embodied and the bearer of the good news of the kingdom of God.

The *telos* of creation, which tumbled off-track in the human tragedies of Genesis 3-11, is reaffirmed in the Abrahamic promise, anticipated in the story of Israel, proleptically actualized in the history of Jesus the Messiah, inaugurated in the history of the church, and fully realized in the inheritance of the new heaven and new earth. In this way, through Jesus the Messiah, Abraham and his descendants—those who trust in the Messiah—inherit the cosmos (Romans 4:13).

The "Christ Event" is the means by which this inheritance is secured. God keeps faith with Abraham through the Messiah, and God reconciles the world in the Messiah. By "Christ Event" I primarily mean an event within history (created time and space) though also mediated to us through an existential encounter in the Spirit.

- The incarnation of the Logos as Jesus of Nazareth united God and humanity.
- The ministry of Jesus proleptically realized the future in the present.
- The death of Jesus defeated the powers through obedient surrender to God.
- The resurrection of Jesus inaugurated new creation.
- The enthronement of Jesus at the right hand of God guarantees the future of creation.

The “Christ Event” is the means to an end, and the *good news is both the means and the end*. The arrival of Jesus the Messiah is good news, and the end, accomplished through the Messiah, is also good news (the “good news of the kingdom”).

Incarnation. “God in the flesh” is good news because the person descended from Abraham is also the same one who descended from heaven, the Son of God. This one is both human and divine, and therefore unites God and humanity in intimate fellowship. The incarnation completes creation by realizing its *telos*, which is the mutual indwelling of God and humanity within the creation.

Ministry. The ministry of Jesus—empowered by the Spirit—is eschatological in character because the future, which is the kingdom of God, is proleptically present through the reconciling work of the Messiah. “The good news of the kingdom of God” is this: the blind see, the lame walk, the poor rejoice, the dead are raised, sins are forgiven, the oppressed are liberated, and people groups are reconciled. The promises to Israel are realized in the ministry of Jesus, and the curse is reversed.

Death. The death of Jesus defeated the powers arrayed against humanity. Those powers included sin, the demonic, and oppressive social structures. Jesus endured the cross in obedience to the Father, and through that obedience overcame evil, redeemed creation, and demonstrated both the love and righteousness of God. Through obedience unto death, the Son overcame evil with good.

Resurrection. The resurrection of Jesus by the power of the Spirit inaugurated new creation. As the firstborn from the dead, the resurrected Jesus is the beginning of new creation. He is the new humanity, which is the first installment or first fruit of a renewed creation, including the resurrection of the dead. Death is defeated, and new life is realized.

Ascension. The enthronement of Jesus at the right hand of God guarantees the future of creation. Jesus, as new human—the son of Abraham, son of David—reigns until creation is fully redeemed, including the redemption of humanity in body and soul. As the reigning Lord, Jesus pours out the Spirit upon the renewed Israel, the church, until the last enemy is destroyed.

The good news, then, is the *faithfulness of God* who keeps the Abrahamic promise to renew the creation, which is the reconciliation of God, humanity, and creation. This includes the forgiveness of sins, transformation of body and soul by the Spirit as new creation, and the destruction of opposing powers. This good news is accomplished by the *faithfulness of Jesus the Messiah*, who as both Son of God and Son of David, unites God and humanity so that they might dwell together within the creation.

The Narrative of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit
John Mark Hicks

1. The Incarnation/Birth.

Luke 1:35 – “The angel said to her, ‘The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God’.”

“In the Annunciation the Spirit rests on the Son in the waters of the womb of Mary...At the Annunciation the Spirit seals her resting on the Son antecedently in the womb of the Father and anticipates her resting on the Son in the womb of his side. In these she keeps faith with her hovering over the waters already at creation” (Rogers, *After the Spirit*, loc 1239). The Spirit has no revulsion for the physical but takes up residence within it and befriends it. There the Spirit delights to rest within the creation, upon the creation, and hover over the creation.

Incarnation is the completion of creation; it embodies the goal of creation itself. Incarnation tends toward consummation, not simply redemption; it embodies union, not simply liberation. If redemption is the main story, then consummation becomes superfluous, and then so does creation and human bodies.

The incarnation is the means of *theosis*. God unites with humanity so that humanity might experience God’s goal, that is, for humanity to become like God and for humanity to intimately experience the communion of the Triune God. Incarnation is an act of empathetic grace but it is not a contradiction because humanity was designed to unite with God.

2. The Baptism.

Luke 3:21-22 – “Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, ‘You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased’.”

“The baptism of Jesus is primarily to be understood as an intertrinitarian event, in which other human beings participate by their own baptism... Jesus receives the love and witness in a way that other human beings can participate in—he comes to the Jordan ‘to perfect baptism,’ i.e., to accomplish its potential for initiating human beings into the triune life” (*After the Spirit*, loc 1753-55).

At the same time, Jesus shares life with Israel—announced the child of God through water (like Israel at the Red Sea), receives the presence of God in the Spirit (like Israel at

Sinai), enters the wilderness by the Spirit (like Israel in the wilderness), and enters Galilee in the power of the Spirit (like Israel entering the promised land).

In the baptism of Jesus, God pours out grace upon Israel (among whom Jesus stands as an Israelite), pours out the Spirit upon Israel, and affirms their status and dignity as God's children. The baptism of Jesus is the first "Christian" baptism as it moves from Israel to new creation with the descent of the eschatological Spirit.

3. The Ministry.

Luke 4:14a, 17b-19 – "Then Jesus, filled with the power of the Spirit, returned to Galilee...He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written: 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release on the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor'."

The Spirit inaugurates consummation within the economy of redemption as the future breaks into the present. "Repent and believe" is the call; turn from brokenness and trust in the consummation, which is already at work in the world in the power of the Spirit as it was in the ministry of Jesus. In other words, the ministry of Jesus reverses the curse, and we are called into that ministry through our baptism to participate in the work of redemption for the sake of consummation.

When we participate in the ministry of "son (ui°o\B) of the Most High" (Luke 1:32), we, too, are called "sons (ui°oi«) of the Most High" (Luke 6:35), particularly when we imitate the Father: "love our enemies, do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return...for he is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful." The Lukan narrative assumes participation in the ministry of Jesus results in *theosis* (cf. Kuecker, *JTI* 8 (2014) 213-228).

"Jesus is the Son of the Most High by virtue of the life-giving work of the Spirit. Jesus shares in fully human life (experiences death) and he receives human worship along with the Father. Followers of Jesus can share in Jesus' identity as son of the Most High, as they follow Jesus into enemy love and radical generosity, for to adopt that pattern of life is to be conformed to the life of the Most High" (Keucker, 219).

4. The Transfiguration.

Luke 9:28-36 – "Jesus...went upon the mountain to pray. And while he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white...Moses and Elijah...appeared in glory and were speaking of his exodus...[Peter, James, and John] saw his glory...While [Peter] was saying this, a cloud came and overshadowed them; and they were terrified as they entered the cloud. Then from the cloud came a voice that said, "This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!"

As Jesus prays in the Spirit, the Father comes to Jesus through the Spirit. The intimacy of the Son's prayer life is a function of the communion of the Father, Son, and Spirit. In this moment, as the Son faces his "exodus" (death), the Father affirms him and proleptically announces the resurrection, the future glory of the Son (transfiguration)

This is moment is a gathering of humanity in the presence of the glory of God where the community participates in this communion of the Father, Son, and Spirit. Peter had it right—we need tabernacles in which to worship, but he had it wrong as well—this was only an anticipation of the future. This is the function of liturgy and assembly—to glorify the Triune God, and it is the function of life itself as a human being is *homo liturgicus*. With the Eastern Church, perhaps it is helpful to see prayer and assembly as moments where we enter the cloud of Transfiguration to glorify the Father, Son, and Spirit.

The Eucharist is the epiphany of the Son as our eyes are opened in the breaking of the bread to see and know the Son. This is the gift of the Father through the Spirit. The Eucharist is the living Christ at the table by the power of the Spirit through whom we commune with the Triune God.

5. The Death.

Luke 23:43-46 – “[Jesus] replied, ‘Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise.’ It was now about noon, and darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon, while the sun’s light failed; and the curtain of the temple was torn in two. Then Jesus, crying with a loud voice, said, ‘Father, into your hands I commend my spirit.’ Having said this, he breathed his last.”

The death is both abandonment and entrustment, that is, Father abandons the Son but the Son commends himself to Father. The commitment prayer along with the hope of Paradise reflects confidence and intimacy (“Father” is how Jesus addresses God in Luke). Yet, the Son is abandoned to the grave. “God causes God to go into abandonment by God while accompanying him on the way with his Spirit” (Rowan Williams, quoted in *After the Spirit*, loc. 1050).

Luke has redacted Mark’s account, adding the repentance of the thief, the tearing of the curtain before Jesus’s death, changing the language of darkness to conform to Joel 2:17 (quoted in Acts 2:20), and substituting Psalm 31:6 for Psalm 22:1. Luke’s narrative is Jesus’s death functions as Passover liberation in which Jesus obediently entrusts himself to the Father in death for the sake of liberating humanity from death. Though the Father abandoned him to the grave, the Son was not abandoned in the grave (Acts 2:27, 31).

The death of Jesus at the hands of the powers destroys the powers through faithful obedience as the Spirit justifies and vindicates the innocent one. Through death, Jesus unites with Israel in their suffering of the consequences of the exile and releases Israel

from exile as the innocent one, and what God does for Israel, God does for all humanity by releasing humanity from the bondage of death and sin. Through death, Jesus affirms the love of God for all humanity, for all creation.

6. The Resurrection.

Luke 24:35-43 -- While they were talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." They were startled and terrified, and thought that they were seeing a ghost. He said to them, "Why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? Look at my hands and my feet; see that it is I myself. Touch me and see; for a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have." And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet. While in their joy they were disbelieving and still wondering, he said to them, "Have you anything here to eat?" They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate in their presence.

Romans 8:11 – "If the *Spirit* of the *One* who raised *Jesus* from the dead dwells in you, the *One* who raised *Christ* from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his *Spirit* that dwells in you."

Believers become participants in the life that the Father through the Spirit shares with Jesus. "The inclusion of the Spirit of the Raiser and of the Raised within the human becomes the inclusion of the human with God" (*After the Spirit*, loc. 1014). The mortal body does not contrast with the Triune life but is assimilated or grafted into the Trinitarian life.

The resurrection of Jesus, as the firstborn from the dead, is our own resurrection, which is also the resurrection of creation itself. The resurrection of Jesus inaugurates new creation in the form of a new humanity that knows immortality in communion with the Triune God.

The resurrection of Jesus, in the Gospel of Luke, is central to the Eucharistic table. The Emmaus story (breaking bread), as well as this story and Acts 1:4 (sunalizo/menoß), involves eating with the resurrected Jesus, and this is the significance of "breaking bread" in Luke-Acts.

7. The Ascension/Enthronement

Luke 24:49-53 – “And see, I am sending upon you what my Father promised; so stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high. Then he led them out as far as Bethany, and, lifting up his hands, he blessed them. While he was blessing them, he withdrew from them and was carried up into heaven. And they worshipped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy; and they were continually in the temple blessing God.”

As Acts 2:29-36 affirms, God raised Jesus from the dead and exalted him to the right hand of God to sit on the throne until his enemies were defeated (quoting Psalm 110). Jesus as new human, blessing the disciples, ascends by the Spirit in a spiritual (resurrected) body to receive from the Father his throne (kingdom) as well as the gift of the Spirit, whom Jesus then pours out upon the community gathered to bless God. Jesus invites us to reign with him in the power the Spirit as we participate in the communion of the Triune God and co-rule with God over the world, for which we were created in the beginning.

Jesus invokes a priestly blessing upon his disciples (cf. Leviticus 9:22-23; Sirach 50:20-22), and at the same time it is a royal blessing (Psalm 67:1-17), which gives hope to the world over which the royal priest reigns. This blessing is the fulfillment of the promise to Abraham, which is for the whole world (Acts 2:39; 3:25-26). The ascended Christ is present to the church by the Spirit as one who continually blesses the people, and when assembled, we, too, in liturgy receive this blessing from the Father through the Son in the Spirit.

8. Pentecost

Acts 2:16-18, 33 – “This is what was spoken through the prophet Joel: ‘In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams. Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy’...Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and have received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you both see and hear.”

The pouring out of the Spirit actualizes a new age, a new era in the economy of redemption. Because the new human has been enthroned, the eschatological Spirit is poured out from the future to bring creation to its final goal. This new era is inclusive; the Spirit of God comes upon all—male/female, slave/free, young/old, Jew/Gentile—and empowers them to see the world eschatologically (visions) and testify to its reality (prophecy).

“The *theosis* of the church is constituted by the radical identification between Jesus the ascended Lord and the gathered people of God. The church’s participation in this pneumatological union with the life of the enemy-loving God by virtue of its participation in the particular history of Jesus [and by the indwelling, outpoured life of the Spirit, JMH] allows for the church to share in Jesus’ life of radical generosity and enemy love through practices of baptism, prayer, incorporation, and table fellowship. To share life with Jesus, by the power of the Spirit, is to get in [participate, JMH] on God’s objective assumption of humanity in Christ. (Kuecker, 223).