

HTB IX. 1-7

THE LIFE OF JESUS: PART ONE OF TWO.

MATTHEW, MARK, LUKE, JOHN.

COMPREHENSIVE QUESTION;

What can be learned about God's kingdom from the first half of the four gospels? What is the pertinence of each point today? How does each one inform your Christian life, outlook, and hope?

NOTES:

1. REMEMBER, EVERY QUESTION INCLUDES A "WHY?" AND A "BECAUSE?". IF YOU THINK YOU MIGHT FORGET THOSE REASONS, THEN WRITE THEM DOWN BRIEFLY WITH YOUR ANSWERS. LATER THOSE REASONS MAY HELP YOU EVALUATE YOUR ANSWERS.
2. LOOK UP THE REFERENCES IN G'S, ESPECIALLY THE LONG STRING OF REFERENCES, BECAUSE THEY MAY (a) HELP YOU ANSWER THE QUESTIONS, (b) ILLUMINATE THE CONTEX, AND (c) REVEAL THE DEEP CONNECTIONS WITH THE OLD TESTAMENT SCRIPTURES THAT EARLY CHRISTIANS WOULD BE WELL AWARE OF.

INTRODUCTION TO THE GOSPELS

Although they are historical, the four gospels of the New Testament do not address many modern concerns about the 1st century A.D., for the gospels focus primarily on the activities and teachings of the historical Jesus of Nazareth. Although they are biographical, they are not complete biographies, for they leave out most of Jesus' life and many of the personal and background details that modern biographers seek to supply. They are in fact the first examples of a new literary genre, gospels, for their primary role is to present the good news [gospel] about God as he is revealed in the ministry and passion [suffering] of Jesus of Nazareth, God's Son and Messiah, whom his followers came to celebrate as their Saviour and Lord.

For about thirty to seventy years after Jesus' death and resurrection, the earliest Christians were able to learn about Jesus' activities and teaching from his surviving followers, the immediate witnesses to what he had said and done. The sermon sketches in the Book of the Acts of the Apostles give some idea of the shape and content of what Jesus' followers taught as the church grew and expanded from Jerusalem westward throughout the Roman world. Eventually the early Christian's interest in details of what Jesus had actually said and done was threatening to outstrip the information the remaining witnesses could personally provide in many locales, so their oral accounts needed to be transcribed and assembled in written form as gospels. These written gospels could be widely circulated for evangelism, for instructing new converts in Christianity, for clarifying the truth about what Jesus actually said and did, and even for Christian worship. Long after the original witnesses were dead, later generations of Christians in the 2nd-5th centuries also tried to write further popular, and sometimes secret, accounts of Jesus' life, teachings and passion. These latter "gospels" sought to understand Jesus in terms of their own contemporary Greco-Roman worldview, rather than in terms of Jesus' own early 1st century Palestinian Jewish context, which was much more influenced by the thought patterns of the Hebrews than by those of the Greeks and Romans. Although these new "gospels" were usually attributed to one of Jesus' earliest disciples to help authenticate them, they were not recognized by the early church as authentic and normative accounts of Jesus' deeds and teachings according to the original apostolic witnesses, whose memories Jesus had promised would be aided by God's own Holy Spirit (Jn 14:25).

Exactly how, where, when and by whom the four New Testament gospels originally came to be written, are issues still vigorously debated by modern biblical scholars. Quite a variety of views are held, even by scholars who view these four gospels as vital parts of God's inspired [breathed out] written revelation of himself. Although there is still no universal consensus on such matters or on the exact literary interdependence of these four gospels, we will work with what seems to be the widest consensus yet. Since Matthew, Mark, and Luke share roughly the same approach to Jesus and his ministry, they have been dubbed the "Synoptic [viewing together] Gospels". Although many early Christians viewed Matthew's Gospel as the earliest of the three, most modern scholars consider Mark's to have been the first of these three gospels, because of its simple outline of Jesus' activities, and because most of its content is found in the other two in roughly the same order. For teachings of Jesus which they both include, but Mark doesn't, Matthew and Luke are usually thought to have drawn upon another early written source collecting Jesus' sayings, which is no longer extant but dubbed "Q" [from "Quelle", German for source]. Both Matthew and Luke seem also to have had other separate sources, probably oral ones, which each drew upon for the sections unique to their own gospels. In contrast, John's Gospel overlaps with the three Synoptics very little, almost as if it were written somewhat later to supplement them with another, yet compatible, eyewitness perspective. This general understanding of the relationship between the four gospels is the one presented graphically on our manual's historical chart of the New Testament's literature.

Although the four gospels differ in emphasis and in details and their arrangement, they all follow roughly the same general outline of Jesus' brief ministry: his preparation for ministry, his public

itinerate ministry of word and deed in Galilee and Judea, his final week in Jerusalem, and his passion and resurrection. Around this basic skeletal outline, Christians in all ages have sought to reconstruct a unified history of Jesus' life and teachings on the basis of the accounts of the four canonical gospels. Two general approaches have prevailed: the harmony which blends together sections from all of the canonical gospels' into one continuous narrative, and the synopsis that set three of four gospels side by side in parallel columns. Unfortunately, today both approaches are often called 'harmonies'. The harmonies like Tatian's late 2nd century Diatesseron [fourfold] in Syriac and Dorothy L. Sayers' mid 20th century drama The Man Born to Be King usually have popular appeal because of their simple clarity, but all too often they seem one-dimensional, and are inevitably coloured by the perspective of the editor in choosing which of the several gospel accounts of the events and teachings is to be included in their narrative. A comparison of such harmonies, as with the comparison of the great many Lives of Jesus over the centuries, reveals more about their editor's own faith, understanding, and culture than those of the 1st century Jesus himself. Of course, this doesn't seem to bother those who claim that even the four 1st century gospels themselves are so coloured by the faith of the early church that today we have little or no hope of recovering the real "historical Jesus" behind the early church's "Christ of faith" — unless, of course, you believe, as the early church claimed following the apostolic witnesses of Jesus' life, that Jesus of Nazareth and God's Messiah / Christ were identical.

From the 2nd century Ammonius of Alexandria and 3rd century Eusebius of Caesarea on, synoptic parallel sections between the first three gospels were noted in the margins of their copies of the gospels. Later these sections were presented side by side in parallel columns of a synopsis, so they could be easily compared with respect to their similarity and differences in detail, style, perspective, even theology. This also facilitated scholarly attempts to discern the possible interdependences of the four gospels, and to try to discern their distinct literary and oral sources. However, because only a general over-all historical order of Jesus life was clearly common to all the gospels, attempts to juxtapose all of the texts of the four gospels in parallel section by section in one unified chronological order, involved many general and specific historical choices by the editors. To date there is no clear scholarly consensus on which of many possible chronological arrangements of synoptic sections and details is best. Nevertheless, because of the great value in studying the four gospels in parallel in some defensible chronological order, I have had to choose one of the synoptic approaches to follow in our study of the New Testament literature with respect to the historical period of the life of Jesus the Messiah.

I have chosen to follow very closely the order of A. T. Robertson's synopsis, A Harmony of the Gospels (Harper & Row New York, 1922), not only because I am most familiar with it, but also because it juxtaposes all four gospels, and because its extensive notes explain many of the historical choices the editor was making. Robertson's arrangement generally follows the detailed chronology of Mark's gospel, supplemented at various points by the accounts of Matthew, Luke, and John. For comparison you might want to look at the outline of the different four-gospel synopsis presented in 1990 by the Thomas Nelson Publishers in the midsection of some of the pew editions of their NRSV Bible translation, but without editorial notes, only an acknowledgement of their dependence on Burton H. Throckmorton Jr's widely-used three gospel synopsis. It seems to be more influenced by literary than historical criteria.

In order to be able to appreciate the detailed similarities and differences between the four gospels it is necessary to read them not only in parallel, but also in a word-for-word type translation, like the KJV, RV, ASV, RSV, NASB, NRSV, NKJV, ESV rather than in one of the many contemporary dynamic equivalent, thought-by-thought translation, e.g., JB, NEB, TEV, NIV, CEV, REB, NLB, CJB, CEB, etc. A. T. Robertson's synopsis uses the Revised Version of 1885 [RV], one of the most literal committee translations available in his day and even now. But because the RV employs a somewhat dated and British English idiom, it's often helpful to have the student's preferred, more dynamic equivalent translation available for comparison to catch the contemporary meaning of an obscure text.

The readings for our studies of the gospels should be read in the order of the groups of texts in which they are presented so that the parallels between the gospels in each group will be most evident, as well as the chronological order of the sections. Thus, following the order of Robertson's synopsis, for Trail IX: Section 1, read ## 1-3 of Robertson's synopsis [RS] in order, i.e., first Lk 1:1-4; then Jn 1:1-18; and finally, Mt 1:1-17 and its parallel [//] Lk 3:23-38.

INTRODUCTION TO MARK'S GOSPEL

According to ancient tradition, Mark's Gospel was written for the church in Rome shortly after 60 A.D. by John Mark, Barnabas' cousin and sometime companion missionary of both Paul and Peter, in order to put into written form Peter's oral evangelistic preaching about Jesus as God's Messiah and Son. Dates in the later 60's and early 70's and other places of origin are still argued for by some biblical scholars. While Mark's own background is thoroughly Jewish, he is sympathetic to Gentiles. The language throughout is a rough form of the Greek of popular speech, and the most Aramaic in style of all the gospels. Palestinian customs are explained, and technical terms, even Greek ones, are sometimes expressed in transliterated Latin terms for his Roman readers.

In the earliest centuries of Christianity, this was the least popular of all the four gospels, mainly because most of its contents were embodied in the much smoother and stylistic longer gospels of Matthew and Luke. It was even commonly viewed as a later and shorter abstract of Matthew's earlier gospel. Perhaps because of this early neglect, Mark's original ending has been lost, perhaps also even its introduction. Nevertheless, Mark has come into its own in modern times, because its detailed, vivid, galloping, childlike narrative reads like a factual, eyewitness account of the work and teaching of a real historical person in mid-1st century Palestine. Even Jesus' feelings are frequently revealed. Jesus' disciples appear in a poor light, even though their training for future ministries is well described. A clear turning point in Jesus' ministry comes with Peter's confession at Caesarea Philippi (Mk 8:27-38), yet Jesus' passion is the focus of this gospel, for two fifths of its text is devoted to Jesus' last journey to Jerusalem.

ANALYSIS OF MARK'S GOSPEL

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|-------------|---|
| 1:1-13 | The mission of John the Baptist in preparation for Jesus' ministry. |
| 1:14-9:50 | Jesus' Galilean ministry: |
| 1:14-5:43 | His early ministry in eastern Galilee, centred in Capernaum, |
| 6:1-9:50 | His later ministry in northern Galilee. |
| 7:1-8:56 | Ministry in and near Capernaum, |
| 9:1-50 | Disciple-centered ministry. |
| 10:1-13:37 | Jesus' Judean ministry: |
| 10:1-52 | His general ministry there, |
| 11:1-27 | His triumphal entry into Jerusalem, |
| 11:27-12:44 | His controversies with the religious authorities in Jerusalem, |
| 13:1-37 | His apocalyptic discourse. |
| 14:1-15:47 | Jesus' arrest, trial, crucifixion and burial: |
| 14:1-9 | Jesus anointed for burial by a woman in Bethany, |
| 14:10-11 | Judas contacts the chief priests about betraying Jesus, |
| 14:12-25 | Jesus' last Passover meal with his disciples, |
| 14:26-31 | Peter's coming denial of Jesus foretold, |
| 14:32-42 | Jesus and his disciples in Gethsemane, |
| 14:43-52 | Jesus' arrest, |
| 14:53-65 | Jesus' preliminary hearing, |
| 14:66-72 | Peter's denials of Jesus, |
| 15:1-20 | Jesus' trials, |
| 15:21-41 | Jesus' crucifixion. |
| 16:1-8 | The women's discovery of Jesus' resurrection. |
| [16:9-20 | Longer endings found only in some later manuscripts.] |

INTRODUCTION TO LUKE'S GOSPEL

This, the longest New Testament book, was probably written in Rome in the early to mid-60's by Luke, the Greek physician who traveled there with the apostle Paul, in order to present to Theophilus (Ac 1 :1-4) an orderly account of what Jesus had done and taught. As a Gentile writing for a Gentile, Luke employs quite literary Greek, avoids technical Jewish terms, explains Palestinian geography, expresses the universal character of Jesus' gospel, and places less emphasis on the immediate return of the Messiah than do Matthew and Mark. Although he establishes broad connections between Jesus' ministry and the general themes of the Old Testament, he presents Jesus himself as the end of the old order and the beginning of God's new order (16:16). Therefore, Jesus' death and resurrection are not the end but the beginning of history. Conceptually, Luke focuses upon prayer, praise, peace, joy, love, friendship, wisdom, authority, glory, the Holy Spirit, and Jerusalem and its temple.

As an historian, Luke carefully checks earlier accounts of Jesus' life and ministry, like Mark's Gospel, against the testimony of eyewitnesses (1:1-4), connects Jesus' life with secular history by specifying dates, times and places. He also includes some unique teaching plus more information about Jesus' early life and later ministry. He has a sharp eye for the popular responses to Jesus, and tends to stress Jesus as a healer, saviour, and deliverer. He has a special interest in social relationships, and in Jesus' ministry to individuals, especially to marginal people like the poor, women, children, and sinners.

ANALYSIS OF LUKE'S GOSPEL

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| 1:1-4 | Prologue. |
| 1:5-2:52 | Infancy narratives: |
| 1:5-25 | The miraculous conception of John the Baptist, |
| 1:26-38 | The annunciation to Mary, |
| 1:39-56 | The three-month visit of the pregnant Mary with the pregnant Elizabeth, |
| 1:57-80 | The birth and growth of John the Baptist, |
| 2:1-20 | The nativity of Jesus, |
| 2:21-40 | Jesus' circumcision and presentation in the temple, |
| 2:41-52 | Jesus' trip to the temple at age 12. |
| 3:1-4:13 | Preparation for ministry: |
| 3:1-20 | The ministry of John the Baptist, |
| 3:21-22 | Jesus' baptism by John, |
| 3:23-38 | Jesus' human genealogy, |
| 4:1-13 | Jesus' temptations in the wilderness. |
| 4:14-9:50 | The Galilean mission: |
| 4:14-44 | Beginnings, |
| 5:1-6:16 | Calling the disciples, |
| 6:17-49 | Sermon on the plain, |
| 7:1-8:56 | Ministry in and near Capernaum, |
| 9:1-50 | Disciple-centered incidents. |
| 9:51-19:27 | The journey to Jerusalem: |
| 9:51-10:37 | Samaritan ministry, |
| 10:38-11:13 | Meditation and prayer, |
| 11:14-54 | Jesus and the Pharisees, |
| 12:1-53 | Jesus' advice to his disciples, |
| 12:28-19:27 | Various sayings and events. |
| 19:28-24:53 | The consummation of the Messiah's mission: |
| 19:28-21:38 | Ministry in Jerusalem: |
| 19:28-44 | Triumphal entry into Jerusalem, |
| 19:45-48 | Cleansing of the temple, |
| 20:1-47 | Confrontations with Jewish officials and parties, |
| 21:1-38 | Prophecies of judgement on Jerusalem and the Messiah's advent. |
| 22:1-24:53 | Passion, death and resurrection narratives: |
| 22:1-38 | Jesus' last Passover supper with his disciples, |
| 22:39-48 | Jesus and his disciples on the Mt. of Olives, |
| 22:49-53 | Jesus' arrest, |
| 22:54-52 | Peter's denials of Jesus, |
| 22:53-23:25 | Jesus' passion and trials, |
| 23:26-32 | On the way to the cross, |
| 23:33-49 | Jesus' crucifixion, |
| 23:50-56 | Jesus' burial, |
| 24:1-49 | Jesus' post-resurrection appearances to his disciples, |
| 24:50-53 | Jesus' ascension |

INTRODUCTION TO MATTHEW'S GOSPEL

Matthew's Gospel may have been written in the 70's of the century A.D. by the apostle Matthew for the Christian church in a cosmopolitan city like the Syrian capital, Antioch, which had both a large Jewish population and strong Christian missions to Hellenistic-Jews and to Gentiles. Earlier and later dates for the book are still argued for, depending upon how one reads the gospel's relationships to the destructions of the temple and of Jerusalem, and to the deteriorating relationships between Jews and Christians during the latter half of 1st century A.D. The gospel presents Jesus as the anticipated, but rejected, Jewish Messiah. Its strong Judaic background is evident in its great interest in the fulfillment of Old Testament Messianic prophecies, in Jesus' respect for the Old Testament and his teaching of some of its main themes, in Jesus' limiting his ministry to the people of Israel, in a sensitivity to the mixed state of contemporary Jewish piety, in a familiarity with the variety of schools of rabbinic teaching, in an awareness of Jewish questions about the circumstances of Jesus' nativity and resurrection, in an acknowledgement of Jewish culpability for Jesus' death, in its lack of Mark's explanations of Jewish customs, and in its concern about what God would do in the future. Gentiles, however, are also kept in view, from the Magi in the birth narrative to the world-wide scope of the Great Commission (Mt 28:18-20). Only in this gospel does Jesus even mention his intent to found the church (16:18; 18:17).

Matthew is placed first in the New Testament, not only because many early Christians thought it was the earliest gospel written— first in Aramaic, then translated into Greek — but also because its very Jewish character made it a fitting bridge between the Old and New Testaments. It was no doubt the most popular gospel in the early Christian centuries for liturgical use, and for its stately structure which gathers Jesus' teachings topically into five discourses neatly spliced into a concise, lucid narrative of Jesus' activities. Apart from the larger, fixed points in the life of Jesus, detailed chronology does not seem to be a concern of the author.

ANALYSIS OF MATTHEW'S GOSPEL

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| 1:1-4:16 | The person of Jesus, the Messiah: Narrative: |
| 1:1-17 | Jesus' human genealogy, |
| 1:16-2:23 | Jesus' nativity, |
| 3:1-17 | Jesus' baptism, |
| 4:1-11 | Jesus' temptations, |
| 4:12-16 | Jesus' Galilean ministry begins. |
| 4:17-16:20 | The proclamation of Jesus, the Messiah: |
| 4:17-25 | Narrative: Jesus' early activities in Galilee, |
| 5:1-7:29 | <u>First discourse</u> : The sermon on the mount, |
| 8:1-9:38 | Narrative: Jesus' continuing teaching and healing ministries in Galilee and environs, |
| 10:1-42 | <u>Second discourse</u> : Mission directives to the twelve disciples, |
| 11:1-12:50 | Narrative: Jesus' interactions: |
| 11:1-19 | With the disciples of John the Baptist, |
| 11:20-30 | With the Galilean cities where Jesus had been ministering, |
| 12:1-45 | With the Pharisees, |
| 12:46-50 | With Jesus' own family. |
| 13:1-52 | <u>Third discourse</u> : Parables of the kingdom of heaven, |
| 14:1-16:20 | Narrative: Continuing northern ministry of Jesus, the Messiah: |
| 14:1-12 | Herod's execution of John the Baptist, |
| 14:13-21 | Jesus' feeding of the five thousand plus, |
| 14:22-33 | Jesus' calming of the storm on the Sea of Galilee, |
| 14:34-36 | Jesus' healing ministry in Gennesaret, |
| 15:1-20 | Jesus' further interactions with the Pharisees, |
| 15:21-28 | Jesus' encounter with a Canaanite woman in Tyre-Sidon, |
| 15:29-31 | Jesus' healing ministry by the shore of the Sea of Galilee, |
| 15:32-39 | Jesus' feeding of the four thousand, |
| 16:1-12 | Jesus' further interaction with Pharisees and with Sadducees, |

- 16:13-20 Jesus retreats with his disciples to Caesarea Philippi.
- 16:21-28:20 The passion, death and resurrection of Jesus, the Messiah:
- 16:21-17:27 Narrative: Jesus' later ministry in Galilee:
- 16:21-28 Jesus begins to teach his disciples about his passion to come in Jerusalem,
- 17:1-13 Jesus' transfiguration,
- 17:14-20 Jesus' healing of an epileptic son,
- 17:22f Jesus' continuing teaching about his passion, death and resurrection,
- 17:24-27 Jesus' payment of the temple taxes for himself and Peter.
- 18:1-35 Fourth discourse: Discipleship and discipline,
- 19:1-23:39 Narrative: Jesus' ministry in Judea:
- 19:1-20:34 Jesus' ministries of teaching and healing in Judea,
- 21:1-17 Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem,
- 21:18-22 Jesus' encounter with a fruitless fig tree,
- 21:23-22:46 Jesus' interaction with priests, elders, Pharisees and Sadducees in the temple,
- 23:1-39 Jesus' public critique of the Pharisees in the temple for his disciples.
- 24:1-25:46 Fifth discourse: Last times,
- 26:1-28:20 Narrative: Jesus' passion, death and resurrection appearances:
- 26:1-5 Jesus' death plotted by Jewish officials,
- 26:6-13 Jesus' anointed for burial by a woman in Bethany,
- 26:14-16 Jesus to be apprehended with Judas' help,
- 26:17-30 Jesus' final Passover meal.
- 26:31-46 Jesus and his disciples in Gethsemane,
- 26:47-56 Jesus' arrest,
- 26:57-27:31 Jesus' trials,
- 27:32-56 Jesus' crucifixion,
- 27:57-61 Jesus' burial,
- 27:62-66 Jesus' tomb sealed and guarded,
- 28:1-10 Jesus' resurrection appearances to the women,
- 28:11-15 Jesus' tomb guards' report and the official Jewish cover-up,
- 28:16-20 Jesus' appearance to the eleven disciples in Galilee

INTRODUCTION TO JOHN'S GOSPEL

While some modern biblical scholars maintain that this is the earliest and most Jewish of all the four canonical gospels, most still claim that it is the latest and most Greek one. It may well have been written by the apostle John in Ephesus in the 80's or 90's of the 1st century for Greek-speaking Jews in order to promote faith in Jesus as God's Messiah and Son. Its Greek is simple, but not bad; its vocabulary is limited, but its thought profound, frequently employing words like witness, believe / trust, love, life, abide, truth, word, and light. The author seems to have a very good grasp of Palestinian customs, history, and geography prior to the great Jewish-revolt against the Romans of 66-70 A.D., plus an eyewitnesses' knowledge of details like personal names and relationships, and even deep insights into Jesus' inner consciousness.

The emphasis and structure of this gospel is quite different than those of the Synoptics. There seems to be little traveling north and south, a focus on Jesus' ministry in Judea more than in Galilee and with individuals as well as with his disciples, specific Jewish groups and the masses, teaching in discourses and dialogues rather than in parables, and a selection of only seven significant miraculous signs, most of which are not even mentioned in the Synoptics. By connecting Jesus' words and deeds with successive Jewish festivals in Jerusalem, John helps biblical scholars map out a rough chronology of his ministry over a three-year period. A prologue interconnects the beginning of Jesus' ministry with that of John the Baptist, and introduces theological themes that permeate Jesus' teaching and both connect his words and deeds to each other and also to his true identity as God's eternal Word and unique Son, who is fully incarnate in human flesh and blood and sent on a mission to reveal the character and purposes of his heavenly Father. Much is made of this unique relationship to his Father, to Jesus' authority, to Old Testament references to him, to the temporal and eternal consequences of people's responses to him, and also to the nature and resources of Christian discipleship. Narratives and discourses tend to alternate throughout the book within successive topical sections.

ANALYSIS OF JOHN'S GOSPEL

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| 1:1-18 | Prologue: Who Jesus is. |
| 1:19-4:42 | Faith-producing impact of Jesus' earliest ministry: |
| 1:19-2:25 | Narrative: Early events, |
| 3:14:42 | Discourse: Early personal encounters. |
| 4:43-5:47 | Authority of Jesus' life-giving words: |
| 4:43-5:18 | Narrative: Two healings, |
| 5:19-47 | Discourse: The authority of Jesus' words. |
| 6:1-71 | Jesus' power over nature: |
| 6:1-21 | Narrative: Two nature miracles, |
| 6:22-71 | Discourse: Jesus, the bread of life. |
| 7:1-8:59 | Jesus at the Feast of Tabernacles: |
| 7:1-52 | Narrative: Division of opinion about Jesus, |
| 8:1-59 | Discourse: Jesus, the light of the world. |
| 9:1-10:39 | Jesus' concern for people: |
| 9:1-41 | Narrative: Healing of a blind man, |
| 10:1-39 | Discourse: Jesus, the good shepherd. |
| 10:40-12:50 | Jesus' gift of life through death: |
| 10:40-12:19 | Narrative: |
| 10:40-11:43 | Raising of Lazarus, |
| 11:54-12:11 | Anointing in preparation for Jesus' death, |
| 12:12-19 | Triumphal entry into Jerusalem. |
| 12:20-50 | Discourse: God brings life through death. |
| 13:1-20:29 | Jesus' departure and return: |
| 13:1-17:26 | Discourse: Jesus' last teaching of his disciples, |
| 13:1-16:33 | Teaching around the Passover meal, |
| 17:1-26 | Jesus' high priestly prayer. |
| 18:1-20:29 | Narrative: Jesus' passion: |

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| 18:1-14 | The arrest, |
| 18:15-27 | The Jewish trials and Peter's denials, |
| 18:28-19: 16 | The Roman trial, |
| 19:17-37 | The crucifixion, |
| 19:38-42 | The burial. |
| 20:1-29 | Early post-resurrection appearances in Jerusalem. |
| 20:30f | Conclusion: Purpose of the gospel. |
| 21:1-23 | Epilogue: The future: |
| 21:1-14 | Narrative: A post-resurrection appearance in Galilee, |
| 21:15-23 | Discourse: Peter recommissioned. |
| 21:24f | Final Authentication. |

1. How do the introductions of the four canonical gospels compare? What factors might account for their differences? To whom does each gospel seem to be addressed, and why? What theological orientation can you detect in each? How do they link history and theology? How should these differences be borne in mind when interpreting each gospel? Which introduction might be most helpful to readers today who are skeptical about the historicity of the gospel's account? Why? Which introduction do you find most helpful personally? Why?
2. Why do you think the Gospel of Mark as it now exists doesn't begin its account of Jesus life and work until the ministry of John the Baptist? If an original beginning of Mark has not been lost, as some scholars speculate, and we today indeed have the original opening, then to which of the other gospels' beginnings does it seem to correspond? Does that suggest a close relationship between those two gospels? What might that suggest about their relative dating?
3. In the prologue to John's gospel, what main word images are employed to describe Jesus' relationship (a) to God [Yahweh], (b) to the world, (c) to humanity, (d) to Israelites / Jews, and (e) to John the Baptist? How do these same images characterize Jesus' mission? How relevant is that mission to people today? Why?
4. What fundamental criteria in the Old Testament creed of Ex 34:6f enabled the author and his contemporaries to recognize who Jesus really was (Jn 1:14, 17)? What responses to him and who he was are deemed appropriate and in-appropriate (Jn 1:1-13)? What difference would it make, therefore, as to how you personally respond to Jesus' coming? How have you personally responded to his coming? How does the Hebraic thought-parallelism in Jn 1:12 clarify what is meant by "believing in Jesus' name"? Could this be partly why the Complete Jewish Bible regularly translates the original Greek phrase by "trust in". Should this be borne in mind whenever you encounter the frequent New Testament phrase "believe in" in your English translation?
5. How are the two human genealogies of Jesus similar and different? How do you think scholars over the years have attempted to reconcile them? How important is it to try to do so? Which of Jesus' ancestors' do you recognize from your recent Old Testament studies? How pure ethnically and ethically were Jesus' blood lines? Considering your own heritage and history, what hope might this give you about sharing in God's mission today?

1. How do Gabriel's annunciation promises about Jesus and John compare with respect to their respective future roles in God's 1st century mission? How well do John's and Jesus' respective ministry roles and styles compare to those of the prophets Elijah and Elisha? How helpful might a wider variety of approaches to Christian ministry be in your own community today? What implications might this have for your Christian congregation and for its mission in your community? Even for your own particular Christian ministry?
2. How were Zechariah's and Mary's receptions of the angel's messages similar and different? With which can you identify most? How do you respond when trust in God does not come easily? Why was trust easier for Mary than Zechariah? Do you think that God would have forced Mary to cooperate, if she said, "Nor? Does human unbelief alter God's plans (1:20, 37f)? How so? How much does God's accomplishing his good purposes seem to depend upon human co-operation? How free did Mary and Zechariah seem to be in their decision to trust God or not? What implications might this have for you and God's purposes for you in his enterprise?
3. How much does Mary's "Magnificat" (Lk 1:46-55) seem to draw upon Hannah's prayer of thanksgiving in 1 S 2:1-10? Why might Hannah's prayer be so familiar to a Jewish village girl like Mary? Without much formal education, and perhaps even being almost illiterate, how would she know the Hebrew scriptures so well? Where would she hear them regularly read and expounded (Lk 2:41; 4:16-21)? How would she remember them so well (Lk 2:17, 19; 4:51; Ps 119:11, 15)? What does this indicate about her character, and her understanding of God's purposes? How much biblical literacy might Jesus' later Jewish audiences have? What is the level of biblical literacy today in your culture? In your own family? In your Christian congregation? How might that compare to previous generations? How great a challenge does this pose for you yourself; and for your presenting the meaning of Jesus life and teachings to others? How important should biblical literacy development be for your Christian understanding, growth, and service? For that of your congregation? Who really needs it? How can they acquire it today?
4. In spite of Elizabeth's inspired words in greeting Mary, who does Mary magnify? How were the characteristics of God extolled by Mary, particularly applicable to her own specific role in God's plans? How do these characteristics of God also apply to your own particular ministry? What other characteristics of God might also be particularly important for you to celebrate? Why is thanking and praising God such a significant aspect of faithfully serving God (Cl 3:17)?
5. How much do your Christian communion and congregation honour Mary? How suitable is your practice? How well does it fit with Lk 1:42f? How could it be improved? What does Mary's crucial role in God's saving economy say about God's view of the role of women in Christian ministry today? How have you appreciated the Christian ministries of women?

TRAIL IX

SECTION 3: RS ## 8-13:: Lk 1:57-80; Mt 1:18-25. Lk 2:1-38.

1. Are there indications that Zechariah was really deaf as well as dumb? Why else would people have marveled at the name he himself had chosen for his son? Why do we often forget that people who can't speak to us, also cannot hear us very well, if at all?
2. To what extent do you think the notoriety of John's nativity may have facilitated his special calling to be God's new prophet? What might have been involved in his being reared in the desert until it was his time to minister publicly? What evidence is there that he was influenced there by some separatist wilderness community like Qumran?
3. According to Zechariah's Benedictus (Lk 1:68-79), what are the stages of God's unfolding plan of salvation over the ages? How does this plan connect the Old and New Testaments? How many Old Testament references can you detect in his blessing? To what extent have you personally entered into the divine purpose of salvation through the Messiah, Jesus (Lk 1:74f)?
4. What were the many important roles played by God's Spirit in the birth of Jesus, God's Messiah? How many divine-human partnerships were involved in the whole process? How have you witnessed God's Spirit's working through people? What similar roles does he play in your life? How do you respond to his partnering with you?
5. How well can you imagine the initial terror response of the shepherds to their angelic visitors? What were the typical human responses to encounters with angels in the Old Testament? What are the successive stages of the shepherds' responses to the good news the angels brought? How typical are these stages for almost anyone's reception of the good news that God's Messiah really has been born as a human infant on earth (Jn 1:12f)? How far has your response to the historical coming of God's Messiah progressed to date? What further responses might still be appropriate? How open to them are you? When?
6. How important were the two traditional ceremonies of Lk 2:21-38 in properly beginning the life of any first-born Jewish son (Gn 17:12; Lv 12:3; Ex 13:2, 12, 15; Lv 12:1-8)? What does the particular offering made by Jesus' parents indicate about their economic situation (Lv 12:8; 5:11)? How did the responses of Simeon and Anna (Lk 2:20-36) help make the second rite even more special than usual for Mary and Joseph? How did they interpret to his parents and to the other witnesses in the temple the significance of what was happening? How might their words as well as the earlier ones of the shepherds have helped Jesus' parents raise him to be prepared for his public ministry?

1. How is what Jesus later said in Jn 9:39 illustrated by the reactions to Jesus' birth by (a) Jesus' parents (b) the shepherds, (c) the Gentile magi / astrologers, (d) king Herod, (e) the chief priests [Sadducees], (f) the scribes of the people [Pharisees], (g) the people of Bethlehem, (h) the people of Jerusalem, (i) Simeon and (j) Anna? Which of these responses are common today? Which comes closest to yours right now?
2. Why do you think the Herod's experts' quotation from Mi 5:1-5 was so selective? What do the parts left out signify? What other changes seem to have been made in using the passage as a "proof text" to answer Herod's very specific question? Was their answer, therefore, actually incorrect? How so? When might such selectivity be justified? How selective and accurate is your own quoting of scripture? How can you check to see if it is justified?
3. What can be learned about the young Jesus from the incident at Passover in the Jerusalem temple with respect to (a) his coming of age, (b) his relationship with his parents, (c) their knowledge of their son, (d) his knowledge of the Hebrew scriptures, and (e) his relationship with the biblical scholars of his day both then and later?
4. From the one incident and the two brief summary statements in Luke 2:40 & 52, what seems to be most important to know about Jesus' early life? What further light is shed on this period by Mk 6:3; Mt 13:55 and Lk 4:16? What else might you wish you knew about Jesus' childhood and youth that the canonical New Testament does not record? Why do you think 1st century Christians didn't record any answers to such questions? However, what might have motivated people in the next few centuries to try to satisfy their curiosity about Jesus' early life, as well as about his and the apostles' more secret words and deeds? Why do you think the early church tended to reject these quite popular documents, which often fit Jesus and Christianity into Greek culture much better than the more Jewish New Testament documents do? Why do think some 21st century scholars find these extra-canonical gospels, acts, epistles, and apocalypses more authentic historically than the canonical ones? What theologies are involved in these so called "historical" decisions? How can you discern which stories about Jesus are suitable for young children today? What about for adults?
5. From what we do know about Jesus' early teens from the canonical gospels, how much was Jesus like the young Samuel (Lk 2:52; 1 S 2:26)? How many children and youths do you know like that? How precious are they in God's sight and in his economy (Mt 18:1-6, 9f)? How, then, should we Christians care for them (Dt 6:4-9; Pr 22:6; Cl 3:21; Ep 6:4)?
6. How important is it to you that some of the details of Jesus' birth fit well with Old Testament prophecies about God's coming Messiah? Why do you think Matthew in particular continually underlines these congruencies (Mt 1:23 // Is 7:14; Mt 2:6 // Mi 5:2ff; Mt 2:15 // Ho 11:1; Mt 2:18 // Jr 31:15; Mt 2:23 // Is 11:1)?

1. Does Mark's beginning his gospel at this point rather than earlier, indicate that Jesus was adopted as God's Son when the Spirit of God descended on him during his baptism by John? What might such a view imply about Jesus' humanity and divinity? Why might such a view have been attractive to people in later times who had great difficulty understanding how Jesus could be both fully divine and fully human? What do you think of this view?
2. Why do you think Luke takes just as much pains to date both the beginning of John's baptizing as he does for Jesus' birth (Lk 2:1-7)? How does it reflect his declared purpose and methodology (Lk 1:1-4)? Do you think of these events and the whole of Jesus' life as being as historical as your own life is? What are the implications of that for you?
3. How does John's characteristic message express the purpose(s) of his special ministry as prophesied in Is 40:3-5 and M1 3:1; 4:5f? How can you shape and focus your message about Jesus, God's Messiah, to fit your particular service role in God's contemporary mission? How like the prophet Elijah was John in his lifestyle and ministry (2 K 1:1-8)? Who have similar ministries today? How similar are their lifestyles to Elijah's and John's? What problems does that continuity or discontinuity pose for their ministry's credibility? How could such problems be addressed? By whom?
4. Why might it be appropriate to repent of one's sins as soon as one realizes that the long-awaited reign of God was just about to arrive on earth? Does anticipating the coming of God's kingdom imply that God hadn't been reigning on earth before then? If not, what does it imply about God's coming reign? About his present reign? How much do you think in terms of God's reigning on earth here and now? How much about his future earthly reign? How do you link the two?
5. How did John make his baptism of repentance applicable to each type of person who came to him? Do preachers of repentance do that today? How might John have made repentance relevant to you and the people you know best? How appropriate is it to ask for "fruits worthy of repentance" from Christians who trust only in God's free grace through Jesus Christ for their right relationship to God (Ep 2:8-10; Ga 5:6; 1 Th 1:3; Ja 2:14-26)? How does the regular rite of repentance in your Christian congregation reflect this? Should it be reformed to do so?

TRAIL IX SECTION 6: RS ## 23-24:: Mk 1:7f // Mt 3:11ff // Lk 3:15-18.
Mk 1:9-11 // Mt 3:13-17 // Lk 3:21-23.

1. In your own words, what was John the Baptist's gospel! good news? How was it connected to his call to repentance (Mt 3:2, 8; Lk 3:3, 8)? How are repentance and the gospel connected for you and your Christian congregation? Would a public evangelist like John draw great crowds in your community? What lessons can you draw from John's ministry for evangelizing [Literally = "gospelizing"] today?
2. What seems to have been John's understanding of the differences between his own ministry of baptism and that of the coming Messiah? Why in the face of John's protest, did Jesus insist upon his being included in John's baptism? What does this indicate about the continuity of Jesus' messianic ministry with what the prophets predicted and foretold about the Messiah's ministry? How important is this connection?
3. How might the heavenly voice's linking the Old Testament themes about the Messianic Son of Yahweh (Ps 2:7) and Yahweh's Suffering Servant (Is 42:1-4) indicate to Jesus that now was the time to begin his pre-ordained public role? What sorts of public ministry might that call suggest that he should exercise?
4. If the connection between a call to ministry and being beloved by God was an intrinsic aspect of Jesus' baptism, was Martin Luther correct to speak of every Christian being ordained to Christian ministry at their baptism? With respect to ordination to ministry, what would be the significance of Luke's and Mark's mentioning at this point the presence and activity of the Holy Spirit in Jesus' life (Lk 4:1; Mk 1:12)? What has your own Christian baptism meant to you personally with respect to (a) God's love, (b) God's Spirit, (c) your calling to a particular ministry of love, and (d) the essential role of the Holy Spirit in the practice of that ministry? What more does baptism also mean to you?
5. According to Lk 3:21, what might Jesus' praying have to do with both his baptism and his call to ministry? How is your prayer life related to (a) your religious experiences, (b) your ministry, and (c) the activity of the Holy Spirit in and through you?

1. In each of the wilderness temptations of Jesus, what was the significance of the test for Jesus himself? What connections might there be between these particular tests and the shape of Jesus' coming messianic ministry? Do all who share in some way in Jesus' ministry face similar tests? When? Are these tests the same sorts as Jesus' ones, or are they specific to each person's particular Christian ministry? What important role do such temptations play? Are they inevitable in the kind of society you live in today?
2. How might the Spirit of God's involvement in Jesus' great time of temptation illuminate the meaning of the last request in the prayer Jesus taught his disciples (Mt 6:13)? What are the most appropriate responses for Christians to make to testing / temptation (Mk 14:38; Lk 8:13; Ga 6:1; Ro 5:3-5; 13:14; 1 Co 10:6-13; Ja 1:2f, 12-15, 4:6-8; 1 P 1:6f; 2 P 2:9)? What can we learn from Jesus' ways of dealing with his temptations for facing our temptations? What can we also learn from the fact that Jesus too was tempted just as we humans are (He 4:14-16)?
3. How important is it to really know your Bible in such challenging circumstances? How could such knowledge become possible for you? Why is it important to remember that the Devil also can quote scripture? Does he do so in a way that expresses the meaning in the original text? Do you always? How important is it to do so? How can you tell if someone is respecting the true contextual meaning of a biblical quotation, when using it to support their own theological or ethical position? Should such positions be grounded in scripture? How can this be done authentically? How can you authentically ground your own theology and ethics biblically?
4. How is Jesus' self-awareness of his mission as God's Messiah clarified during his time of temptation? How have times of testing helped you to become conscious of how you are and are not to function in God's present gracious mission?
5. What significance do you find in the fact that Jesus' companions in the wilderness temptations were wild animals and angels (Mk 1:13)? Do you think they would have been equally welcome companions to Jesus? Would they have been for you? Which would you rather meet? How so?
6. What seem to have been the stages of John the Baptist's understanding of who Jesus really was (Lk 1:44, 76-79; in 1:32-34)? What implications did John draw for himself and his own ministry? How has your own understanding of who Jesus is developed to what it now is? What has that meant to your view of yourself and your particular ministry?

TRAIL IX SECTION 8: RS ## 28-31:: Jn 1:35-2:22.

1. What does it mean to you that Jesus is "the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world" (Jn 1:29,36; Is 53:7; Ac 8:32; I P 1:19; Rv 5:6, 12f;6:1, 16;7:9f, 14,17; 12:11; 13:8; 14:1, 4, 10; 15:3; 17:14; 19:7, 9; 21:14, 22f; 22:1, 13)? What made this concept so important to John's Revelation written in a time of persecution? What many roles does the Lamb play in these references? How are those roles related to the Lamb's taking away the world's sins? When are you most conscious of Jesus' atoning role? How does this inform your view of the Messiah's ministry on earth and in heaven? How could it be expressed in you articulation of the Christian good news today? How so?
2. How did Jesus' earliest disciples discover him and come to follow him? What does the title "Rabbi" imply about the earliest disciples view of Jesus? How did they come to view him also as (a) God's Messiah! Anointed One! Christ, (b) the Son of God, and (c) the King of Israel? How does coming to appreciate Jesus' full identity help your Christian faith mature? What other factors then and now help Jesus' followers grow as disciples?
3. How does the way by which Simon Peter and Nathanael came to follow Jesus illustrate the way most adults become Christians today? What does that mean for Christian evangelism? Might your saying "come and see" to your relatives, friends, or neighbours motivate some of them to personally investigate what you have discovered about Jesus and his followers?
4. During the wedding in Cana, could Jesus' mother have had a better sense of God's timing for the beginning of Jesus' public ministry than Jesus himself had? What might have motivated her? Could a human really have forced God's Messiah's hand? What was Jesus' first public miracle the first sign of (Jn 1:14, 51; 2:11)? How did it lead to faith / trust (Jn 1:12f; 2:11)? How might miracles play a similar role in generating Christian faith today? What further theological meaning might this particular miracle have for Christians?
5. How and why did the various witnesses of Jesus' first cleansing of the temple in Jerusalem respond quite differently then or later (Mk 14:58; 15:29)? How might you have responded if you had been there then? How might a recollection of Mt 3:1-3 and Ps 69:9 have helped them understand what was happening? What sign did Jesus offer for his authority for such a radical act? What implications might there be for the proper use of your congregation's buildings today? Who has authority over their use? How appropriate is that? How do various interested parties within and beyond your congregation respond to how that authority is exercised? How justified are these responses? Should this be changed for the better? In what respects? How can such change be suitably effected?

TRAIL IX -- SECTION 9: RS ## 32-35:: Jn 2:23-3:36; Jn 4:1-4 // Lk 3:19f// Mk 1:14 // Mt 4:12 / I Lk 4:14; in 4:5-42.

1. How was it that Jesus knew human beings so thoroughly (Jn 1:3, 14; He 2:17f; 4:15)? Why, therefore, didn't Jesus entrust himself to those who believed on his name on the basis of his miraculous signs (Jn 2:25; 4:48; 6:26, 30-36; 7:31; 12:37)? Yet why does Jesus trust his own closest and chosen disciples, including Judas Iscariot, enough to share in his own public ministry? Whom does he eventually trust to continue his God-given ministry (Mt 28:19f; Jn 20:21-23; Ac 1:8)? How does that fit with God's own ministry-sharing policy (Ps 8:2,4-8; Gn 1:26-28; 2:15; Ex 3:10-12; Dt 31:23; etc.)? What do you think he has entrusted you with?
2. Why do you think Jesus took a Socratic [Zetetic / question-driven] approach with the learned Jewish leader Nicodemus, who privately acknowledged Jesus as a Rabbi, even though Jesus had never attended a rabbinic school (Jn 7:15; Mt 13:54-56)? How embarrassed and confused do you think he felt during this dialogue? However, what good eventually came out of this discussion (Jn 7:50f; 19:38-40)? How has embarrassment or confusion sometimes helped you learn something important too? How so? In your own words summarize Jesus' reasoning with Nicodemus down to Jn 3:15? Do Jesus' words continue verbatim from Jn 3:16 on? How does Jn 3:16-21 clarify what Jesus has been meaning? According to Jn 3:16, how inclusive and self-involving is God's love for (a) God, (b) Jesus, (c) humans, and (d) the world? What human responses are appropriate? With what positive and negative results? How does this relate to you personally?
3. How did John the Baptist cope with what others viewed as Jesus' competition with him (Jn 3:22-30)? How do you cope with how God seems to be blessing so much in the ministry of others in your own sphere of Christian ministry?
4. How does in 3:32-36 help you understand (a) who Jesus really was, and (b) what his mission was? In your own words, what is being said here? Does v. 36 imply that people can share in God's eternal life in the present, before their own death and resurrection? What more might it mean besides a future resurrection (Jn 10:10; Ga 2:20; Ro 6:1-5, 10-14; 8:9-17)? How important is this to you now?
5. Why did Jesus discontinue his early successful ministry in Judea? How compatible are the reasons given in Mk 1:14; Mt 4:12; Lk 3:19f; 4:14, and Jn 4:1-4? What evidence and reasons help you discern and follow the guidance of God's Spirit?
6. Does Jesus deal with the Samaritan woman the same way he did with Nicodemus? Why? How might we learn from this? What steps in Jesus' encounter with the woman helped her come to have personal trust in Jesus as God's Messiah? Is this a paradigm we can employ in face-to-face evangelism today? How so? What can we learn here about interacting positively with (a) our ethnic enemies, (b) social outcasts, (c) acknowledged sinners, and (d) people of a different gender? How did the woman's testimony affect her fellow citizens? How important might your own witness about Jesus be for those you live amongst (Ac 1:8)? What do you think Jesus meant by his sayings in Jn 4:14, 24f, and 34? How might they apply to you personally? What does his parable in Jn 4: 35-38 mean for your Christian ministry?

TRAIL IX-- SECTION 10: RS ## 36-44:: Jn 4:43-45 Mk 1:14f // Mt 4:17 // Lk 4:14f; Jn 4:46-54; Lk 4:16-31; Mt 4:13-16; MIc 1:16-20 // Mt 4:18-22 // Lk 5:1-11.

1. How do you account for the Capernaum official's faith in Jesus? How did his faith begin? What made it grow and continue to grow? How did your own faith in Jesus begin, grow, and continue growing? Do you continue expect it to grow even more?
2. In light of how Jesus began his great Galilean ministry, how do you explain his rejection in his Galilean home town, Nazareth? How might Jesus' choice of scriptures to read and comment on have contributed to that rejection? Why did Jesus' pointed citations of Old Testament examples of prophetic ministry turn his own people's wonder into anger? When have you heard a sermon that claimed that old scriptural prophecies were saying was being fulfilled right now and right here? Should we Christians today expect the scriptures to be applicable to our present situations, circumstances, lives, congregations, and communities (Ro 15:4; I Co 10:11; 2 Ti 3:15-17)? How important is that to you?
3. Why do people often have to leave home for their talents and achievements to be appreciated? How true is this of Christian ministries? Is this true for every type of Christian ministry in the Body of Christ? Have you personally experienced the truth of the proverb Jesus cited in Jn 4:44; Mk 6:4, and Mt 13:57? What were the circumstances and results for you? How did you handle it? How did Jesus? What resources did Jesus have that could have helped you cope better than you did? How better can you be prepared for the next rejection?
4. What about the city of Capernaum made it a suitable centre for Jesus' early northern Galilean ministry (Jn 1:43f; 2:12; 4:47; Lk 4:23; 5:10; Mt 4:13-16; Mk 1:20f, 29f)? What makes your present locale suitable for exercising your particular Christian ministry? How much were you personally involved in coming to this arrangement? Do you see it as lucky, providential, fatal, charismatic, prudential, or what?
5. What earlier experiences of Jesus did the pairs of fisherman brothers already have On 1:35-2:12; Lk 4:31-44? In spite of all he had already seen and heard, why did Peter respond to Jesus as he did (Lk 5:8; Is 6:5) after the miracle of the fish (Lk 5:1-11)? What about that miracle got through to him as nothing else had? How did his fishing partners respond? Are all of Jesus' disciples in all ages also called to become "fishers of men" (Mk 1:17; Mt 4:19; Lk 5:11; Mt 28:19f; Ac 1:8)? For non-fishers, what metaphor might better their witness to and participation in Jesus' mission to make disciples of all nations (Mt 28:19f)? What metaphor would suit you best? What are the costs of joining in Jesus' mission? Does it necessarily involve leaving one's present vocation and circumstances (Mk 5:17-20; Lk 8:38f)? What would motivate you to follow Jesus in his mission? What holds you back?

TRAIL IX -- SECTION 11: RS ## 42-45:: Mk 1:21-28 // Lk 4:31-37; Mk 1:29-34 // Mt 8:14-17/I Lk 4:38-41; Mk 1:35-39// Lk 4:42-44; Mk 1:40-45 // Mt 8:24 // Lk 5:12-16.

1. What amazed the people of Capernaum most about Jesus' words and actions in their synagogue? Would you have responded similarly to the same things? How did Jesus' own disciples respond? How did the people respond after the Sabbath had ended? Why?
2. Why do you think Jesus tried to silence the witness of demons? How truthful should we reckon their testimony to be? What weight does such evidence have today? Why, also, does Jesus try to limit the publicity by those he has healed and their witnesses? What can great public acclaim do to a good public ministry? What impact did this publicity have on Jesus' ministry? Why do you think he moved on to other cities rather than stay where he seemed so successful? Can you think of modern parallels?
3. How important does Jesus' private prayer life seem to him? Why is such regular prayer especially important for those under the pressures of popular success in ministry? What do you think some of those pressures are? How well could you handle them? Do you pray for the welfare of those involved in leading such ministries? Why? How sympathetic are you, if and when they succumb to the temptations [Greek = "pressures"] that come with success, popularity, and celebrity? Can they be forgiven and restored to Jesus' ministry? How so?
4. How do the three synoptic gospel accounts of the healings of Peter's mother-in-law and the leper compare both in their details and in the ways these stories are told? What does each account emphasize? What characteristic features of each evangelist's approach stand out? What would we miss if any one of these gospel accounts were missing? Which gospel communicates best to you? How so?
5. Which do we Christians today most often question about prayers to God to heal people: (a) God's ability to heal, or (b) his willingness to heal? What does this say about our views of God's character and purposes for people? How relevant is this to your prayers for your own healing?
6. In how many very different contexts were people able to find and encounter Jesus? How true is that still today? In which contexts do you most often meet Jesus? What kinds of healing do you find there? What other sorts of divine healing do you feel you still need? In what contexts might you expect to find such healing? How do you pray about this? Do you seek out such contexts? What does all that say about your trust in God?

TRAIL IX -- SECTION 12: RS ## 46-47:: Mk 2:1-12 // Mt 9:1-8 // Lk 5:17-26; Mk 2:13-17 // Mt 9:9-13; Lk 5:27-32.

1. Did Jesus' strategy of avoiding Capernaum for a while (Mk 1:45-2:1, 13) seem to make it much easier for him to teach there when he returned? What new groups seem to have been attracted to hear Jesus' teaching as soon as it was evident that he had returned? Who is "the Lord" who enables Jesus to heal according to Lk 5:17? How does this accord with the Jewish Talmud's later claim that in his healings Jesus had employed the sacred divine personal name, "Yahweh" [rendered "LORD" in most English Old Testament translations following later Jewish custom]? How would those new auditors feel about Jesus' practice of invoking Yahweh by name? How do you feel about using God's personal name? In what contexts might it be appropriate: When would it be quite inappropriate (Ex 20:7)?
2. Which would Christians today find it easier to say to a person afflicted with severe cerebral palsy: "Your sins are forgiven" or "Arise and walk"? How did Jesus link the two? Do you really believe that Christians have the authority to say either one? Why? What filled the crowd with awe (Mt 9:8)? Did they get Jesus' point? How is Jesus' words and actions consistent with God's view of humanity as celebrated in Ps 8? Even when humans are mediators of forgiveness or healing, who should always be praised (Ps 8:9)? What happens when we forget this (Nu 20:8-13)?
3. How important can someone else's faith / trust be for a needy person (Gn 18:23-32; 1 Co 7:14; Ja 5:14-16)? When has the trust of others helped you? Whose trusting might help you right now? Whom might your own trust help? To what extent does the afflicted person also have to trust as well (Ga 6:2, 5)? How might this sharing of trust in God be relevant to some Christians' practice of baptizing infants of Christian parents with a view to the later confirmation of the child's own trust in God?
4. Could the very similar parenthetical comment in all three synoptic gospels (Mt 9:6; Mk 2:10; Lk 5:24) indicate that they all used the same written source. What other signs in the three tellings of this story might also indicate their common dependence? Which one has the marks of itself being the original version on which the other two depend?
5. How does the calling of Levi / Matthew to be a disciple of Jesus indicate that Jesus' own calling involved a ministry with socially, as well as spiritually, marginalized people? What was Jesus trying to say about the character and will of God by quoting Ho 6:6 (Mt 9:13) in this particular context? What implications might this insight have for the church today that shares in Jesus' contemporary ministry (Jn 17:28; 20:21)? Why do some Christians today object to such an inclusive view Christian ministry? Is a social ministry the whole of a Christian spiritual ministry? Is it an essential dimension? What could all this mean for your Christian congregation and its ministry? What could it mean for your own calling to Christian ministry?

TRAIL IX -- SECTION 13: RS ## 48-49:: Mk 2:18-22 // Mt 9:14-17 // Lk 5:33-39: Jn 5:1-47.

1. Why do you think the disciples of John the Baptist fasted as frequently as did the Pharisees? Why was Jesus against his own disciples' fasting at that time? How do Jesus' two short parables illustrate his point? When is fasting appropriate for Christians? To what besides fasting might Jesus' same argument be applicable? How might this apply to your Christian congregation? How might it apply in your life?
2. Is it easier to try to do something new in an established Christian congregation or to start a new congregation to try to do that same new thing? How does Jesus' last comment in Lk 5:39 explain why? However, which is inherently better, the new or the old?
3. How much sense did Jesus' first question to the sick man at the Bethesda pool make? To whom today might it be a very appropriate first question? What did the man's answer reveal about himself and his circumstances? How did Jesus really cut to the very heart of the matter and call for the most appropriate response? What can Christians learn from Jesus here about how to deal with people with serious long-term ailments? Does Jesus really say in Jn 5:14 that the man's illness was a result of his having sinned? Did he even link sinning and illness here? What worse thing might result from his sinning more? How relevant is that to you?
4. In what ways does Jesus here describe his own very special relationship to God, the Father? How did it govern everything that Jesus said and did? How should the Jews of his day have been able to recognize who he really was? Why didn't they and, therefore, welcome him as from God? What special titles indicate Jesus' unique roles in God's economy? Why did the Jewish leaders object to Jesus calling God his Father (Jn 5:18)? Would they have been happier with Jesus' self-designation as "the Son of Man" rather than as "the Son of God"? Which title did Jesus regularly use, according to the synoptic gospels? Why was that (Jn 5:27)?
5. What does the great truth underlined by Jesus in Jn 5:24 and 3:36 mean for you and your assurance of eternal life? Does this mean that eternal life has already begun for some people? For whom? For you? How is it obtained? What does eternal life involve?
6. What does it mean to say that someone "has life in himself"? Who alone has such a special relation to life? What are the implications of that (Jn 5:27-30, 39f)? How does this relate to you personally?

TRAIL IX -- SECTION 14: RS ## 50-52:: Mk 2:23-28 // Mt 12:1-8 // Lk 6:1-5 Mk 3:1-6 // Mt 12:9-14/I Lk 6:6-11; Mk 3:7-12 // Mt 12:15-21.

1. Why was keeping the Sabbath so important to the leaders of the Jewish synagogues then? Is this the same reason why it is important for Christians for worship together weekly (He 10:23-25)? How might Jesus' six-fold critique of the Pharisees, religious mentality be equally applicable today to some Christians? Does Jesus' teaching justify secularizing the Sabbath as in many countries today? What does Jesus teaching on the Sabbath suggest for how Christians should keep the Lord's Day in a secularized culture?
2. What seemed to be Jesus' attitudes to those who sought every opportunity to find fault with him? Did he really have to be a mind-reader to discern what his critics were thinking? How did their attitudes and criticisms influence what he continued to say and do? What might Christians learn from this for their own particular Christian ministries today? Who might be critical of your Christian ministry? How so? Which group of people did Jesus focus his attention on? How is this applicable to you and your Christian ministry?
3. Between the leaders and the people, what contrasting responses were there to Jesus words and deeds at this stage in his Galilean ministry? How true is this of Christian ministries today? What instances have you witnessed with respect to Christian ministries today?
4. From how wide a geographic district were the people coming to see Jesus? What indicates that Gentiles as well as Jews were probably involved? Does that mean that Jesus' own mission, however focused on Jews, was not strictly limited to them (Mt 15:24)? Does this apply to Christian mission today?
5. Why does Jesus again try to limit the impact of his public success (Mt 12:14-16)? What natural human response was he trying to counteract? What does the quote from Is 42:1-4 suggest about the rationale for Jesus' preferred way to relate to crowds? How might it apply to a wildly successful public Christian ministry today? Could there be any implications for you or your congregation?

TRAIL IX -- SECTION 15: RS ## 53-54.2:: Mk 3:13-19 // Lk 6:12-16; Mt 5:1f // Lk 6:17-19' Mt 5:3-12/f Lk 6:20-26; Mt 5:13-20.

1. What similar calling and purposes should exist between Jesus' closest disciples, the twelve, on the one hand, and the spiritual leaders of a Christian congregation on the other hand? How do the two commonest designations of the twelve — "disciples" [learners / followers] and "apostles" [ones sent on a mission] — express different dimensions of their calling by Jesus? Which of these is most applicable to the spiritual leaders of a Christian congregation? How much prayer and deliberation is put into selecting the spiritual leaders of your congregation?
2. How do you harmonize the four New Testament lists of Jesus' closest twelve disciples (Mk 3:17-19; Lk 6:14-16; Mt 10:1-4; Ac 1:13)? Which disciples might have two distinct names? How many groups of brothers and cousins can you identify? Can you see any significance in this?
3. What does "blessed" mean in contemporary English? How does Jesus' list of blessings God gives fit with your culture's prevailing views of what makes people happy? How many of these blessings can only be made available in the afterlife? Which of these divinely bestowed blessings would make you most happy? Are the divine blessings Jesus specifies particularly appropriate for the groups to which they are said to be given? Are the blessings said to be given because of the virtuous character or behaviour of these particular groups? Should the "Beatitudes", therefore, be interpreted as Jesus' catalogue of the major Christian virtues that God promises to reward? Elsewhere in the New Testament, even in Jesus' recorded teachings, are these specific blessings said to be available only for these particular groups among the citizens of God's kingdom? Are any the blessings of God's kingdom bestowed because people merit them by being virtuous? On what basis are God's blessings given? Are the groups listed as to be blessed by God the sorts of people your culture would think God will or should make happy? If God can and will make even such a motley crew of marginalized people happy, then who can't and won't God make happy? How could God make you happy? On what basis? How do the accompanying woes in Lu 6:24-26 reinforce Jesus' positive theme? Does God seem to have a preference for the marginalized? How close is the theme to that of Mary's Magnificat (Lk 1:46-56 / RS #7) and Hannah's prayer (1 S 2:1-10)? Nevertheless, on what basis are some of God's eternal blessings said to be awarded Mt 5:10-13 (2 Ti 4:8; Ja 1:12; 1 P 5:4; Rv 2:7, 10, 17, 26-28; 3:5, 12,21; 7:9-17; 20:4)?
4. What do the salt and light metaphors for Christian living in this world mean to you (Mk 4:21; Lk 8:16; 1 P 2:12; 3:1; 4:11, 16)? How and why do we Christians often try to avoid living this way? How would Christians being salt and light help those who know them best discover what God is really like (1 P 3:1f, 13-16)?
5. What is Jesus' view of the value of the Law and the Prophets? Why, then, do some Christians maintain that all Old Testament scriptures apply only to the era before Pentecost, and therefore not to Christians? According to Ro 4:13, 18-25; 15:4; 13:8; 1 Co 10:11; 2 Ti 3:15-17, how should Christians view these scriptures, the only ones available to the earliest church (Lk 16:29-31)? Is keeping the Law of Moses a condition for entering the kingdom of God (Ac 15:7-11, 23-29; Ro 9:30-10:13; Ga 5:1-6; Ep 2:8-10)? What role, then, does the Law of Moses play in God's reign for Christians (Ro 13:8-10; Ep 2:10)?

TRAIL IX -- SECTION 16: RS ## 54.3-5:: Mt 5:21-48 // Lk 6:27-30, 32-36; Mt 6:1-18;
Mt 6:19-34.

1. How do Jesus' ethical standards here go well beyond those of the letter of the Mosaic laws? What rhetorical means does Jesus use to emphasize his point? What issues are dealt with in Mt 5:21-48? What is Jesus' basic point in each case? How literally, therefore, are we meant to take his words? What makes it clear that the character of God himself is ultimately the real standard of Jesus' ethic? What resources must we have to live as children of such a gracious God (1 Jn 4:19; Ro 5:5; 8:1-17; Ep 3:14-2f)? What might our relatives, friends and neighbours think God is really like, if we were to live as the gracious God's children should (Lk 6:27-36)? What implications does this have for Christian evangelism (Mt 5:16; 1 P 2:12; 3:15)?
2. What great spiritual risks are involved in public righteousness and piety? How seriously do Christians today take Jesus' warnings about them? Why, then, do so many contemporaries call Christians phonies or hypocrites? Are they right? How so?
3. What do Jesus' teachings about prayer, both before and after he gave his disciples a model prayer, mean to you? How are they applied in your own use of this "Lord's Prayer"? Does it matter to you that the common conclusion of that prayer (Mt 6:13b) is not in the oldest biblical texts, in spite of being quite appropriate, especially in liturgical settings? What are the essential elements of this model prayer? How often do you include them in your own prayers?
4. Why do you think Jesus found it necessary to underline the conditional nature of God's forgiveness immediately after presenting his model prayer? How is it linked to the prayer? How well do you bear this condition in mind in your pleas for divine forgiveness? Does this mean that God's grace is not free? That it has to be earned (Ep 2:8-10)? How important also is the instruction of Mt 5:23f for your prayers?
5. In these passages, how does Jesus describe complete devotion and commitment to God? How does Mt 6:19 speak to your personal life style in this present materialistic age? What principles are involved? What does it take really to live without worrying?
6. What else in this very dense "sermon" stands out as very important for you to remember and apply to your life? What also puzzles you about some of Jesus' teachings here? Where might you find help to deal with these quandaries?

TRAIL IX -- SECTION 17: RS ## 54.6-8:: Mt 7:1-6 // Lk 6:37-42; Mt 7:7-12 // Lk 6:31; Mt 7:13-8:1 // Lk 6:43-49.

1. Does Jesus' teaching about judging mean that we should never criticize anyone? Why? How do his parables confirm or undermine your interpretation of what he meant? What more does Lk 6:37f add? How does the parable in Lk 6:39 relate to this?
2. In your own words, what is the point of Jesus' saying in Mt 7:6? How might it apply to you? What connection might it have to the issue of judging others? Could this be what Peter has in mind at the end of 1 P 4:15?
3. How do Jesus' promises in Mt 7:7f echo Yahweh's in Dt 4:29; Jr 29:11-14; 1 Ch 28:9, and 2 Ch 15:2? What, then, is the point of Jesus' following illustration in Mt 7:9-11?
4. How does Jesus' unique positive formulation of the "Golden Rule" (Mt 7:12 // Lk 6:3) go well beyond the superficially similar negative maxim taught by many ethical teachers: "Don't do to others what you wouldn't want them to do to you"? What were the occasions in Matthew (7:9-11) and Luke (6:27-36) for Jesus' positive formulation? How do those contexts help you understand its meaning and applications? Was Jesus merely putting in his own words the essence of what many 1st century Jews agreed was the summary of Moses' interpersonal ethics in Lv 19:18; "Love your neighbour as yourself" (Mt 19:16-19; Mk 12:28-34; Lk 10:25-38; Ro 13:8f)? Do you regularly use Jesus' ethical maxim? How? How does Jesus offer his disciples an even stricter maxim in Jn 13:34f and 15:12? Why is it so important that Jesus' disciples live according to this higher standard (Jn 13:35)? What was Jesus' own standard for loving others (Jn 15:9; 17:23; Mt 5:43-45, 48)? Is that what Paul was also pointing to in Ep 5:1f and also John in 1 in 4:7-21)? How can humans love like God (Ro 5:5; 8:14; I Jn 4:7,19)
5. How are the four illustrated warnings with which close the Sermon on the Mount/ Plain so very important to all those who claim Jesus' ethical teachings as authoritative? What is their common theme? What indicates that you take Jesus' warnings seriously?

TRAIL IX

SECTION: 18 RS ## 55-58:: Mt 8:5-13 // Lk 7:1-10; Lk 7:11-17; Mt 11:2-19 / Lk 7:18-35; Mt 11:20-30.

1. What so impressed Jesus about the Gentile centurion's faith? Have non-Christians ever impressed or shamed you with their faith in God? How do you own faith and tolerance need to grow?
2. In Luke's account of Jesus' raising of the widow's son, what details suggest that the author might well be a physician (Cl 4:14)? How do your training and experience in life help you notice some of the details in how God works which other observers seem to miss or think are unimportant? How often is the meaning of the events sometimes evident in those very details?
3. Why do you think the imprisoned John the Baptist would ask such skeptical questions, particularly after receiving reports of Jesus' great deeds in Galilee? For a prophet like John, why should the evidence of Jesus' specific deeds be sufficient to confirm his true messianic identity (Is 29:18f; 35:4-6; 61:1; Lk 4:15-21)? Did Jesus seem to be functioning as the sort of Messiah that John had prophesied that he'd be (Lk 3: 16f)? Why might Jesus' "woes" for the Galilean cities that he had worked in most, have satisfied John's messianic expectations better than the evidence Jesus had offered him (Mt 11:20-24)? Why does Jesus, nevertheless, highly praise John? Why did the very different life styles and ministry foci of John and Jesus appeal to many of the Jewish people but not to their religious leaders? What might be the responses of people and religious leaders today to both types of ministry?
4. In each instance, what is the importance of Jesus' statements in (a) Mt 11:11// Lk 7:28, (b) Mt 11:12 // Lk 16:16, (c) Mt 11:19c // Lk 7:35, (d) Mt 11:25-27// Lk 10:21f, and (e) Mt 11:27? What does each mean for you?
5. What is the significance of being called to share Jesus' yoke (Mt 11:28-30)? Can you hear in Jesus' invitation to be his yoke partners an echo of Ps 8:4-6's view of God's astounding sharing of his special relationship and sovereign vocation with mere humans? Is there also an echo of Jr 6:16 in Jesus' description of his yoke (Mt 11:30)? What is his yoke? Can you see any connection of this yoke with the divine-human image-bearing partnership of Ps 8 (2 Co 5:17; Ep 4:24; Cl 3:10f)? How have you responded to Jesus' invitations here? Have you found his promises to be true? Who is Jesus that he is able to accomplish this in your life (Mt 11:27)?
6. Does the close parallelism between the accounts of Matthew and Luke here warrant positing that they both drew upon an earlier common written source [Q = Quelle = "source" in German]? What sorts of data would such a source have had to contain? Why do Matthew's and Luke's accounts still have significant differences and emphases? Must they each also have had other sources? How could sources other than written ones also have been involved? What if Matthew, as one of the Twelve, was also an eyewitness himself of many of Jesus' actions and teachings? What other eyewitnesses might Luke have had access to while living in Judea during Paul's last visit and two-year imprisonment in Caesarea [59-61 A.D.]?

TRAIL IX -- SECTION 19: RS ## 59-62:: Lk 7:36-50; Lk 8:1-3 Mk 3:22-30 // Mt 12:22-37
Mt 12:38-45.

1. What connections does Jesus draw here between one's actions, one's love for God, and one's sins' being forgiven? Does this suggest a way to deepen one's love for God or even to increase God's graciousness (Ro 6:1)? How significant is the order of all of these actions?
2. How did some women demonstrate their gratitude for what Jesus had done for them (Lk 8:1-3; Mt 27:55)? How vital and practical was their support for the itinerate ministry of Jesus and his disciples? How can you facilitate Jesus' continuing ministry today in and through your Christian congregation by means of your practical expressions of gratitude for what God has been doing in your life? Do such practical contributions reimburse Jesus or God for what they have done for you? How does this relate to the action of the woman who washed Jesus' feet?
3. Were the Pharisaic scribes here totally wrong to claim that Jesus' miracles could have been performed by someone in league with the evil one (Dt 13:1-3; Mt 24:24; 2 Th 2:8-12; Rv 13:13; 16:14; 19:20)? What sorts of miracles of Jesus might possibly seem to warrant their interpretation? What other actions and words of Jesus also seemed to confirm their view of him (Jn 7:20; 8:43, 52; 10:20)? What do you make of the arguments that Jesus used to refute their interpretation? What was their crucial mistake? Why was it so serious?
4. According to this context, what would you say constitutes blasphemy against the Holy Spirit? Why is it so very serious? How prevalent is this grave sin today? Should you be worried that you have committed it? How so? How can you help a Christian who seems convinced that she/he has committed this terrible sin?
5. Is your generation any less evil and adulterous with respect to God than Jesus' generation? What do people really want when they ask for miraculous signs? How prevalent is this desire today? Why does Jesus refuse to satisfy their request? What signs does he offer instead? How might 1st century Jews understand his references to Jonah and Solomon? What do these two signs relate to in Jesus' life? How does today's generation respond to these signs?
6. What do you think Jesus meant to teach in each of (a) Mt 12:27f, (b) Mt 12:30, (c) Mt 12:34-37, and (d) Mt 12:43-45? What relevance do each of these teachings have for you?

TRAIL IX -- SECTION 20: RS ## 61, 63-64.1.(b):: Mk 3:19-21, 31-35 // Mt 12:46-50 // Lk 8:19-2
Mk 4: 1 f // Mt 13:1-3a // Lk 8:4; Mk 4:3-25 // Mt 13:3b-23 // Lk 8:5-18; Mk 4:26-29.

1. Were Jesus' family and friends justified in being concerned about his behaviour? What were they thinking about him? Would you feel you needed "to help" another Christian who seemed to be carried away by his ministry? Have your Christian activities ever prevented you family from seeing and talking to you? How did Jesus respond to their concerns? What was his point (Mk 10:28-30)? Nevertheless, how important should family relationships be for both lay and clergy Christians in ministry (Mt 10:37; Lk 14:26; Cl 3:18-21; Ep 5:24-6:4; 1 Ti 3:41; 5:8; Tt 1:6; 1 P 3:1-7)?
2. What was the main point of the parable of the sower as Jesus told it to the crowd ((Mt 13:2-9; Mk 4:1-8; Lk 8:4-8)? What two questions did the disciples have later? How did Jesus answer the first one? Did his quotations from Is 6:9f and Ps 78:2 clarify his purpose for you, or just muddy the waters? Why and how did he answer the second question? Does Jesus' detailed explanation of the various soils in this parable imply that every parable should be interpreted not just as an apt metaphor but as a detailed allegory, as has been the trend during most of the history of Christian interpretation of parables? Why do you think the Protestant Reformers and most modern interpreters reject elaborate allegorical interpretations of parables, especially esoteric, multi-level ones?
3. How carefully was the seed [the word of God's kingdom] spread around? What might this imply for our sharing the good news of God's reign today? Why would God want to waste so much seed on unprofitable ground? Did the miraculous abundance of the harvest from the best soil — far beyond even the best yields through modern efficient agricultural methods — make even a wasteful process very worthwhile? Should modern methods of evangelism be much more targeted in order to avoid such "unnecessary" waste? Would God wish to waste anything as valuable as the gospel? Is any of the gospel seed ever really completely wasted in God's economy (Is 55:11; 44:26-28; 46:10b; 59:21)? Are we in a position to judge whether God is ever truly wasteful?
4. How would you describe in your own words the four basic responses [typified by the four soils] to the same word of God's kingdom [seed]? How typical are these different responses to the gospel today in your community? What type of soil have you been? What endangers the development of the full fruitfulness of the good news about God's reign in your life? What could be done about this? How is any growth really possible in any type of soil (Mk 4:26-29)? How important is it for everyone involved in evangelism to remember this? How should it affect the processes of evangelism?
5. How does the additional parable of the lamp in Mark and Luke illuminate the teaching of the parable of the soils by being placed here (Mt 5:14-16)? What is the appropriate response to receiving God's word? How might that multiply the effects of the gospel seed/light (in 4:39-42)?

TRAIL IX -- SECTION 21: RS ## 64.1 (c)-2(d):: Mt 13:24-30; Mk 4:30-32 // Mt 13:31f; Mk 4:33f // Mt 13:33-35; Mt 13:36-53.

1. Would you have taken the approach of the owner's slave to the weeding of the field? What would have been the result? How does Jesus' interpretation of that parable (Mt 13:36-43) accord with interpretations you have heard in sermons? What shift in symbolism is there for "seed" here from that in the parable of the variety of soils? Can we assume that a particular symbol always has the same meaning in a particular biblical book or for the same author / speaker, let alone throughout the whole Bible? What might change the meaning of a symbol? What does the last verse in Jesus' interpretation of the parable (Mt 13:43; Dn 12:2f) mean to you? Why do you think it is Jesus (Mt 25:31-46; Jn 5:22,27; Ac 10:42; 17:31; 2 Co 5:10; 2 Ti 4:1, 8) who speaks more than anyone else in the Bible about God's final judgement? How does that fact influence your view of the importance of that uncomfortable subject?
2. Do the parables of the mustard seed and of the leaven make the same basic point(s)? Which one(s)? What implications does this have for Christians who seek to see the kingdom / reign of God advance today? Might the first parable actually have had a different meaning for Jesus' listeners who knew very well that both weed-like wild mustard and seed-eating birds were two of the greatest banes of Palestinian fanners? How neutral a symbol would leaven have been to Jesus' Jewish listeners (Ex 12:34, 39; Lv 2:11; 6:14-18; 7:13; 23:17; Mk 8:15; Mt 16:6, 11f; Lk 12:1; Ga 5:9; 1 Co 5:6-8)? Yet can these metaphors be given a positive meaning too?
3. Is the reign / kingdom of God / Heaven as valuable to you as the parables of the treasure and pearl suggest it should be? For you, what is it worth more than? What do you in fact sacrifice for pursuing it? How would most of your contemporaries know how highly you value it? What changes in your lifestyle, priorities, economics, time use and relationships might convey this evidence better?
4. Which of the previous parables have their main point(s) reinforced by the parable of the dragnet? How does it help people to hear more than one parable making roughly the same point(s)? Are all metaphors equally clear to everyone? Even if their metaphors are all familiar, what pedagogical reason might Jesus have to use several diverse metaphors about the reign of God all together in the same discourse?
5. How does Jesus' "therefore" in Mt 13:52 connect the disciples' claim to have understood all of his parables about God's kingdom to his concluding parable? Which scribes [biblical and legal experts] does Jesus have in mind here? What does he suggest about the relationship between the old and the new revelations of God? Does that apply to the relationship of the Old and New Testaments? How does the theme of God's kingdom / reign / sovereignty run through both biblical testaments? What other great themes do so as well? How do they develop from the old to the new testaments? What else might Jesus be teaching here?

HTB IX.22-28

TRAIL IX SECTION 22: RS ## 65-66:: Mk 4:35-41 // Mt 8:8, 23-27 // Lk 8:22-25
Mk 5:1-20// Mt 8:28-34/! Lk 8:26-39.

1. In the storm incident, as reported in the three synoptic gospels, what surprised the disciples at first? What feelings were as overwhelming as the storm itself? How did their later surprise at Jesus' words and actions transform their initial response to him? Why was this incident so important to the disciples? What does it reveal about Jesus' relationship to God, the All-sovereign One? Should Jesus' sleeping amid the storm have already made that clear? What storms of life that impact us does Jesus seem to be sleeping through? Is he really totally unaware of your circumstances (He 4:14f)? Is he in your boat? What should that mean for you (He 4:16; 10:19-25)?
2. How does Jesus' way of treating the demoniac(s) compare with how your own society treats them? Who are today's demoniacs? What ministries should Christians have with them? How is that possible?
3. What were the social and economic benefits and liabilities of Jesus' brief ministry among the Gerasenes / Gadarenes? What historical examples of the impact Christians have had on society can you think of? What are some of the social and economic consequences of Christian ministries today? How do your Christian congregation and your wider community understand and handle these benefits / liabilities? Why did the people of the area ask Jesus to leave? Should Christians follow Jesus' example here by leaving any unwelcoming community? Why did Jesus grant the request of those who rejected his activity, but denied the plea of the one(s) he had just liberated? Who is the best witness to a-society hostile to Jesus' ministry?
4. Who is right about whether it was God or the man Jesus who had performed this healing, according to Jesus (Mk 5:19 // Lk 8:39) or the demoniac(s) (Mk 5:20 // Lk 8:39)? What might this indicate about the divine-human partnership that Paul saw characterizing Christian ministries (1 Co 3:8; 1 Th 3:2)? How appropriate is an either/or logic for understanding causality even in purely human relationships?
5. What do you make of Mark's presenting all that you have studied recently as having happened on the same day (Mk 4:35)? Have you experienced such long and busy days? Are all your days like that? What about Jesus' days? Is there any wonder that Jesus fell asleep on the boat trip? Can you too catch a nap in midst of a busy day of Christian service without feeling guilty? How so?

TRAIL LX -- SECTION 23: RS ## 67-69:: Mk 5:21-43 // Mt 9:18-26/Lk 8:40-56; Mt 9:27-34• Mk 6:1-6 // Mt 13:54-58.

1. In what senses would it be correct to call the four incidents briefly recounted in here "faith healings"? Whose faith was involved in each case? What characterized their faith? Can faith alone heal, or is something else also involved? Does it help to translate "faith" and "believe" by "trust" as the Complete Jewish Bible regularly does? Was it easier to believe in such healing then than now? How might Dr. Luke's more descriptive account of the first two cures help modern medical people be more open to similar phenomena?
2. How important was touch in each of these healings (Mk 3:10; 6:56)? How important is it in much healing today? Does the first healing suggest that both the healer and the healed person should feel something happening at the same time? What? Why did Jesus often order witnesses to a healing not to tell anyone what had happened? How many didn't obey him? With what results? Why was it nigh impossible to keep quiet about healings? Would all this apply today? How so? How can Christian congregations practice a quiet healing ministry today (Ja 5:14-16)?
3. Why do you think Jesus made an exception to his usual rule, by asking the woman to speak out about touching him and being healed? Can you imagine the social and possibly economic as well as physical suffering of this Jewish woman had endured because of her particular affliction (Lv 15:19, 25-27)? How difficult would it be for her to be out in the crowd and to be planning to touch Jesus? Why touch only his clothes? With all the jostling in the crowd, why did Jesus stop and ask "Who touched me"? What does this show about Jesus? How might this encourage us to ask him for help? Can we also make exceptions to our rules for compassionate reasons?
4. Why do you think Jesus returned to the synagogue in Nazareth after his earlier rejection (Lk 4: 16-31)? Why would they allow him to speak there again? Why would it be that their lack of trust was the reason he couldn't do many miracles there (Mt 13:58; Mk 6:5)? Why is trust/ faith also just as essential to salvation (Ep 2:8-10; He 11:6)?
5. Why was Jesus so surprised at their continuing lack of trust in him (Mk 6:6)? Would this happen in your Christian congregation? What about the Nazarenes' continuing unbelief in him was so surprising to Jesus? How might the officials of your Christian congregation respond to preaching and healing services in your community led by a well-known young tradesman from a local family who had neither higher education nor ordination? How might you feel if he were a close relative of yours? What if you were the preacher-healer? How essential are official credentials for accrediting Christian ministries? What credentials do people really need to prove that their ministries are approved by God? Do they need to become clergy to be recognized? Would Paul agree (Ro 12:3-8; 16:1-13, 21-23)? Where might you and your ministry fit in? How so?

TRAIL IX -- SECTION 24: RS # 70: Mk 6:6-13 // Mt 9:35-11:1 // Lk 9:1-6.

1. Why, at this time, does Jesus send out his twelve disciples (Mt 9:35-38)? How much of Jesus' ministry did they share? How were they to meet their basic human needs? What resources did Jesus share with them to make their co-ministries possible? What other equipment for ministry does Luke, the physician, note? How are these two resources different, both in source and influence? How important is it that they both go together in Christian service, even today (Jn 17:18; 20:21f; Mt 28:18-20; Lk 24:49; Ac 1:8)?
2. How should the basic maxim, "freely you have received, freely give" (Mt 10:8; Is 55:1), characterize all Christian ministries? How does this fit with the maxim of Mt 10:10b (Dt 25:4; Lk 10:7; 1 Co 9:1-12; 1 Ti 5:17f)? How well does Paul reconcile these two principles in 1 Co 9:13-18? What are the legitimate rights for Christian ministries? For what reward did Paul waive those rights? Was he following Jesus' example (Mt 8:20; Lk 9:58; 8:3)? Which approach might be the most effective one in a society where professional Christian ministers are distrusted because of their vocational and financial vested interests in propagating the Christian gospel? What further caution might Peter add for Christian leaders (1 P 5:1-5)?
3. Which of Jesus' instructions and warnings about visiting still apply to Christian pastoral visitations in homes? How important was the response of the home or town visited? Should Christian visitors today respond to the receptions they receive, in the same way Jesus told his envoys to then? Why?
4. Who are the wolves who will harass the disciple-sheep? Why will they do so (1 P 5:8f)? Have you ever experienced this? What advice and assurance does Jesus give? What does Jesus mean when he said that he didn't come to bring peace but a sword to the earth (Mt 10:34)? Doesn't this contradict the expectation that God's Messiah would be the "Prince of Peace" (Is 9:6; Lk 2:14)? What then is meant by Mt 10:35-39)? Have you experienced this cost of Christian discipleship? How so? Do the many assurances that Jesus gives to his disciples here, motivate you follow him sacrificially? How so? What further assurances would you want?
5. What are the terrible consequences of denying Jesus? Who is the one to fear in Mt 10:28? Do you? How so?

TRAIL IX -- SECTION 25: RS #71:: Mk 6:14-29 // Mt 14:1-12// Lk 9:7-9.

1. If Jesus were ministering in your community today, what interpretations of his identity and unusual ministry might be offered by the people that you know? If you knew who he really was, how would you set them straight?
2. How might Herod Antipas have heard about Jesus' miraculous activities (Mt 14:11; Lk 8:3)? What were the popular theories about the great healer, Jesus' true identity? Why did Herod adopt one rather than any of the other popular explanations of Jesus' powers? What does this indicate about his mental state? Have you ever adopted one particular explanation among several popular ones of an unusual phenomenon primarily for personal reasons? Was your interpretation actually correct? How did you discover this? What were the implications of your preference for you and others?
3. In spite of the public and private pressures on him, why was Herod Antipas still strangely attracted to John the Baptist and his unpleasant prophetic message? Have you ever had a similar strange fascination with someone or something? How did it resolve itself for you?
4. Why was Herod greatly distressed / sorry (Mk 6:26) by the request of Herodias' daughter? How would you describe Herod's relationship with John? Do you think Herod recognized who was behind the request? So what do you think Herod's real reasons were for granting her request? How aware do you think he was of each of them? How aware are you of many of your own primary motives for action? Once you become so aware, do you always offer those motives as your public reasons for action? How so? Who is most deceived then? Should this be a Christian's way of communicating (Cl 4:6; Ep 4:25,29; 1 P 3:14-16)?
5. Why, after all this, do you think Herod wanted to meet Jesus personally? Would you have wanted to do so? Why, however, did Jesus prefer to avoid meeting Herod quite yet? How did Jesus succeed in avoiding doing so (Mk 6:30-34; Lk 9:10f)? When did they finally meet (Lk 23:4-12)? How so? With what consequences?

TRAIL -- SECTION 26: RS # 72:: Mk 6:30-44 // Mt 14:13-21 // Lk 9:10-17 // Jn 6:1-13.

1. Why do you think that the twelve disciples [followers / learners] are called "apostles" [sent ones] as they return from sharing in Jesus' public ministry (Mk 6:30; Lk 9:10)? Why do you think it is only Luke among the four evangelists who frequently calls the twelve disciples "apostles" (Lk 6:13 [//Mt 10:2]; 17:5; 22:14; 24:10)? Does Mt 28:19f, Ac 1:8 and 2 Co 5:18-20 suggest that in one very important sense all Christians should be called sent ones / apostles? Nevertheless, what are the unique criteria for the Twelve to be called apostles (Ac 1:21-26)? Who else in the New Testament are explicitly called apostles (Ac 14:6; 1 Co 4:9; 9:5f; 1 Co 15:7; Ga 1:19; Ro 16:7; 1 Th 2:7; He 3:1)?
2. How important is a time of debriefing for all those who have shared in Jesus' ministry (Mk 6:30 // Lk 9:10; Ac 14:26f)? Is this still true today? How does your Christian congregation make provision for this? Following Jesus' example with his ministering disciples (Mk 6:31), what role should periodic rest also play in your Christian life? Nevertheless, what sorts of interruptions should be permitted (Mt 14:14; Mk 6:34)?
3. How do the attitudes and approaches of Jesus and his disciples differ with respect to the multitude's basic physical needs? What implications might there be for Christians and Christian congregations today? How appropriate is it to compare our limited human resources to the magnitude of the human need around us before we attempt to respond to that need? Should the great disparity between the need and the resources deter us from sharing what little we do have? Can we trust God to accomplish much more than we imagine is possible (Ep 3:20f)? What do we do with what is left over? However, when is it vitally important for disciples to count the cost beforehand (Lk 14:25-33)?
4. How does the general process of taking, blessing, breaking, and giving (Mk 6:41 // Mt 14:19f / Lk 9:16; Mk 8:6 // Mt 15:36) characterize Jesus' basic way of ministering to human needs in any age? What important roles do Jesus' disciples play in this process then and now? How can this help us understand some of the spiritual dynamics of Christian ministries? What is the significance of the same general fourfold process being made explicit in the breaking of the bread in all of the New Testament accounts of Jesus' institution of the Eucharist / Holy Communion / the Lord's Supper (Mt 26:26; Mk 14:22; Lk 22:19; 1 Co 11:23f)? Could that indicate that every divine meeting of human needs is in some sense sacramental? Or is the sacrament an instance of God's meeting human needs? Or both? Or something else that they all have in common? How so?
5. What, if any, implications can be drawn from the fact that the feeding of the 5000 is the first event in Jesus' life and ministry that all four gospels document? What makes this event so important theologically and personally? How so?

TRAIL IX -- SECTION 27: RS ## 73-75:: Mk 6:45f // Mt 14:22f// Jn 6:14f; Mk 6:47-52//
Mt 14:24-33 // Jn 6:16-21 Mk 6:53-56 // Mt 14:34-36.

1. What impact did the feeding of more than 5,000 people have on (a) those who were fed, (b) the disciples, and (c) Jesus himself? What might have happened if Jesus had not quickly scotched the people's attempt to make him their king? How closely do the events described in in 6:5-21 correspond to Jesus' three temptations in the wilderness (Mt 4:1-11; Lk 4:1-13)? What was different now? Have you ever experienced a misinterpretation of your words or actions that necessitated a similar narrow escape? Did that drive you also to urgent, private prayer about what to do next? What happened then? How do you feel about that?
2. According to John's account, what might Jesus' sending of his disciples across the lake after dark while he retreated to the hills suggest? What was the crowd's response when they found him gone? What does the "yet" in Jn 6:17 suggest about the disciples own expectations about Jesus? How easy would it have been to walk on a raging sea, even for someone who could walk on water? Had Jesus originally intended simply to take a short cut to meet his disciples at the dock in Capernaum (Mk 6:48) or had he planned a more dramatic way than merely feeding a multitude to convince his disciples that he had authority over the forces of nature? Did Jesus force this insight upon them (Mk 6:48)? How deep, do you think, the disciple's understanding of their newly-found confession really was (Mt 14:33)? How might their immediate arrival at their destination (Jn 6:21) have helped confirm their new faith in Jesus? Would it have for you too?
3. How might Jesus convince modern scientifically-minded people that he has authority over the forces of nature? How important is this dimension of Jesus' character? How can Christians present it to our contemporaries?
4. Would you have dared to test whether the figure apparently walking on the water was really Jesus in the same way Peter did (Mt 14:28)? Did Jesus' reply really convince Peter? Would it have convinced you? Why did Peter fail to walk all the way to Jesus on the water? How far into the water would you have had to sink before you cried out, like Peter, for salvation?
5. How does the response of the people of Gennesaret [a very fertile costal plain on the Sea of Galilee just south of Capernaum] compare to the other's recent responses to Jesus? How generous was Jesus' response to them? How open are you to help everyone that you can? What might it involve to do so?

TRAIL IX: SECTION 28: RS # 76:: Jn 6:22-71.

1. In the first section (vv. 22-40) of Jesus' dialogue in the synagogue of Capernaum with some of the very people whom he had recently fed on the other side of the Sea of Galilee, what were Jesus' responses to their questions and requests? What do Jesus' answers seem designed to do? How would you have felt if you had been involved in this dialogue? How hard to understand are Jesus' sayings here to the people then, and to you now? How might focusing on his plainest words vv. 29, 35, 40, 47, 57f help you interpret him?
2. According to Jesus here, what is the "work of God" (v. 29) that human beings are able to do? How does this accord both (a) with Paul's analysis of the Jew's characteristic religious problem in Ro 9:30-10:4, and (b) with his brief summary of the basic pattern of God's salvation for both Jews and Gentiles in Ep 2:8-10?
3. What seemed to bother these Jews about Jesus' claim that he himself was the true bread that God gives from heaven? As he continued to talk, how did Jesus even further offend the sensitivities of these very kosher Jews (Dt 12:16, 23)? How hard do you find Jesus' words here? Was Jesus really referring here only to consuming, even masticating (v. 53ff), the elements in the Eucharist / Holy Communion / the Lord's Supper? Why do you think that many Romans in next century, who had only heard rumours about Christian worship patterns, thought that Christians were murderers and cannibals? Could our contemporaries listening to our Communion liturgies think that we are too?
4. Why were many of Jesus' own followers offended by what he was saying? Why do you think Jesus spoke this deliberately offensive way publicly at the height of his popularity? Have you ever had to do something similar? How so? In spite of everything, why did some of his disciples choose to stick with him? Do you follow Jesus for the same reason? Why else?
5. Why do some people trust in Jesus, while some people who have the same exposure to him do not? Is such saving faith / trust in Jesus predetermined or preconditioned by God (Ro 8:28-30)? What faith-related factors are evident here? What other influences might there be? How important is this to you? Does what Jesus says help your assurance of faith? How so?

TRAIL IX -- SECTION 29: RS ##77-78:: Mk 7:1-23 // Mt 15:1-20 // Jn 7:1 Mk 7:24-30 // Mt 15:21-28.

1. What seems to have been involved in the Pharisaic Jews' ritualistic traditions for eating and purification (He 9:10)? What do you think motivated these rituals? What did Jesus think of these traditions? Why? What common present-day Christian traditions might Jesus view in a similar way? How can we be sure that our Christian customs honour and worship God from the heart (Jn 4:23f) as well as with lips and gestures? Do any of your or your church's customs or traditions actually contradict God's explicit biblical commands? Which ones? Which ones might seem to be more acceptable, even if they lack biblical warrant? Why are they of value?
2. What does Jesus' parable about true religious purity, plus its interpretation of it, mean to you? What implications might there be (a) for your own lifestyle, and (b) for your estimate of another person's purity? Which of the real spiritual defilements listed here are of the greatest danger to Christians and Christian congregations today?
3. Why does Jesus seem not to be worried that the popular leaders of the people, the Pharisees, were offended by his teaching on true religious purity? What parallels might there be today? Should Christians follow Jesus' advice about how we should treat such people? For the same reasons?
4. Why do you think Jesus again moved temporarily beyond the borders of Palestine? Why couldn't he be alone with his disciples even there (Lk 6:17-19)? How important is it to be alone with God by yourself or in a small group? How does Jesus' response to the Gentile woman clarify for us Jesus' view of his own calling / mission? What does that mean for Gentile Christians (a) in the 1st century A.D., and (b) today? What also does it reveal about the character of God as we see him through Jesus, his Messiah?
5. What major social and religious barriers did the woman have to overcome to demonstrate her great faith to Jesus? What motivated her to reach out so passionately to Jesus, the Jewish Messiah? What was there about the woman's reply to Jesus initial rejection that seemed to change his mind about replying to her and granting her request? Is this the only argument that Jesus appears to have lost? Is it significant that it was to a woman? What does this also reveal about God's character as seen in Jesus? How does this story illuminate your relation to marginalized people in your society? What does it say about the mission of your congregation to its community?

TRAIL IX -- SECTION 30: RS ## 79-81:: Mk 7:31-8:9 // Mt 15:29-38:
Mk 8:10-12 // Mt 15:39-16:4; Mk 8:13-26 // Mt 16:5-12.

1. In the Greek-speaking territories beyond Herod Antipas' realm where Jesus now briefly ministers, how is it that in response to Jesus' amazing healings these people glorify the God of Israel (Mt 15:31) as well as Jesus himself (Mk 7:37)? How might they have heard about Jesus (Mk 5:20; Lk 6:17f)? How readily did they respond when they finally got to witness personally what they had for some time only heard about Jesus' activities and teachings? How common is this response phenomenon (Jn 4:39-42)?
2. What light do the healings of the deaf and the blind men here throw upon the nature of some divine healing processes? Are they typical of all divine healings? Why do they seem to be more difficult than most of Jesus' other healings? Does Jesus' explicit use of Aramaic in the first healing indicate whom he might be addressing even in this Greek-speaking area?
3. Why is it so hard then and now to keep healing ministries more or less private and quiet? Why is it often important to try to do so for the sake of the person healed? How can Christian congregations ensure that it is not the great leaders or institutions, but God himself who is glorified for such ministries?
4. What is so significant about this second feeding of a great multitude, now in the Gentile area of Decapolis, that two gospels record it as well as the earlier mass feeding in Galilee? How else does this one differ from the feeding of the 5000? What did Jesus expect his disciples to have learned from the two amazing feedings that they had witnessed (Mk 8:16-21; Mt 16:7-10)? Why hadn't they learned it? What should present day Christians learn from these two miraculous public feedings? However, how different was the disciples' understanding of Jesus' reference to leaven / yeast from what Jesus was trying to tell them? Was this just an understandable misunderstanding, or were the two ideas really connected by more than a common metaphor? How so? How confusing, as well as illuminating, can metaphorical language sometimes be? How important is the immediate context for correctly discerning the point of a particular use of a metaphor (Mk 8:8-16; Mt 15:37-16:8)?
5. What is the yeast / leaven that Jesus was referring his disciples to beware of here (Mk 8:15; Mt 16:6, 12)? Should Christians beware of it today? Where do we find such leaven at work today? Do people or their leaders discern the signs of the times any better today than they did then? Should Christians be able to do so? How so?
6. What feelings lay behind Jesus' deep sighs in Mk 7:34 and 8:12? What occasioned them in each case? What does this reveal about Jesus? How is his patience demonstrated in spite of such feelings? What light might Jesus' later comment in Mt 17:17 throw on all this? How similar are the things that make you sigh?

TRAIL IX -- SECTION 31: RS ## 82-84:: Mk 8:27-30 // Mt 16:13-20 // Lk 9:18-21;
Mk 8:31-37// Mt 16:21-26// Lk 9:22-25 Mk 8:38-9:1 // Mt 16:27f// Lk 9:26f.

1. What are the variety of views about Jesus today compared with those of the Jews of his day? But who, as a Christian, do you say that Jesus really is? What difference does this confession make to your world view and lifestyle? How does Peter's confession of faith now compare with the earlier affirmations presented in the gospels (Jn 1:49; Mk 1:24f // Lk 4:34; Mt 14:33)? How can they all be reconciled? Why do Christians tend to think that Peter's confession here was so important?
2. How does Jesus appropriate and employ the imagery of Ps 89:4, 21, 26, 38 & 48(2 S 7) in his subsequent talk with Peter (Mt 16:17-20)?
3. Upon which rock was Jesus going to build his church? What might be the implications of different answers to this question for Christians today? How does what Jesus said in the next two sections [##83 & 84] fit with your own answer? Might you want to modify your position in light of this?
4. What aspects of Jesus' identity did he still want to keep concealed from the people? Why might that be so? What other aspects of his identity and fate was he now trying to make clear to his disciples? Why was it so hard for Peter to connect these aspects? Would it have been any easier for the crowd (Mk 8:34; Lk 9:23)? How easy is it for you? How much would Jesus' next teaching help his disciples make the appropriate connection? Would it for you, as a post-passion Christian disciple? How do you view and live your life as disciple of Jesus' kind of messiah? How attractive an option is that for outsiders?
5. What is the significance of the phrase "for my sake" in Mk 8:35 // Mt 10:25 // Lk 9:24 for understanding the meaning of Jesus' statement about being his disciple / follower in this particular context? How might the very different contexts and the lack of the phrase "for my sake" in Lk 17:33 and Jn 12:25 affect the meaning of the statement about how saving and losing ones' life? Could this statement in any of these contexts be construed as advocating saving ones' spiritual life through world-denying ascetic disciplines? What does Jesus' statement mean to you personally?
6. What are the possible future events that Jesus might have been referring to in his last statement here? Which event is the most likely one that he had in mind? What do you think the disciples probably understood Jesus to mean? What difference would the right answer make (a) for the disciples, and (b) for you? Why do you think Jesus was so ambiguous here and elsewhere?

TRAIL LX - - SECTION 32: RS ## 85-86:: Mk 9:2-8 // Mt 17:1-8 // Lk 9:28-36;
Mk 9:9-13 // Mt 17:9-13 // Lk 9:36.

1. How do the extra details in Luke's account of Jesus' transfiguration clarify (a) its context, (b) what happened, and (c) its meaning? How meaningful is it to you that the three figures were discussing the departure [Greek = "exodus"] Jesus was about to accomplish at Jerusalem (Lk 9:31)? Who do you think would be involved in that new exodus (Ro 6:3-13; 2 Co 5:14-17; Cl 2:12)? What should that imply for you?
2. Had you been a witness to Jesus' transfiguration, how would your feelings behaviour and words have been different than those of the three witnessing disciples?
3. For you, for them, and for Jesus himself, what would have been the significance of (a) the presence of both Moses and Elijah (Mt 4:5f; Lk 24:27; Jn 1:45) and (b) the specific words from the cloud (Mk 1:11; Mt 3:17; Lk 3:22; Dt 18:15; Is 42:1; Ps 2:7; 2 Pt 1:16-19)? Why might this affirmation of Jesus been important to him at this point in his mission?
4. Might some Christian churches well be right in claiming, on the basis of the later words in 2 P 1:4 of the witness Peter (2 P 1:16-18), that in Jesus' transfigured we have a glimpse of what Christians' resurrection bodies will be like? What would this mean to you, if they were indeed correct? Could John, the only other surviving (Ac 12:2) and writing witness of the transfiguration (1 Jn 1:1-3), be hinting at the same thing in 1 Jn 3:2?
5. Why do you think Jesus wanted his three witnesses to keep silent about his transfiguration before his resurrection? What was it about Jesus' promised resurrection that puzzled his three disciples? What puzzles you most about it? How different are your and their quandaries?

TRAIL IX -- SECTION 33: RS ## 87-89:: Mk 9:14-29 // Mt 17:14-20 // Lk 9:37-43; Mk 9:30-32 // Mt 17:22f // Lk 9:43-45; Mt 17:24-27.

1. Why do you think the crowd were greatly amazed when they saw Jesus arrive after descending from the mountain (Mk 9:15)? Why were both the disciples and the multitude astounded at the majesty of God as well as marvelling at what Jesus did for the afflicted boy (Lk 9:43)?
2. In light of the disciples' previous experience in publicly sharing in Jesus' healing ministries (Mk 6:7, 13, 30; Mt 10:8; Lk 9:1f, 6, 10), why might a father ask them to heal his son in Jesus' absence (Mk 9:17f; Mt 17:16; Lk 9:40)? What essential element was missing for both the father and the disciples that delayed the healing of the afflicted boy (Mk 9:29; Mt 17:20f)? Why did Jesus respond so harshly to them all (Mk 9:19; Mt 17:17; Lk 9:41)? What enabled him, nevertheless, to proceed with the healing? What can we learn from this for the practice of divine healing in Christian congregations today (Ja 5:14-16)? How are prayer and faith connected (Mt 21:21; Mk 11:23f; Jo 5:15)? How does fasting come in (Mk 9:29; Mt 17:2f)?
3. Why do you think Jesus took this opportunity to speak again privately to his disciples about his coming death and resurrection? Which of the disciples' responses to this news might have been yours if you had been one of them? Are there things that Jesus said to his disciples that you can't understand that you're afraid to ask him about? Could they be hidden even for Christians for a good purpose (Lk 9:45)?
4. Does Mt 17:24-27 (Ex 30:11-15) certify the fairness of head taxes? Should Christians support through their taxes state-run religious establishments, whether Christian or otherwise (Mt 22:15-22; Ro 13:1-7; 1 Co 10:31-33; 1 P 2:13-17)? How relevant to you is the reason Jesus gave Peter for paying the annual temple tax (Mt 17:27)? Could it also apply to regularly supporting your local Christian congregation? How so?
5. What is the significance that Matthew is the only evangelist who records the incident about the temple tax payment (Mt 9:9)? How and why do your life-experiences help you to see aspects of God's work in your life and in the world that other people, even fellow Christians, tend to miss or take for granted? In what ways can you share these insights and their importance?

TRAIL IX -- SECTION 34: RS ## 90-91:: Mk 9:33-37 // Mt 18:1-5/I Lk 9:46-48; Mk 9:38-50/I Mt 18:6-14 // Lk 9:49f.

1. In what ways do the followers of Jesus today still compete to be the greatest servant / minister in God's kingdom? Why was a little child set in their midst by Jesus a suitable object lesson to teach his competitive disciples? Does Ps 8:2 teach something similar? What implications are there for Christians and Christian congregations today? Do Christians really take children, servants, and "the least" as seriously as Jesus does? Why?
2. What do these passages suggest about the importance in God's plan of Christian ministries with children? What is needed to conduct them properly? How might a serious comparison of the contexts for the parable of the lost sheep in Mt 18:1-14 and later in Lk 15:1-10 affect the church's focus for its mission nationally and internationally today? What refocusing might be appropriate? How similar and different are the teaching points of the parable in these two contexts? What allows a parable to be used in more than one way? How fundamental yet flexible is the shepherd-sheep metaphor for God's people (Ps 23:1-3; 100:3; Is 40:11; 53:6; Jr 28:3f; 31:10f; 50:6; Ek 34; Jn 10:11-16; 1 P 5:1-4)? How effective is it for non-agrarian Christians today? What metaphors might be more helpful?
3. What could people who pride themselves on their own correct Christian thought [orthodoxy] and practice [orthopraxis] learn from how Jesus advised his disciple John to treat others who also sought to do good in Jesus name? What ecumenical implications might be drawn from this?
4. How does Jesus seek to convey how very serious a matter it is to cause someone to sin, whether "a little one" or anyone else (Lk 17:1f)? How well does Jesus convince you? Who are these "little ones" according to Jesus? What implications might there be here for you and your Christian congregation?
5. Is Jesus really intending to teach about (a) hell, (b) angels, (c) the world, or (d) salt here? Should we mine his words here for reliable information? What is he really talking about by referring to them? How much can people learn from good illustrations? How reliable is that as information? What do you learn from each of Jesus' illustrations here?

1. Why is forgiveness essential in a Christian's relationships (Mt 6:14f; Mk 11:25)? How can you facilitate reconciliation and forgiveness? What should happen if the best personal and communal attempts at reconciliation don't succeed even following the procedure of Mt 18:15-17? Should Christian victims always ultimately forgive the perpetrators, even if they remain unrepentant (Lk 17:4)? How was such forgiveness possible for Jesus (Lk 23:34; 1 P 2:23)? How would this help Christians too (Ac 7: 60; Ro 12:19-21)? What about God's character enables you to trust him to repay rights and wrongs in the best time and way? Should forgiveness always be conditional on repentance? What happened if forgiveness is refused?
2. What is the immediate context in Matthew's gospel of the three verses Mt 18:18-20? What words join these three sayings together? What words and phrases also connect this group of sayings with what precedes and follows them? What else suggests that Matthew intended the whole of Mt 18:15-35 to be the record or summary of a unified discourse, and not just a collection of unrelated sayings of Jesus taken from different occasions? If this is so, what would be the interpretation and application of these three sayings? However, how does the popular Christian tendency to isolate these verses and separate them from each other change their range of meaning and application? What other scriptures might confirm such wider interpretations and applications of each verse? How much hangs upon such traditional interpretations and applications of these individual verses for you and your Christian community? What should be different for you and your community, if these three verses were always interpreted as a unit, and in its immediate context?
3. Can you identify with Peter in the matter of forgiving his brother? What impact do you think Jesus' parable would have on him? What does it say to you? Can anyone really receive forgiveness in one's heart and not be willing to forgive others too, especially in analogous circumstances? What connection is there between forgiving and loving God and others (1 Jn 4:20)? Would you, like Jesus' disciples on a similar occasion, exclaim, "Lord, increase our faith!" (Lk 17:3)? How would more or better faith / trust enable you to keep on forgiving or loving others (1 Jn 4:19)?
4. Why does Jesus discourage people from following him halfheartedly? Do his discipleship demands seem unreasonable? What does he mean by his plowing illustration? What do you think he expects from you to be his disciple? Why might this hold you back from following him? Are the costs of Christian discipleship the same today? How should the church represent Jesus' discipleship requirements to prospective followers (Lk 14:25-33; Mt 28:19f)?
5. How do Jesus' and his unbelieving relatives' senses of timing and rationales for his public visit to Jerusalem compare? How do you sense when, why, and how to do something? How well do you think Jesus handled their advice? How well also did Jesus handle James' and John's response to the Samaritans' rejection of them because they were taking the shortcut from Galilee to Jerusalem through unfriendly Samaria (Jn 4:9, 20-22)? What can you learn from Jesus here about how to respond to inhospitality, rejection or hostility?

Remember to write up your answer to the comprehensive question based upon your notes