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Facing Jesus: Rediscovering Jesus Through Art, Imagery, and Imagination

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GEORGE FOX UNIVERSITY

PROJECT PORTFOLIO:

FACING JESUS: REDISCOVERING JESUS THROUGH ART, IMAGERY, AND IMAGINATION



IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY
PORTLAND SEMINARY

BY:

JULIE SCHENDEL

PROJECT FACULTY:

DR. MINDY SMITH

PORTLAND, OREGON

FEBRUARY 2023



CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

This certifies that the doctoral Project Portfolio of

Julie Schendel

has been approved by
the Evaluation Committee on March 15, 2023
for the degree of Doctor of Ministry in Semiotics, Church, and Culture.

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Dedication

To anyone who has struggled to find themselves in the image of God: may you always find that Christ is real, relatable, and accessible to you.

Acknowledgments

To every artist who shared their talent and vision of Jesus, who helped to expand our image of Christ by sharing their incredible artwork, this project would not have been possible without you.

To all my conversation partners who helped open my eyes to the limitedness of popular Christian imagery and the need for broader conversations around inclusivity and hospitality, thank you for your honesty and vulnerability.

To the teaching staff at Portland Seminary, Loren, Cliff, Heather, and Jen, thank you for leading us with such grace through this program and making it such an extraordinary learning experience.

To my Semiotics, Church, and Culture PDX19 Cohort who throughout these last three years have inspired, challenged, supported, and taught me so much, I am grateful for our conversations and how you have helped me grow.

To Stacey, Laura, and Donna, incredible women who are making an impact on the world through their passion, experience, and wisdom, thank you for being by my side through this entire journey. Your constant support and encouragement have carried me through the toughest days. Knowing you has inspired me and helped me grow. I am grateful for each of you.

To Dr. Mindy Smith, my project faculty, mentor, and friend, who saw more in me than I often saw in myself, who pushed me to find my doctoral voice, and who supported me every step of the way with grace, wisdom, encouragement, and laughter...thank you is not enough.

To Dr. Len Sweet, who deepened my appreciation of art and the practice of searching for signs and symbols in scripture, imagery, and the world, I am humbled and grateful for your leadership and wisdom. You have changed the way I see and share Jesus.

Epigraph

"Art should comfort the disturbed and disturb the comfortable."
Cesar A. Cruz

"The business of the ministry is to comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable."¹
Frederick W. Burnham

¹ Deis, Robert. n.d. "Comfort the Afflicted and Afflict the Comfortable..." July 30, 2020.
<http://www.thisdayinquotes.com/2020/07/comfort-afflicted-and-afflict.html>.

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Glossary

Visio Divina. “Divine seeing.” Visio Divina is the practice of praying through imagery, exploring the signs and symbols in an image, and allowing God to reveal new truths through paintings and pictures.

Historical Imagery. Historical imagery portrays Jesus in an historically accurate manner as a first-century, Palestinian/Jewish man. It focuses on his human aspects and properly displays authentic physical characteristics, clothing, and background settings.

Christological Imagery. Christological imagery portrays Jesus as the Christ and focuses on his divine nature. Images may include symbols that would not have been included in his human nature such as crowns, halos, or a glowing aura.

Relational Imagery. Relational imagery portrays Jesus in a way that is relatable to the audience or representative of the artist. Characteristics may include physical features, clothing, or postures that relate to a race or culture other than Jesus’. Examples may include portraying Jesus as European, Asian, or African, etc.

Symbolic Imagery. Symbolic imagery portrays Jesus using signs and symbols such as colors or animals to point to a deeper meaning reflecting Jesus.

Research Method

This Doctoral Project utilized a blended research and design methodology called “Collaborative Design for Ministry and Nonprofit Contexts.” In Collaborative Design, practitioners work with stakeholder representatives to address a Need, Problem, or Opportunity (NPO) in their context. Using a combination of bibliographic resources, local knowledge derived from stakeholder Workshops, and an iterative process of continuous adjustment using just enough feedback information at each juncture of development, practitioners produce an application-oriented Project that seeks to effect Christ-centered change.

Abstract

In this Project Portfolio, I will address the following NPO: Christians have a limited understanding of the nature and character of Jesus due to the whitewashed imagery and artwork many American churches portray. Much of the historical artwork shows Jesus with Caucasian or European features that are relatable only to a certain demographic, leaving many minority groups excluded. The overall key insights from my research are twofold: First, a lot of modern artworks that share broader expressions of Jesus are still relatively inaccessible due to licensing fees and limited audiences. Second, most churchgoers have never been encouraged to question the image of Christ and are comfortable assuming that he looks like the artwork displayed in their churches. By exploring a greater variety of imagery, participants are encouraged to rethink their understanding of hospitality and inclusivity regarding the way the church is teaching the image of Christ. The goal is not to take away a favorite image but to add to the types of imagery that shape and develop one's faith.

The ministry setting is the local church in the North Georgia Conference of the United Methodist Church and additional churches beyond the UMC denomination. My project is threefold: a Visio Divina through an Advent Devotional, Visio Divina through a Lenten Devotional, and an Introduction to Visio Divina Bible Study. The devotionals include diverse collections of Christian imagery with reflection questions that encourage curiosity and self-discovery surrounding the need for adapting more diverse imagery. The Bible study introduces the practice of Visio Divina and exposes the audience to a variety of Christian images in art and film. All three explore historical, Christological, relational, and symbolic imagery, recognizing the need for all categories to express a broader understanding of the nature and character of Jesus.

Introduction

Jesus Christ is one of the most widely recognized characters in history, yet we lack one true image that accurately portrays what he looked like. Due to human curiosity, Christian imagery plays a huge role in our faith development. Stained glass windows were created in churches to tell the stories of Jesus during a time where most congregations were illiterate. Pictures, symbols, and colors brought Bible stories to life and made them more accessible. Yet over time, our imagery has not evolved as much as our worship communities. Jesus is predominantly featured as a white European man with long hair and blue eyes, despite his Middle Eastern Jewish ethnicity. The United States has been steadily growing in racial and ethnic diversity, yet our worship spaces remain overwhelmingly segregated. The imagery and artwork represented in any church speaks volumes to the way Jesus is portrayed through worship in any given congregation. My project brings to light the following NPO: Christians have a limited understanding of the nature and character of Jesus due to the whitewashed imagery and artwork many American churches portray. To address this, I created an Advent and Lenten Devotional, as well as a Bible study introducing the practice of Visio Divina through an extensive collection of diverse artworks. Participants will explore new images, wrestle with their discomfort around unfamiliar themes, and expand their image of Jesus through prayerful study and reflection.

Discovery

This project has been years in the making and transformed tremendously throughout the research process. I remember questioning my church's images of Jesus as early as childhood. Seeing Warner Sallman's famous *Christ at Heart's Door* left me wondering why Jesus was white if he was born and raised in the Middle East. More recently I served a church in a diverse community where Blacks and Hispanics made up over 51% of the population, yet the congregation was predominantly white, and all the stained-glass windows and artwork portrayed Jesus as white. I knew it was problematic to present our Savior as white in a community that was struggling with racism and resisting conversations around white privilege and white supremacy. I worried what kind of message we were presenting to the world when guests would visit and immediately see Warner Sallman's *Head of Christ* upon entering.

The painting came up in a conversation with a church member, who sensed my unease of the portrait. I told her: "I worry it is not the best representation of Jesus since the picture portrays him as white. We have a very diverse community, and I wonder what kind of hospitality that painting offers. Does it feel like only people who look like that image of Jesus are welcomed?" She looked at me shocked and rebutted, "He's not white. His skin is darker in that painting, and his features are more Jewish. I think that's exactly what Jesus looks like." This conversation was one of the first signs that my project was going to be controversial.

To further explore my concern around white imagery, I held a Discovery Workshop to gain insight from a variety of people. Participants consisted of church members, seminary students, and friends ranging from mid-20's to mid-60's, all of whom were regular churchgoers. I hoped to have greater racial diversity in my participants than 1 out of 5, but gathering volunteers whose schedules aligned with the workshop was quite difficult, so I increased my intentionality in additional research. The most surprising discovery of this workshop was how hard it was to convince my participants that there was a problem. They saw no issue with the natural segregation in churches due to a belief that different races and cultures worship very differently. Together we discovered that the main longing when looking at an image of Christ is to find Jesus offering peace and comfort, and participants did not see any issue with that being Jesus' main characteristic. At the end of the

workshop, our NPO changed to this: Considering mainline churches, we've discovered an opportunity to embrace more diverse imagery of God, to address our natural resistance to change and accepting others. The audience would be impacted by this opportunity by being inspired to carry out God's mission to a more inclusive population.

Design

The Design Workshop included new participants who represent my primary audience of church members and clergy. I accomplished bringing in slightly more racial diversity with an African American, a Nigerian, and the rest Caucasian. My one-on-one interviews branched out further with a UMC Bishop, an African American clergy person from outside of my home conference, and an Evangelical Covenant Church clergy person and author. The key discovery from the workshop confirmed that as a society, we are more comfortable worshipping an image of Jesus that is relatable and looks like us than one that is historically accurate. Our concept pitches included an image rich sermon series introducing diverse images and characteristics, a storybook collection of personal experiences and how their favorite imagery shaped their faith, and a children's book introducing diverse imagery of Jesus to a young audience. The one-on-one interviews helped shaped the idea of the storybook collection taking the form of a blog and image rich social media sites. This was the quickest and most accessible way to share images and their impact on people's faith. I interviewed artists who created diverse imagery, clergy who worked to update their church's imagery, and individuals whose imagery has changed as their faith developed. From those additional interviews I discovered that every single person of color I spoke with grew up in a Black church that used white images of Jesus. None of them grew up with an image that represented their race, and they all had a difficult time relating to any Christian imagery because of this disconnect. Through these interviews and my additional research, I realized how thoroughly the church has been impacted by white supremacy due to the prevalence of white people being the focus, even in Black spaces.

My prototypes to share these stories included three sites entitled "Facing Jesus," including a blog: <https://facing-jesus.com/>, a Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/facingjesus>, and an Instagram account: https://www.instagram.com/facing_jesus/. Throughout the process, I learned that people were hesitant to engage with the online content due to the controversial nature of diverse imagery. People who agreed with the need for diversity did not see these stories as anything innovative. People who disagreed did not feel comfortable commenting online. From these discoveries I confirmed one of the concerns from my Design Workshop, that people were not ready to address the need for diverse imagery. At this stage, my project changed direction from the blog and social media sites to the more personal devotionals for Advent and Lent. Instead of sharing publicly how our white imagery is harmful and needs to change, I altered my language toward an invitational approach through Visio Divina. By inviting participants to explore and pray through various images, they were able to make their own discoveries around why an image spoke to them, made them uncomfortable, or brought them new awareness about Jesus. The Advent and Lenten Devotionals were geared toward the individual to explore these images in private, and small groups studying the devotionals allowed these discoveries to be discussed in a safe environment that was not broadcast online. Bringing the audience to a more personal level may have reduced the scope, but it brought forth much greater results. The Advent Devotional participants gave much more feedback than the original online audience. The Bible Study was another safe place for starting difficult conversations around the importance of expanding our imagery in churches.

Delivery

DOCTORAL PROJECT SCOPE

My project consisted of a 28-day Advent Devotional, a 47-day Lenten Devotional, and continued posting on social media sites. While not originally in my scope, I added a five-week Bible Study to gain quicker feedback once I realized my benchmarks may not have allowed for adequate feedback in the timeline allowed. The devotionals were shared in two formats: a complete booklet that individuals could download from home, and a daily email that participants could subscribe to receive. I considered creating a website to compile all parts of the project in one place, but due to the shortcomings of the blog website, I decided another website might not give the best return for my time and effort.

BENCHMARKS

- Devotionals will have a visually pleasing format that is easy to read and understand with high quality color photos. Email format is easy to subscribe and open. Downloadable version is easy to access and print.
- At least 10 individuals and 2 group studies agree to participate in the Advent Devotional.
At least 20 individuals and 5 group studies agree to participate in the Lent Devotional.
- Group studies may meet weekly as opposed to daily.
- Email devotionals receive a 60% or higher open rate to track engagement.
- Feedback questionnaire reports a 60% “finish” rate from individuals or groups where participants complete all 28 daily/4 weekly (Advent) or 47 daily/6 weekly (Lent) devotionals.

FEEDBACK

I used a combination of tracking devices through Constant Contact to show devotional open rates and engagement, as well as feedback questionnaires where participants shared similar reports and the impact they experienced. Since participants will not complete the Lenten Devotional until after this portfolio is submitted, I will continue to gather feedback through similar evaluations after Easter. One of the most helpful means of feedback was a Facing Jesus email account from which the devotionals were sent, which allowed participants to respond directly when a specific image or reflection spoke to them. I will continue to respond to feedback through that email address.

The Advent Devotional booklet was made available to 27 individuals requesting the pdf file to print and read at home. The Advent Devotional daily email was sent to a preexisting mailing list of 137 congregation members. Typically, weekly engagement on previous newsletters was around 50%. The Advent Devotional emails remained consistent with previous trends and received an average 51% open rate. The daily Advent Devotional emails also went out to 17 subscribers, additional participants who requested the devotional. Subscriber emails received an average 89% open rate. These open rates stayed consistent throughout the 28 days of Advent. I would have preferred a higher open rate from my congregation but am pleased it remained consistent with previous open rates. I consider the high open rate from subscribers to be a great success. I did not request feedback on open rates from the 27 who requested the printable booklet, but several offered very positive reviews. After Advent I sent out surveys to anyone who responded with a willingness to share feedback. I received half a dozen responses so far, with most people being minimally or not at all familiar with Visio Divina before the devotional, declaring 90-100% of the images were new to them, achieved 90-100% completion rate, and all were very likely to participate again in the Lent Devotional and were very likely to share it with others. This shows great engagement and an eagerness to continue learning.

Throughout this process I realized that due to the dates of the Advent and Lenten seasons, I would not be able to receive feedback in as timely a manner as I hoped to support my findings before university deadlines. To combat the delay, I added to my scope by creating and teaching a five-week Bible Study. This study allowed me to have face-to-face conversations with church members as I introduced *Visio Divina* and shared an introduction to imagery of Jesus. The participants were fully engaged and found the study very thought provoking. The lesson on “Jesus Around the World” especially brought up very fruitful conversations around the segregation of our churches and the racism that is still evident in our community. This style of teaching allowed the group to come to these realizations through the shared images and the posed questions. They were much more receptive and far less defensive to these ideas when they arrived at these conclusions on their own, rather than encountering these ideas more directly through the blog.

LONG-TERM OBJECTIVES

My long-term objectives for this project include finding ways to get more clergy interested in teaching the Bible Study to their congregations and sharing the devotionals with a wider audience. Ideally, I want to publish part or all of this project, but the permissions and licensing fees I have acquired so far only cover single use for a limited audience. I am researching methods of getting curriculum published or self-publishing, but the costs to gain artist permission and publish this many images is currently highly unachievable.

Evaluation and Experience

One of the biggest roadblocks I faced during this project was gaining permission to use so many images. My research revealed a great variety of artists and styles that most of my audiences have not yet experienced, but most modern artists are very protective of how their images are used. Some artists were very generous to grant permission for single use for a limited audience. Several were very generous to offer their images to a student who was not out to make a profit. Many artists required some form of licensing fee or payment for single use, which limited the amount of preferred images I could use. Other artists never responded to my inquiries or never gave permission. Another challenge was finding existing imagery that supported my theme. It was rare to find Jesus shown righteously angry, as liberator, smiling, or in many other uncommon ways. The images I did find were often shared illegally so often that locating the original source or artist's name was impossible.

This project went through several stages of revision as I tried multiple methods of addressing the problem. I conducted several additional interviews with artists, people whose image had changed as their faith grew, and people who led their churches into adapting more diverse imagery. I wanted a better way to share their stories but struggled to gain a captive audience through online sharing. This theme was very emotionally charged, because it challenged people's favorite image of Christ and in turn, challenged their faith. People are hesitant to admit that a change or broadening of their image of Jesus is needed. If they admit to being wrong about one thing, i.e., Jesus was not white, there is fear that any number of other known truths would need rethinking as well. To combine some of my methods of addressing this problem, I took several highlights from my interviews and wove them into the Lenten Devotional where it could make a stronger impact.

Next Steps

This project is a first step toward helping people discover how important our image of Jesus is and how necessary it is for churches to be aware of how they are depicting Jesus. By introducing a variety of images, people will gain exposure to new artists, new characteristics of Jesus, and new

ways of considering Jesus. Feedback participants shared about the Advent Devotional was that they had never seen most of the images before.

The Lenten Devotional will be sent out to participants beginning February 22nd. I will monitor engagement through the same methods used for the Advent Devotional by email open rates, feedback questionnaires, and responses to social media accounts. I will continue working with clergy who are ready to start this conversation with their congregations by offering the devotionals and Bible Study for church use. I will continue exploring possibilities for publishing any part of this project.

Reflection

This program has allowed me to think more deeply about how I understand Jesus and how I share Jesus with the world. My advisor encouraged me to select a topic I was passionate about. My passion for how we see Jesus only grew the more I learned and unpacked throughout this process. My project started as a minor annoyance at how hard it was to find images of Jesus portrayed culturally and historically accurately. This moved to concern at how our churches do not fully represent the kingdom of God when they fail to reflect the community they are serving. Our lack of representation leads to a perceived lack of hospitality and openness to people of all ages, races, nations, and cultures. My research opened my eyes to how thoroughly the church has been built on systemic racism that asserts whiteness as the norm even when it comes to portraying Jesus. Battling against this cannot be fully solved by increasing the diversity of our image of Christ, but it is a step in the right direction. I still have a lot of questions, but I know that expanding our image of Christ in ways that are historical, Christological, relational, and symbolic can bring greater awareness to the fuller picture of Jesus we are trying to tell.

It is my prayer that people begin to see Jesus anew with fresh eyes. I hope that our understanding of who Jesus is and who Jesus included expands and inspires how churches approach their own hospitality. Our image of God is not so much finding a Christ that looks like us; it is about finding ourselves in the Imago Dei that welcomes all, includes all, and loves all. Representation and relatability are important, but as a society we need to take a serious look at how we relate to one another. God created our world to be beautifully diverse. Jesus spent his entire ministry reaching out to those whom others had cast aside and labeled as different. If we are truly to embrace the body of Christ and celebrate being created in the Imago Dei, it is time we follow the example of Christ by challenging our preference for sameness and expanding how relatability looks. It begins with how we see Jesus and how we show Jesus to others.

Doctoral Project

Advent Devotional

The Advent Devotional covers the four weeks of Advent. The introduction and first week are included here. The remaining three weeks and footnotes are included in Appendix E.1.



A Visio Divina Advent Devotional



INTRODUCTION

This Advent Season let's take a closer look at the story of the birth of Jesus. We often focus on the scriptures, the songs, and the story we know well, but sometimes we fail to take a closer look at the signs, symbols, and art that can say so much more than words. I have collected some of my favorite images and artwork to help us take a second glance and spend some time truly seeing Jesus with new eyes.

This devotional is a practice in Visio Divina, Latin for "divine vision." It is an ancient practice similar to the art of Lectio Divina, or "divine reading." In Lectio Divina, the participant is invited to reflect upon a passage of scripture. The participant reads it, prays it, and allows the Holy Spirit to reveal its meaning. The scripture may say something different every time it is read. In Visio Divina, the participant is invited to gaze upon an image, considering its colors, patterns, textures, shadows, and light. Consider what this media type says about the image. Is it a simple sketch, a gilded icon, a handcrafted sculpture, or an abstract painting? Visio Divina is not just about looking at an image, but it is a chance to pray through the image, to allow God to reveal to you a deeper meaning every time you look at it.

Just as one scripture verse is not enough to express the fullness of who Jesus is, one image cannot fully tell the whole story either. This collection of artwork offers different images of Jesus, sharing various sides of his life. Some may be familiar favorites. Some may take you by surprise. Whatever reaction you may have is telling you something important about the story of Christ and your relationship with each aspect of his life and character. Our expectations do not always align with our realities, and sometimes the story of Jesus' birth has been so customized and sanitized that we can hardly catch a glimpse of how the story continues to speak to us today.

I invite you to set apart some time each day to spend in prayer with these images. If possible, view them on a computer screen to give you the greatest access to all the details of the larger image. You may want to gather some paper and pen or a journal to jot down your thoughts as you explore each image. Some days will invite you to make a first impression, and then offer additional information about the artist or artwork, giving you a chance for a second look. Take note to see if your meditations change upon learning more about the background of each image. As you study the individual images, consider these questions:

- What is the first thing that catches your eye in this image? What details do you only notice upon further reflection?
- What is the strongest emotion being stirred within you as you see this image? Sit with that emotion for a few moments and try to discover what it is seeking to teach you.
- What is the artist seeking to portray? What is not being said?
- What is God revealing to you today as you look at this image?

As you begin this journey with Visio Divina, let us begin by praying the following liturgy:

“O Discerning Spirit, who alone judges all things rightly, now be present in my mind and active in my imagination as I prepare to engage with the claims and questions of diverse cultures incarnated in the stories that people tell.

Let me experience mediums of art and expression, neither as passive consumer nor as an entertainment glutton, but rather as one who through such works would more fully and compassionately enter this ongoing, human conversation of mystery and meaning, wonder and beauty, good and evil, sorrow and joy, fear and love.”

Liturgy by Douglas Kaine McKelvey, from “Every Moment Holy”[1]

It is my prayer that God speaks to you through each image and reveals to you something new this Advent season. If you would like to share any of your discoveries with me or offer feedback, please contact me at jschendel@facing-jesus.com. Enjoy the journey.

SUNDAY**27**

Cosmic Christ. Artist–Sister Annett Hanrahan. Used with permission.[2]

John 1:1-5

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

HOPE

- What is the first thing that catches your eye in this image? What details do you only notice upon further reflection?
- What is the strongest emotion being stirred within you as you see this image? Sit with that emotion for a few moments and try to discover what it is seeking to teach you.
- What is the artist seeking to portray? What is not being said?
- What is God revealing to you today as you look at this image?

Second Look:

Advent is a season in which time seems suspended. It is a season of waiting for Christmas when we prepare for the coming of the Christ child, even though his arrival was thousands of years ago. While looking back and remembering the birth of Jesus, we also look forward to the second coming of Christ in anticipation of the fulfillment of the prophecies and the culmination of Christ's kingdom come, here on earth, as it is in heaven.

The Cosmic Christ is an image that explores Jesus' participation in the universe since the beginning of time. Sister Annett Hanrahan draws inspiration from the South Pacific and Polynesian cultures in this painting. What signs and symbols do you notice?

MONDAY**28**

Annunciation. Artist unknown. Royalty free.

Luke 1:26-31

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you." But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus."

HOPE

- What is the first thing that catches your eye in this image? What details do you only notice upon further reflection?
- What is the strongest emotion being stirred within you as you see this image? Sit with that emotion for a few moments and try to discover what it is seeking to teach you.
- What is the artist seeking to portray? What is not being said?
- What is God revealing to you today as you look at this image?

Second Look:

Where do you imagine this scene takes place?

Does the setting impact the story or Mary's response?

If God wanted to send a message to you today, what might that look like?

TUESDAY**29**

Annunciation. Artist unknown. American mosaic in the Basilica of the Annunciation, Nazareth, Israel.

Luke 1:34-38

Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" The angel said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy, he will be called Son of God."

HOPE

And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. For nothing will be impossible with God." Then Mary said, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her.

- What is the first thing that catches your eye in this image? What details do you only notice upon further reflection?
- What emotions are being stirred within you as you sit with this image? What could be causing these emotions, or what are they trying to tell you?
- What is the artist seeking to portray? What is not being said?
- What is God revealing to you today as you look at this image?

Second Look:

The Basilica of the Annunciation has mosaics from over 43 different countries, each representing a unique style.

What is surprising about this mosaic from America? How would you approach a different style to represent American culture?

With each country adding its own cultural characteristics, does this style of artwork take away from Jesus' country of origin in first-century Israel?

WEDNESDAY 30



Light in the Wilderness, 2021. Artist–Richard J. Kirk. Used with permission.
[3]

John 8:12

Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life."

HOPE

- What is the first thing that catches your eye in this image? What details do you only notice upon further reflection?
- What is the strongest emotion being stirred within you as you see this image? Sit with that emotion for a few moments and try to discover what it is seeking to teach you.
- What is the artist seeking to portray? What is not being said?
- What is God revealing to you today as you look at this image?

What story is being told in this image?

When were some times that you felt you were walking in darkness? What brought you hope or offered light to make it through?

Second Look:

This image is inspired by a passage from the Book of Mormon:

1 Nephi 17:13-14

And I will also be your light in the wilderness; and I will prepare the way before you, if it so be that ye shall keep my commandments; wherefore, inasmuch as ye shall keep my commandments ye shall be led towards the promised land; and ye shall know that it is by me that ye are led. Yea, and the Lord said also that: After ye have arrived in the promised land, ye shall know that I, the Lord, am God; and that I, the Lord, did deliver you from destruction; yea, that I did bring you out of the land of Jerusalem.

What similarities do you find in this passage compared to the Bible?

What role does light play in symbolism in our lives?

When can the contrast of imagery between light and dark be helpful? Harmful?

THURSDAY

1



Nativity. Artist unknown, Mepkin Abbey Gardens, Moncks Corner, South Carolina.

Luke 2:1-7

In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. All went to their own towns to be registered. Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

HOPE

- What is the first thing that catches your eye in this image? What details do you only notice upon further reflection?
- What is the strongest emotion being stirred within you as you see this image? Sit with that emotion for a few moments and try to discover what it is seeking to teach you.
- What is the artist seeking to portray? What is not being said?
- What is God revealing to you today as you look at this image?

When we think of the birth of Christ, our minds often go straight to the nativity scene. We hear the story of how Mary and Joseph were forced to travel in the late stages of her pregnancy in order to take place in the census. We sympathize with the young woman who gave birth in an unexpected place. We remember the unknown visitors who traveled to see the newborn symbol of hope.

When you look at a nativity scene, what is the first thing that comes to mind?

Second Look:

This nativity set is crafted with very little detail around the faces, yet each character is still easily distinguishable. What might this say about our understanding of the characters present at the birth of Christ?

Where have you found moments of hope in the midst of difficulty, unexpected detours, or interrupted plans?

FRIDAY**2**

Virgin and Child, ca. 1270-1300. Artist unknown, made in Limoges, France.
On view at The Met Fifth Avenue. Public domain.

Luke 1:32-33

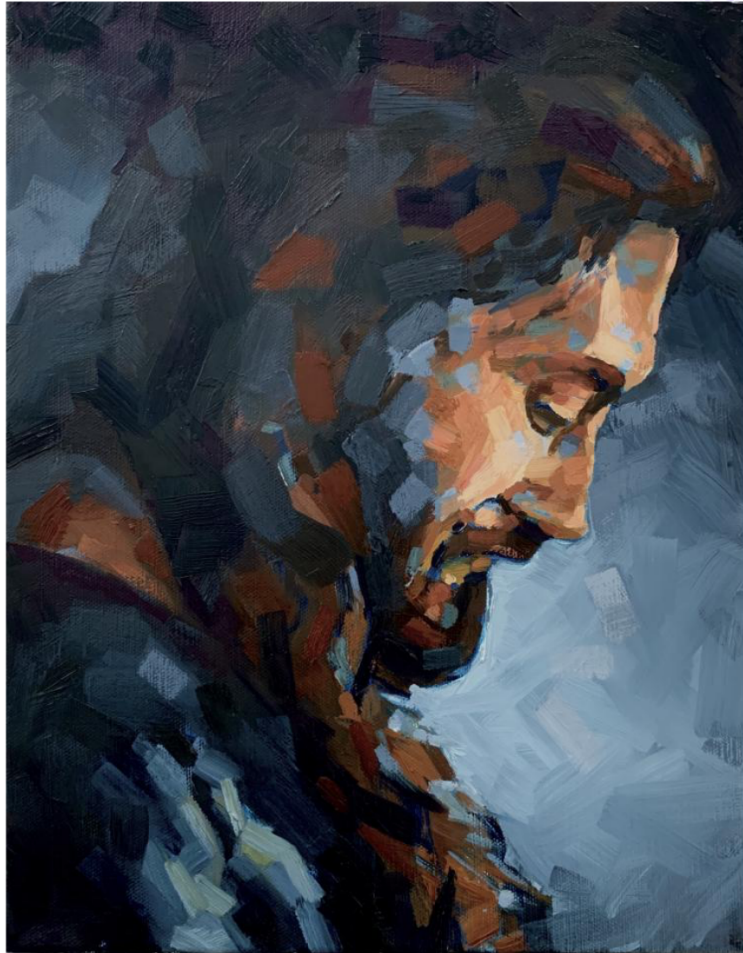
"He will be great, and will be called Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."

HOPE

- What is the first thing that catches your eye in this image? What details do you only notice upon further reflection?
- What is the strongest emotion being stirred within you as you see this image? Sit with that emotion for a few moments and try to discover what it is seeking to teach you.
- What is the artist seeking to portray? What is not being said?
- What is God revealing to you today as you look at this image?

During his life in Israel, Jesus never wore an ornate crown, sat on a throne, or ruled an earthly kingdom, yet he is remembered as the King of the Jews, the King of kings. Jesus himself proclaimed that his kingdom was not of this earth. Looking at this image, we see Mary and Jesus both adorned in crowns and fine clothing, sitting on what appears to be a throne.

How would Jesus' ministry have looked different had he occupied a throne in Jerusalem? Would he have faced more or less trouble than he caused by leading a simple, nomadic lifestyle?

SATURDAY**3**

A Perfect Brightness of Hope, 2020. Artist–Scott Sligting. Used with permission.[4]

Scripture leaves much to be desired in connecting the stories of the birth of Jesus and the start of his ministry. There are very few details about what helped to shape him and grow him into the man that he became. Yet even upon hearing the story of his humble origins, we anticipate great things from him once he is grown. We gain a sense of hope at his birth that carries through the years until he is ready to make himself known.

HOPE

- What is the first thing that catches your eye in this image? What details do you only notice upon further reflection?
- What is the strongest emotion being stirred within you as you see this image? Sit with that emotion for a few moments and try to discover what it is seeking to teach you.
- What is the artist seeking to portray? What is not being said?
- What is God revealing to you today as you look at this image?

What hopes do you think Mary had for her child as she imagined his life past childhood?

Is the Jesus that you encounter today the one that you hoped for?

Lenten Devotional

The Lenten Devotional covers the six and a half weeks of Lent from Ash Wednesday until Easter. The introduction and first week are included here. The remaining three weeks and attributions are included in Appendix E.2.



A VISIO DIVINA LENT DEVOTIONAL

INTRODUCTION

Dear Reader,

This devotional is the culmination of my Doctorate of Ministry portfolio and a passion project showcasing a collection of some of my favorite images of Christ. It is my belief that no one image can encompass all that Christ is and was, nor should it try. The more images we take in, the more fully we understand the nature and character of Jesus. This collection will explore historical, Christological, relational, and symbolic images of Jesus. It is my prayer that they enhance your Lenten season, open your mind to a deeper understanding of Jesus, and plant seeds as to how you can share more diverse imagery of Jesus as a part of your faith expression. May you have a blessed Lent.

Grace and peace,
Rev. Julie Schendel

INTRODUCTION

What is Lent?

Lent is the 40 day season in the Christian year leading up to Easter. It begins on Ash Wednesday when we remember our mortality and mark our foreheads with the sign of the cross in ashes. This practice helps us to recognize that while our earthly lives may be temporary, we are journeying toward the cross which leads us to the promise of Resurrection and eternal life. The 40 days of Lent reminds us of Jesus' 40 days spent in the wilderness, where he fasted and faced temptation. This was a time of prayer and preparation for Jesus before he began his public ministry. Christians often reflect on this time by fasting from something as well, giving up a favorite luxury such as chocolate or soft drinks, or going deeper by giving up gossiping or complaining. They may choose to take on a new spiritual discipline such as prayer, journaling, or meditation.

This Lent, I want to invite you to try something new. This devotional will invite you to look deeper when it comes to the question "Who do you say that I am?" as we seek to know Jesus. Consider giving up your expectations for who you assume Jesus is, and taking on the discipline of seeing Jesus from a new perspective.

INTRODUCTION

What is Visio Divina?

This devotional is a practice in Visio Divina, Latin for “divine vision.” It is an ancient practice similar to the art of Lectio Divina, or “divine reading.” In Lectio Divina, the participant is invited to reflect upon a passage of scripture; reading it, praying it, and allowing the Holy Spirit to reveal its meaning. The scripture may say something different every time it is read. In Visio Divina, the participant is invited to gaze upon an image, considering its colors, patterns, textures, shadows, and light. Consider what the media type says about the image. Is it a simple sketch, a gilded icon, a handcrafted sculpture, or an abstract painting? Visio Divina is not just about looking at an image. It is a chance to pray through the image and allow God to reveal to you a deeper meaning every time you look.

Just as one scripture verse is not enough to express the fullness of who Jesus is, one image cannot fully tell the whole story. This collection of artwork offers different images of Jesus, sharing various sides of his life. Some may be familiar favorites. Some may take you by surprise. Whatever reaction you have is telling you something important about the story of Christ and your relationship with each aspect of his character. This devotional is filled with more questions than answers. There is not one entirely accurate or entirely wrong image of Jesus. Approach each day with an attitude of curiosity to see what you can learn from the artist's colors and symbols presented. What bigger truths are being revealed beyond these pages?

INTRODUCTION

For Personal Study

I invite you to set apart some time each day to spend in prayer with these images. If possible, view them on a computer screen to give you the greatest access to all the details of the larger image. You may want to gather some paper and a pen or journal to jot down your thoughts as you explore each image. Some days I will invite you to make a first impression and then offer additional information about the artist or artwork, giving you a chance for a second look. Take note to see if your meditations change upon learning more about the background of each image. As you study the individual images, consider these questions:

1. What is the first thing that catches your eye in this image? What details do you only notice upon further reflection?
2. What is the strongest emotion being stirred within you as you see this image? Sit with that emotion for a few moments and try to discover what it is seeking to teach you.
3. What is the artist seeking to portray? What is not being said?
4. What is God revealing to you today as you look at this image?

These questions will be included in each daily devotional to help you become comfortable with the practice of Visio Divina. The repetition of questions will help you approach each image with a similar mindset and "blank canvas" of reflection. If you are short on time, you may skip these questions and focus on the customized questions that are unique to each image. These will help you look deeper at the particular theme and tone of the picture for the day.

INTRODUCTION

For Leading a Group Study

If you are using this devotional to lead a group study, begin by deciding how to display these images so that everyone in your group can see them. You may consider printing out enough copies of the devotional for each member to have or projecting it onto a larger screen that is visible to everyone in the room.

Start the first session by introducing the concept of Visio Divina as described above. Keep the reflection questions from the “for personal study” section handy and use them as a starting point to explore each image. Begin with Ash Wednesday and encourage everyone to draw, describe, or write characteristics of their favorite image. If you’re able to prepare before the session, gather a variety of drawing materials and paper for everyone. Crayola makes “Colors of the World” markers, colored pencils, and crayons that reflect a variety of skin tones and are helpful to have on hand. Target makes a slightly cheaper Mondo Llama brand “Hues of You” as well.

If your group is meeting weekly, I suggest that you start with the first image that coincides with the day of the week in which you are meeting. For example, if you are meeting on Wednesdays, start the first week with the devotional from Ash Wednesday. Take a moment to observe the first image and invite participants to name what they see and feel. This may take some practice if they have never practiced Visio Divina before. Different people will pick up on different details, and an image that one person loves, another may hate. It is ok to have differing opinions as long as everyone remains respectful.

INTRODUCTION

For Leading a Group Study

Work your way through the basic questions. Once you have explored the image as a group, read through the additional information in each devotional such as the scripture references, notes from the artist, or additional questions related to the image.

Allow this information to take your conversation further as you look deeper. Once you feel you have explored an image well, move onto the next day and repeat the process. You may not get through all seven images for the week during your allotted time. If that is the case, you can choose to pick up where you left off the next week, or select images ahead of time that you believe will foster the best conversation for your particular group.

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

This devotional would not be possible without the creative and incredible work of so many wonderful artists. Many of them have graciously given permission to use their artwork for the cause of this project, and others were made possible by low licensing fees. If you would like to learn more about the artists and explore their incredible work, check out their studio sites here.

Donice Bloodworth Jr. aka DaCre8iveOne: <https://dacre8iveone.store/>

Patricia Brintle: <https://www.patriciabrintle.com/>

Donna Cox: <https://www.donnacoxcreations.com/>

David Hayward aka NakedPastor: <https://nakedpastor.com/>

Laura James: <https://www.laurajamesart.com/>

Mike Moyers: <https://www.mikemoyersfineart.com/>

Annie Poon: <https://www.anniepoon.com/>

John August Swanson: <https://johnaugustswanson.com/>

Emma Taylor: <https://www.emmapaints.com/>

Frank Wesley: http://www.frankwesleyart.com/main_page.htm

Lauren Wright Pittman: <http://www.lewpstudio.com/>

Elsbeth C Young: <https://www.alyoung.com/>

All scriptural passages are from NRSV unless otherwise noted.

ASH WEDNESDAY

Matthew 16:13-20

Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" And they said, "Some say John the Baptist but others Elijah and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you but my Father in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven." Then he sternly ordered the disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah.

Be Thou My Vision, 2013. Artist—Mike Moyers. Used with permission.

[1]





Who do we say that Jesus is? The images we portray in our churches, homes, and throughout our lives say a lot about who we say Jesus is and was.

What is your image of Christ? What was the first image you remember being exposed to? Was it a stained glass window at your church? A picture in a storybook Bible from your childhood? A painting hanging in a grandparent's home? An actor from a movie telling the story of Jesus?



Take a moment and consider your favorite image of Christ, or take the time to draw or sketch an image of who you think Christ is. If you're not comfortable drawing, you can create a list of words and characteristics that describe who Jesus is to you. As you look at your image, consider how you came up with this image. Is it based on a favorite scripture story, images you remember seeing in your church, what you imagine when you pray? Think about how these resources have influenced your understanding of Jesus.

THURSDAY 2/23



A Choice, 2018. Artist–Lauren Wright Pittman. Used with permission.
[2]

1. What is the first thing that catches your eye in this image? What details do you only notice upon further reflection?
2. What is the strongest emotion being stirred within you as you see this image? Sit with that emotion for a few moments and try to discover what it is seeking to teach you.
3. What is the artist seeking to portray? What is not being said?
4. What is God revealing to you today as you look at this image?

A note from the artist, Lauren Wright Pittman:

"Jesus offers the crowd (us) a layered and complicated choice, one that is as complex as his own dualistic nature. The first option is self-denial, a heavy burden, and a lost—but saved—life. The second is gaining the whole world, but forfeiting life. It's easy for a seasoned Christian to take this choice for granted. This choice that Jesus calls us into may even seem like a no brainer, but in this moment, Jesus teaches of the terrors that will befall him and invites the crowd to knowingly face that path alongside him. If we're honest, it is extremely difficult to reject the tempting power and wealth this world has to offer and allow our life to take the shape of good news for all.

The choice isn't an obvious one. One side looks like an opulent pile of riches, a crown, and endless power, while the other looks like tattered and worn hands with new life blooming out of wounds, work, burdens and relationships. This choice may seem like a distant decision made long ago, but it's a decision to be made every single day, one moment at a time. In working for and with the downtrodden, poor, orphaned, widowed, ostracized, and oppressed, we will find ourselves."



During the season of Lent, we have a choice. We can sit in the image and understanding of Jesus that we have, or we can open our hearts to discover more about the nature and character of Christ. We may have a favorite way of picturing Jesus: cuddling a lamb, welcoming in children, or expressing his deep love through his death on a cross, yet any single image cannot encompass all that Jesus is. If we only see Jesus as the peacemaker or the miracle worker, we are limiting our understanding of his greatest assets that came from calling out the oppressors, raising the lowly, and condemning the rich.

Compare and contrast the symbols on each side of Jesus' face. What do you notice?

Keep your eyes open this week and notice where you see images of Jesus in church, around your community, and in the media. Consider what messages these particular images are seeking to portray.

FRIDAY 2/24



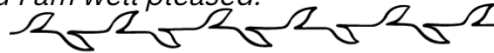
Baptism of Jesus, 2021. Artist-Liz Valente. Brazil. Used with permission.[3]

1. What is the first thing that catches your eye in this image? What details do you only notice upon further reflection?
2. What is the strongest emotion being stirred within you as you see this image? Sit with that emotion for a few moments and try to discover what it is seeking to teach you.
3. What is the artist seeking to portray? What is not being said?
4. What is God revealing to you today as you look at this image?

Mark 4:1-11

John the Baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. And the whole Judean region and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him and were baptized by him in the River Jordan, confessing their sins. Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. He proclaimed, "The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the strap of his sandals. I have baptized you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove upon him. And a voice came from the heavens, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."



Before Jesus began his public ministry, he went to his cousin John to be baptized, where he heard the voice of God claiming him and calling him Beloved, while the Spirit appeared in the form of a dove. This happened immediately before that same Spirit took Jesus into the wilderness where he would begin forty days of fasting and temptation. Many question the need for Jesus to be baptized as he was thought to be without sin, but knowing what he was about to endure in the wilderness, it makes sense that he would need this moment of affirmation. When we are baptized, we too are being claimed as children of God and called Beloved.

SATURDAY 2/25



Baptism of Christ, 2005. Artist–David Zelenka. Free Cultural Work.[4]

In scripture, we see often several different versions of the same story. Jesus' baptism appears in Matthew, Mark, and Luke, and while they all have similarities, the differences appear in the details. What did one author include that another left out? Artists are the same. One story can be painted from several different perspectives, and it is in the details that the message becomes clear. Take a moment to read the story again from Luke's telling. Then spend some time comparing the details from today's painting by Dave Zelenka to yesterday's painting by Liz Valente. What elements remain the same in the stories and the images? What details stand out in one compared to the other?

Luke 3:15-17, 21-22

As the people were filled with expectation and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Messiah, John answered all of them by saying, "I baptize you with water, but one who is more powerful than I is coming; I am not worthy to untie the strap of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his granary, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire."

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



1. What is the first thing that catches your eye in this image? What details do you only notice upon further reflection?
2. What is the strongest emotion being stirred within you as you see this image? Sit with that emotion for a few moments and try to discover what it is seeking to teach you.
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4. What is God revealing to you today as you look at this image?

SUNDAY 2/26



Christ Appearing to Mary, 1910. Artist–Edward Middleton Manigault, 1887-1922. Public Domain.[5]

The season of Lent is said to last 40 days between Ash Wednesday and Easter, but the calendar shows this period to be 47 days. Sundays are not counted because they are known as “little Easters.” Lent often focuses on introspection, repentance, and fasting and can feel heavy for such a long period of time. Seeing Sundays as a little Easter offers a small break from the weight of the season and a chance to celebrate the resurrection every week. Images each Sunday will portray Jesus in his resurrected form, or focus on the people around him who witnessed his return after death.

John 20:15

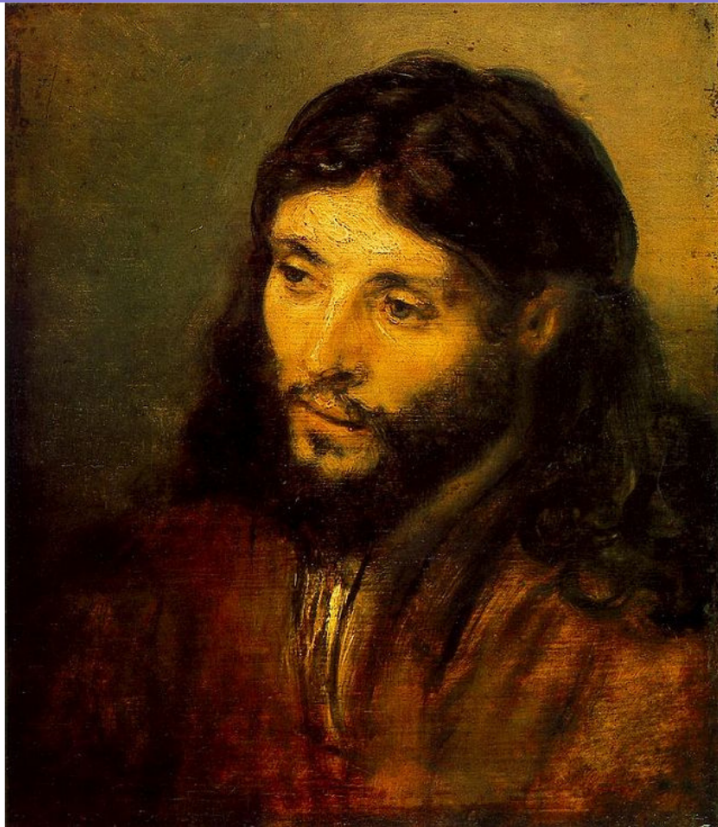
Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?"



After the resurrection, most of the people who encountered Jesus had been some of his closest followers and beloved friends, yet they did not immediately recognize him in his resurrected form. Could this be from the shock of seeing him alive and not wrapped in the tomb as they expected? Or could this say something about Jesus' appearance after he was raised from the dead?

1. What is the first thing that catches your eye in this image? What details do you only notice upon further reflection?
2. What is the strongest emotion being stirred within you as you see this image? Sit with that emotion for a few moments and try to discover what it is seeking to teach you.
3. What is the artist seeking to portray? What is not being said?
4. What is God revealing to you today as you look at this image?

MONDAY 2/27



Head of Christ, 1648. Artist–Rembrandt. Netherlands. Public Domain.
This image can also be found titled “Young Jew as Christ.”

1. What is the first thing that catches your eye in this image? What details do you only notice upon further reflection?
2. What is the strongest emotion being stirred within you as you see this image? Sit with that emotion for a few moments and try to discover what it is seeking to teach you.
3. What is the artist seeking to portray? What is not being said?
4. What is God revealing to you today as you look at this image?



Each image of Christ we encounter offers a unique perspective on how we understand Jesus. No single image can ever fully encompass all that he was or did, yet each image can bring a portion of the story to be explored. Historically, Jesus was born as a first century Jew living in Palestine. While no one knows exactly what Jesus looked like, we can infer certain features based on what we know about the culture at the time. Jesus most likely had brown or olive skin, brown eyes, and dark hair. Scholars debate whether Jesus would have had long hair or more neatly trimmed hair and beard. When we look at images that portray Jesus as more historically accurate, it is easier to connect with Jesus' humanity and connect with the idea that he was a real man who walked the earth.

The Dutch painter Rembrandt was famous for his series of portraits depicting Jesus from a Jewish model. According to Seymour Slive, painting Jesus from a live model in the 1600's "was a radical innovation. Although Christ was a Jew, who lived and preached in Palestine, earlier artists always depicted him with idealized features in accord with their period's conception of his divine nature. Rembrandt was the first artist to base his Christ-type upon a study of the Jews with whom he came in contact, because he took the Biblical text literally." [6]

What features in art do you notice that help shape Jesus' humanity? What features distract you from connecting with an image because it does not show a "true" likeness? Why is it important to consider whether an image is historically accurate or not?

TUESDAY 2/28



The Saviour's Transfiguration, icon. Ab. 1403, State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow. Artist unknown (until recently it was believed that the icon was painted by Theophanes the Greek). Public Domain via Wikimedia Commons.

Matthew 17:1-8

Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter, and James and his brother John and led them up a high mountain, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became bright as light. Suddenly there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him. Then Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here; if you wish, I will set up three tents here, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." While he was still speaking, suddenly a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!" When the disciples heard this, they fell to the ground and were overcome by fear. But Jesus came and touched them, saying, "Get up and do not be afraid." And when they raised their eyes, they saw no one except Jesus himself alone.



If historical images portray Jesus' humanity, Christological images point toward his divinity. Jesus may be shown with unearthly features such as a halo, an ethereal glow, or gathered with incorporeal figures such as God or the Holy Spirit. Christological artwork reflects Jesus as the Son of God more so than the son of man. The transfiguration of Jesus is another example of how his image appears to change. It is unclear if this is a permanent transformation or a temporary vision, but it is likely that God revealed Jesus' glory for the purpose of strengthening the disciples' faith. Once they had been assured of who Jesus was, his changed appearance may have disappeared as quickly as Moses and Elijah. What do you notice about the scripture and the artwork that focuses on Jesus' divinity?

1. What is the first thing that catches your eye in this image? What details do you only notice upon further reflection?
2. What is the strongest emotion being stirred within you as you see this image? Sit with that emotion for a few moments and try to discover what it is seeking to teach you.
3. What is the artist seeking to portray? What is not being said?
4. What is God revealing to you today as you look at this image?

Bible Study

The Introduction to Visio Divina Bible Study is a five-week study. The introduction and first lesson are here. The remaining four lessons are included in Appendix E.3.

A FIVE-WEEK BIBLE STUDY
INTRODUCING VISIO DIVINA



IMAGES OF CHRIST IN ART AND FILM

By Rev. Julie Schendel

3	Introduction
4	Getting Started
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10	Week 2: Jesus' Image in Scripture
14	Week 3: Jesus Around the World
19	Week 4: Imaging the Trinity
24	Week 5: Humor and Satire
29	Attributions

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INTRODUCTION

For the Leader or Teacher

This study is an introduction to imagery of Christ and why it is important in the church. The goal of this study is to begin by inviting participants to observe familiar and comfortable images at first, then gradually increasing the diversity to which they are exposed. As they become more comfortable discussing the various types of imagery, they may be more willing to step outside their comfort zones and discuss more modern images, imagery from other cultures, and images that explore more uncommon characteristics of Jesus.

You will know your context better than anyone, but keep in mind that your participants may come from a variety of backgrounds with various exposure to artwork and imagery of Christ. Some may be lifelong Christians; others may be new to the faith. Some may have attended the same church their entire lives and have only ever been exposed to the imagery in their own church. Others may have participated in various churches, denominations, or even religions before coming to this class. Try to be mindful of these factors when conducting the class and encourage a spirit of openness, curiosity, and respectful dialogue.

This study is meant to be visual and would have the biggest impact with a PowerPoint or Keynote slideshow displaying various images. Suggestions are made for each topic with links provided when possible. However, this class is intended to be personalized to your participants as much as possible. There are a variety of ways to put images to use, but please be respectful of the artist's work. Many older images are considered public domain and are free to use. Always credit the artist's work when it is known. Public domain images can be found in a variety of locations including:

- <https://www.metmuseum.org/>
- <https://diglib.library.vanderbilt.edu/act-search.pl>
- <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Images>

Royalty free images can be obtained from third party sites for a small fee. You can typically get a subscription for unlimited downloads, and that fee helps pay the various artists' royalty fee every time you use their work. These sites include:

- <https://www.shutterstock.com/>
- <https://www.dreamstime.com/>

Many modern artists offer licensing subscriptions for one-time use of their artwork and will have a link on their individual websites. Some artists may offer their artwork free of charge provided you are using it for educational purposes in an individual church setting and are not intending to sell or make a profit off their work in any way. Just ask.

You may also implement "Fair Use" for most images if your audience is small, private, and not being recorded, publicized, or promoted online in any way, or making any type of profit. Fair Use typically applies to copyrighted images for the purpose of teaching, but please do so at your own risk, and do not edit or alter the images in any way.

Getting Started

Depending on how talkative and engaged the participants are during class, you may need to adjust each lesson for time. These lessons were created for 60-90 minutes each lesson and will be impacted by the size of the class.

Gather any materials and visuals ahead of time and check that technology is working. The room should be set up so that everyone can see the screen/visuals and ideally each other as well to garner conversation together. Horseshoe or open circle style set ups work best, but classroom style can also work for larger audiences. If you are using any videos during the class or it is a larger room, make sure everyone is able to hear the speaker or any video audio from any point in the room.

WEEK 1: IMAGERY OF CHRIST

Before Class:

- Slideshow of any images you want to introduce. Include favorite images from participants if possible (see next section "To Leader").
- Unlined paper for drawing.
- Drawing materials such as markers, colored pencils, crayons. Crayola makes "Colors of the World" markers, colored pencils, and crayons that reflect a variety of skin tones and are helpful to have on hand. Target makes a slightly cheaper Mondo Llama brand "Hues of You" as well.
- A whiteboard or flipchart with the appropriate markers.

To the Leader:

If possible, as you are advertising the class, invite people to bring in their favorite image of Jesus. It can be a piece of artwork, a character from a movie, or even a scripture passage describing certain characteristics of Jesus. Allow them to interpret what is meant by "favorite image." Encourage them to send these to you ahead of time so you can do some research on each image to find out the artist, date of completion, if there is a correlating scripture story, etc. "Google image" allows you to upload a picture and perform a reverse search for information on that image. If you are not able to get these images before the first class, ask for them before the second class and proceed from there.



Overview of Class

Open the class with any business such as introductions, instructions, and opening prayer.

This class is an introduction to Christian art and imagery and will explore many different types of icons, artwork, signs, and symbols. The goal of this class is not to share art history, but to invite you into understanding Christian imagery on a deeper level through your own experience. We will look at a variety of styles and images. Every image may not be your favorite, but please consider that it could be the favorite of someone else in the room, so keep your comments respectful. It's ok to dislike an image and share the reasons why. Some images may make you uncomfortable, but you are invited to sit with that emotion for a moment and try to discover what that emotion is saying to you. Each of these images will share a message about who Jesus was or is and will invite you to explore a deeper understanding of Christ.



Questions for discussion:

1. When I say Images of Christ in Art and Film, what comes to mind?

- What are some of your favorite art pieces featuring Jesus? (Warner Sallman's Head of Christ and Knocking at Heart's Door, DaVinci's Last Supper, Jesus portrayed as a Shepherd or with children)
- Where have you seen images of Jesus before? (Picture Bibles, artwork around church, stained glass, etc.)
- What movies or plays have you seen that feature God or Jesus? (The 10 Commandments, The Chosen, Godspell, The Passion of the Christ, The Greatest Story Ever Told, Jesus Christ Superstar).

2. What is art?

- Allow the class to share their definitions.
- Google defines art as: "The expression or application of human creative skill and imagination, typically in a visual form such as painting or sculpture, producing works to be appreciated primarily for their beauty or emotional power." Agree or disagree?

3. When you imagine Jesus, what do you see? What does Jesus look like? What is Jesus wearing?

- Give the class time to draw an image, symbols, or write down words or phrases. Provide a variety of drawing tools and colors.
- Allow the class to share their images and explain why they chose the colors, symbols, characteristics in their drawing. Not everyone is an artist so be supportive of every skill level. This is a good opportunity to learn where they are coming from and what they have already been taught about Jesus.

4. Make a chart of words that the class uses to describe Jesus—male, Jewish, 30's, brown hair, beard, sandals, white tunic, strong, darker skin, long nose, surrounded by disciples/children, etc. A large flipchart or whiteboard is helpful for everyone to see.

5. If I asked you to describe how you imagine Christ (vs. Jesus), would your image change? Would any of these words change?

- Adjust list in different color—Does Jesus have scars? Is he floating in air, glowing, etc.?
- If we were to put words that characterize Christ, what would you add? (Savior, Son, crucified, resurrected, Holy, halo)
- What, if anything, differentiates an image of Jesus from an image of Christ?

Scripture is pretty vague about what Jesus looked like. According to professor and author Joan E. Taylor, “a physical rendering would have been too dangerous. If they described Jesus as beautiful, then explaining his horrific execution became difficult. If they characterized him as ugly, then many of the age would have questioned his royal lineage or assertions of divinity.” A person’s physical makeup says a lot about who they are, and much of Jesus’ life, ministry, and teaching remains a mystery.

Due to his life and death so long ago, “there are no depictions of Jesus before the third century that have survived from a Christian ambience.” Many images have faded or been lost over thousands of years. Many others were destroyed due to iconoclasm—destroying icons due to the belief they were heretical or promoted idolatry, the worshiping of idols.

For those who were raised in the church, picture Bibles or church imagery may have been their first introduction to imagery of Jesus. Others may have heard stories from scripture and imagined the images of the characters.

Historical. Christological. Relational Images

Most images of Jesus will fall under certain categories that help us to differentiate which side of Jesus we are seeing. Some images may fall under multiple categories, and some may fall under something else entirely. However, there are three main categories that tend to reflect most imagery.

1. Historical—this represents Jesus as a historical figure, portraying him as a 1st century Palestinian Jew with presumably olive colored skin, dark hair and eyes, and perhaps short hair and beard. It seeks to portray him as historically accurate and focuses more on features that reflect his humanity and actions that were scripturally accurate.

2. Christological—this represents the more divine side of Jesus and may include some symbols that were not visible during his earthly life such as a halo, light appearing from his open wounds, a heavenly glow, wearing a crown, making the sign of a blessing with his hands, etc.

3. Relational—this represents Jesus in a way that appeals to the intended audience. For example, Jesus may be painted in a certain race or ethnicity in order to be more relatable. Jesus may also be portrayed in more modern scenes such as playing football with children, wearing modern clothes, or eating at a table that appears to take place with people during the present day.

If you have collected your favorite images ahead of time, introduce a couple of them now. Show one image at a time and allow people to share what they notice, what they like, what they don't like. Share any background information you were able to find on the artist or image. Consider these questions to help the conversation. If you have not yet collected your favorite images, hold this exercise until Week 2.

1. What do you notice in this picture?
2. What story is being told in this story?
3. What points to this being Jesus (is there a cross, halo, manger, etc.)?
4. What makes it your favorite?
5. Does this represent Jesus as historical, Christological, relational, or something else?

Project Launch Plan

Doctoral Project Description

Christians have a limited understanding of the nature and character of Jesus due to the whitewashed imagery and artwork many American churches portray. Most churches showcase Jesus as Caucasian/European to make him more relatable to a particular congregation, which emphasizes the harmful idea that the Savior is White instead of Jewish. To address this, I created a three-part project using Visio Divina, or “divine seeing,” to introduce readers to a diverse collection of imagery that invites deeper reflection around how we see and share Jesus. Last Fall I created and led a six-week Bible study introducing Visio Divina and allowed for face-to-face conversations around who Jesus was historically and how other cultures view him. This past winter I launched an Advent Devotional that introduced readers to the concept of Visio Divina by exploring 29 lesser-known images of Jesus. This month I will launch a Lenten Devotional that introduces 47 images and reflections that expose the reader to the historical, Christological, relational, and symbolical nature of Jesus. The concept of Visio Divina encourages approaching these images with prayer and curiosity to discover a deeper understanding. Once individuals become more aware of how exclusive and potentially harmful their church imagery appears, there should be a desire to further explore adding additional images to the conversation. These devotionals and Bible study serve as a step in the right direction by bringing awareness to the problem.

Audience

I approached this project with the perspective of a woman raised in the South, in the Bible belt, where church membership is assumed and often expected, and where racism is still a widely controversial topic. Most churches in this area are still predominantly segregated, not due to written rules, but due to different worship styles and assumed prejudices. This project is for anyone who needs to better understand that representation matters, especially when it comes to our image of Christ. Historically, Jesus was not white, or American, yet much of our Christian artwork and stained-glass windows would suggest otherwise.

My project will have the biggest impact on church members and pastors in predominantly white congregations due to their limited exposure to diverse imagery of Christ. Throughout this project I have collected a following of interested participants through the “Facing Jesus” social media sites on Facebook and Instagram, which allows individuals to participate in a passive role until they are ready to engage further. Through these sites I have invited interested participants to receive the Advent and Lent Devotionals, which can be assessed through an emailed booklet or daily emails. Since many of them found Facing Jesus through my personal social media sites or word of mouth, most of them already have some form of relationship with me and are comfortable engaging in conversation.

Pastors who would benefit most include those who recognize the need for more diverse imagery and are ready to lead their congregations in difficult conversations around inclusivity and hospitality, or churches who are already engaging in conversations around white supremacy and the dangers of presenting Jesus as a white Savior.

My audience also includes my congregation consisting of about 400 members, predominantly white, ranging primarily from middle age to senior adults. Long-term members regularly worship in a Sanctuary with stained glass windows featuring a Caucasian looking Jesus (see appendix for images), and many have not been exposed to much else. The Advent and Lent Devotionals reach an audience of 137 of those members who have subscribed to our church e-newsletter. Church members who do not have access to technology may receive printed versions of the devotional.

Development Plan

The Lenten Devotional will launch to the same audiences who received the Advent Devotional, and will begin with daily emails on Ash Wednesday, February 22, 2023. These will continue each day until Easter on April 9, 2023. I will continue to monitor the success of email open rates to measure continued engagement. During Advent, several readers shared their reflections on certain images or multiple images through my Facing Jesus email, and I was able to interact with them about their findings. I will continue to utilize that method of communication and send a follow up survey after Easter.

I am currently working with pastors and laity who have expressed an interest in using the Lent Devotional with their churches or small groups. I am making it available in its complete booklet form for interested parties to sample and discern if it is right for their setting, while offering support and direction for how to lead a small group on *Visio Divina*. I have three pastors and two laity who are potential candidates.

Several of the artists who granted permission to use their artwork requested printed copies of the finished devotionals for their own archives, and those will be mailed with a letter of thanks this month, further increasing the reach of this project.

Development Process

My church will host two small groups on this material to allow face-to-face conversation, offering real-time feedback on how well the images and topics are received. By facilitating these conversations, I will discover where progress is being made and where further conversations need to happen, which will help discern next steps for increasing how we portray Jesus through art and imagery in our churches.

Due to the extensive use of newer artwork in the devotionals, gaining permission to use images beyond the previously agreed upon "one-time use for a limited audience" will be very costly. Many artists do not offer licensing for commercial use, and those that do charge large fees per image. Unfortunately, this makes the possibility of publishing any of this material unlikely. While older images are often considered Public Domain and free to use, those images are more recognizable and do not make as big of an impact up study. I am speaking with another pastor who has worked in publishing and am hoping to find connections or resources that would allow options for publishing the Bible study with fewer costs and restrictions.

By introducing pastors and congregations to newer artists and resources where these images can be found, churches will have the opportunity to take the next step as they discern toward purchasing and displaying more diverse imagery in their churches or personal collections.

Appendix A– Milestone 1 The NPO Charter

PERSONAL RESEARCH MANIFESTO

My approach to researching the NPO is to keep an open mind while collecting a variety of verifiable data and listening carefully so that I may discover something new.

NPO STATEMENT

Churches offer limited imagery of Jesus Christ which limits churchgoers' understanding of who Jesus is and who belongs to the kingdom of God.

NPO SCOPE AND CONSTRAINTS

By the end of this doctorate program, I will offer an opportunity for pastors and churches to experience a multifaceted understanding of who Jesus Christ was and is, through use of artwork, characteristics, and more. This may look like equipping pastors with a sermon series or Bible study/devotional book addressing Jesus as liberator, shepherd, king, peacemaker, etc. I will target primarily white churches to encourage offering a more inclusive approach to teaching about Jesus. At this time I am uncertain about costs other than perhaps some travel expenses to visit various churches to view their art and imagery.

NPO CONTEXT

My NPO ministry context includes Christian churches and their pastors. I will focus primarily on Protestant Churches in America, while using inspiration from global art and churches like Basilica of the Annunciation in Nazareth, which includes artistic renderings of Mary (and often Jesus) from artists of various countries. My target audience I am hoping to offer an opportunity for is predominantly white congregations, but my research field will include churches of all races as I

learn from them about how Jesus is portrayed. My solution will hopefully be accessible to any church or small group that is able to offer a visual component to worship or Bible Study, as their imagery is a key component. While this is geared toward people of any age, it will probably be better embraced by a slightly younger group, under 50, or ideally a diverse crowd open to discussion about what they are seeing and learning.

ROOT CAUSES

Many churches have primarily remained segregated over the years due to different worship and music style preferences and different theologies taught. Because of this, artwork portrayed often shows Jesus made in our own image instead of a historically accurate portrayal. When traditions are passed down generation to generation, those favorite images become sacred and the teachings continue to portray Jesus primarily as Christ the King or Prince of Peace, with less emphasis on the man who constantly fought against the government and whose family were refugees. We like to think of Jesus as being like us, so these challenging images make us uncomfortable, because they challenge our understanding of who Jesus came to save. We are naturally resistant to change, so embracing more modern imagery and even worship communities can be difficult when it challenges our understanding of tradition and what we have always known.

DISCOVERY WORKSHOP STAKEHOLDERS

My stakeholders consisted of two current church members, two theology students, a friend, a family member, and a previous church member. All ranged in age from mid 20's to over 65.

ONE-ON-ONE INTERVIEWS

My one-on-one interviews consisted of a clergy/professor who has taught imagery of Christ, a professional artist who focuses on Christian imagery, and a clergy person who grew up in the African American church.

3-5 KEY BIBLICAL TEXTS

I will look at as many texts as possible that explore the range of Jesus' characteristics from Prince of Peace, Shepherd, etc., as well as seeing Jesus as liberator for the oppressed, social justice activist, and angry and annoyed rabbi, flipping tables and cursing fig trees. Scriptures include Isaiah 9:6, Psalm 23, Matthew 21:12-22, and Jesus' "I Am" statements in John 4-15.

ACADEMIC RESOURCES

During my research, I plan to have pastor and professor David Ahearn as a conversation partner on imagery of Christ. I will also use theologian and professors William Dyrness and Thomas Thangaraj to understand how various cultures view Christ. I would like to better understand prominent imagery in cultures other than my own, visiting diverse churches, and studying Howard Thurman and James Cone. I will research renaissance painting style and culture to better understand why early paintings often portrayed people as stoic and unsmiling. I want to learn more about the distinguishing factors between portrayals of an historical Jesus and Jesus the Christ.

Appendix A.1

DISCOVERY WORKSHOP DESCRIPTION

My discovery workshop was held on Saturday, October 24, 2020, at an outdoor pavilion (due to Covid) at my church. My stakeholders included:

- Church member, female, white, over 65
- Church member, male, African American, over 65
- Staff member, male, seminary student, white, mid 20's
- Seminary student, female, white, mid 20's
- Friend, female, white, mid 30's
- Family member, male, white, over 65
- Previous church member, female, white, over 50

Everyone attended in person at individual tables facing inward. The session followed the guidelines from the Discovery Workshop Guide. Participants were asked ahead of time to send me their favorite image of Christ and came prepared to consider my original NPO: "American Christians have a limited understanding of the nature of Jesus Christ due to their lack of diversity in Christian imagery in art and film."

DISCOVERY STATEMENT

The discovery workshop was interesting in that everyone seemed to head off in a different direction of where they thought the focus should be directed. They questioned where it was a bad thing to have churches where everyone is similar. They recognized that our imagery primarily portrays Jesus as peaceful and brings comfort, but again questioned whether that was bad or not. Any image we have is going to be limiting to the nature of Christ. Eventually it was decided that there is not a problem here, but an opportunity. The root cause and outcome remained very broad

and optimistic in my opinion. Also, the NPO outline is written with the assumption that a problem will be found (and not an opportunity), so wording in the last half had to be rewritten.

Considering mainline churches, we've discovered an opportunity to embrace more diverse imagery of God, to address our natural resistance to change and accepting others. The audience would be impacted by this opportunity by being inspired to carry out God's mission to a more inclusive population.

CRITICAL INSIGHTS FROM DISCOVERY WORKSHOP

One of the first things I discovered was an age difference in how participants fulfilled their pre-assignment of sending me their favorite image of Jesus. The majority of the older participants immediately had an image in mind (two sent the same image) and admitted that it brought them comfort and memories of their childhood. There was no mention of these images increasing their spirituality, only reminding them of their past. The younger participants had a harder time choosing one image, and most of them instead sent me Bible stories or characteristics of Jesus that they preferred, noting that they were unaware of an image that portrayed those characteristics.

Another major theme that kept coming into play was that churches typically have imagery that reflects those who attend (i.e., a Caucasian looking Jesus), and the reason is likely because of our resistance to changing a beloved or traditional image, and also a resistance to accepting people who are unlike us.

ONE-ON-ONE INTERVIEW DISCOVERIES

Each interview took on a personality of its own. My first interview with a pastor and professor was very positive and encouraging. This participant agreed with the direction I was going, but wanted to clarify if I was focusing primarily on diversity in an ethnic and cultural sense or focusing on the historical and Christological sense, to which I believe I am still trying to clarify myself. The participant encouraged a look at theological diversity and how to provide people a reason why they should consider different theologies of who Jesus was. The pastor/professor suggested a sermon series based on different imagery and characteristics.

My second interview with an artist consisted primarily of talking about art and less about my discovery workshop results. However, this person offered endless resources of suggestions of religion artists, books that study religious art, and more. The participant recognized that art can be a form of devotion during prayer or contemplation.

My last interview was with a friend and colleague who grew up in a church in a different culture than my own. This participant originally didn't want to do the interview, because of a difficulty in choosing a favorite image of Christ. This participant noted that there are few images that actually portray Jesus as historically accurate, as a Palestinian man. However, this participant gave me the best insight to consider: some characteristics of Jesus that the black church connects with. This response tied into the characteristics noted in my first interview and supported the need for a possible sermon series on who Jesus really is, based on various pieces of art.

SYNTHESIS

The discovery workshop kept coming back to the idea that imagery needed to be relatable and accessible, but as I began reflecting, I wondered what was so relatable about the favorite image of Jesus as the Shepherd. Most churchgoers, unless they are farmers, do not have much experience with sheep or shepherds, so it goes back to the peaceful and comforting image to which they're drawn. Each image alone is limiting, so a variety of images that help expand our understanding of who Jesus is may be most helpful. I want to explore the idea of distinguishing established art between the historical versus Christological Jesus, but also explore a variety of images that speak to Jesus as Liberator, Healer, Provider, Comforter, Prince of Peace, Shepherd, and human with moods and emotions.

NEXT STEPS

My next steps will include learning more about early religious artwork and understanding the style that became so popular to portray Jesus as peaceful, stoic, unsmiling, and looking posed, as opposed to realistic and full of emotion. I also want to explore different characteristics of Jesus in scripture to see if I can find any images that faithfully portray those attributes. I want to better understand how churches that are not predominantly white in America portray Jesus, if we are all making Jesus in our own image, or if we are reimagining who Jesus was then, based on who we are now.

DISCOVERY WORKSHOP DOCUMENTATION

My original NPO that I shared with the group was: American Christians have a limited understanding of the nature of Jesus Christ due to their lack of diversity in Christian imagery in art and film. I asked these questions:

Activity One: NPO Definition and Audience

What is the key issue you are trying to address and why is it important?

Participant 1²: Why do we make Jesus like us instead of trying to be more like Jesus? Do we limit Jesus by only seeing him one way? Why is it important that we're not all identical? Would we have fewer divides and barriers with a broader image.

P2: The issue is a lack of diversity in imagery of Jesus. This is important because it may lead to a less complete/whole understanding of who God/Jesus is. Could be harmful to how we view God, ourselves, others.

P3: Our parents usually show us our first images of Jesus and they are of a peaceful Jesus. Christians have not ever agreed about the image due to our ideals that "we" know what is correct.

P4: A limited image of Jesus may not be relatable to all people. People need to know Jesus as a real historical person, not just a homogenized image. An image of Jesus as always peaceful may not be a truthful image of a real person.

² To protect anonymity, participant numbers do not remain consistent throughout notes.

P5: The role of Jesus' mother in his ministry & mission from a cultural perspective.

P6: Our understanding of Jesus is too closely linked to our personal physical makeups. Misunderstanding of who God is. Misunderstanding of the mission of God. These are all important because they present a gap between God's people and the true identity of Christ.

P7: If people can't relate to Jesus, can they believe in him? Is Jesus meant to be defined by imagery? Aren't we fairly unique using imagery to define Jesus? Would greater diversity of images help or hinder people's understanding of Jesus? To introduce more people to Christianity, they have to somehow relate or believe first. Your NPO states "American Christians"—are we seeking people who aren't currently Christian and how images may affect their understanding?

Summary/repeated themes: Relatable—we see Jesus like we see ourselves. Who Jesus is: physical image vs. character. Art is up to interpretation, and everyone sees differently...there's no commonality. Who Jesus was vs. what he taught. Imagery is comforting and reminds us of our childhood. Should our imagery change? How important is imagery to our mission? What do we get from visual representations of Jesus? Understanding the story is crucial to the image. Accessibility in imagery is key. We have an opportunity to increase our imagination of the nature of Jesus through our imagery. We can increase our faith by broadening our images. Abstract images may have a greater impact on our faith.

Edited NPO: There's an opportunity for churches to embrace more diverse images of Christ in teaching and symbols to increase faith and acceptance of one another.

Who is impacted by this NPO and who should I focus on?

P1: We as American Christians should work to release our biases so we can see other religious groups' biases and realize all the similarity we have in common.

P2: Churches seeking growth and sustainability.

P3: Anyone who sees imagery/portrayals of Jesus is impacted. We should focus on people deterred from the faith due to lack of diversity in images; mainline denominations of Christians in Metro-Atlanta.

P4: Church members/congregations, people with narrow-minded view of Jesus.

P5: Focus on potential new Christians; possibility to draw wider audience; increase historical accuracy without sacrificing relatability.

P6: Those to whom Christians seek to do ministry and win others to Christ are impacted. Focus on reality in admitting our comfort zone with our image.

P7: Those on whom images can make a big impact: 1. Those now already sitting in the pew every week (seekers, non-active Christians). 2. Pastors who have perhaps the biggest opportunity to teach us about Jesus. 3. Nonbelievers and those actively opposed to Christianity.

Summary: Nonbelievers, churchgoers, congregations now and in the future.

What social/cultural factors shape this NPO? The Internet and it's greater accessibility.

What evidence do you have this is worth the investment?

Our own experience of God impacts how we share with others. Declining church attendance. Jesus is no longer relatable. Our country is becoming less actively engaged in worship.

Edited NPO: Considering mainline churches we've discovered an opportunity to embrace a more diverse imagery of Christ.

Activity Two: Understanding Those Impacted by the NPO–Empathy Map

What will the audience think, say, feel, or do differently when the NPO is addressed?

Think:

P1: I will have a more inclusive view of the church. I will see Jesus more for who he is and less for who I am.

P2: The church is more thoughtful, welcoming, accepting than I thought. "I've never seen a church do this before." That Christ is more relevant to me today than yesterday (wherever I am on the faith spectrum).

P3: Church members will expand their ideas on who Jesus was and the work he does.

P4: Broader, less limiting.

P5: Christ represents all who worship here.

P6: This is unnecessary.

P7: The church is inconsistent. If the church's images of God have changed, what is true? Who/what can we trust for truthful information?

Commonalities: Inclusive

Say:

P1: I want to learn more about Jesus, because perhaps I don't have the complete understanding.

P2: We'll be more careful with our words and actions (be more compassionate).

P3: Christ listens to you.

P4: Why change our image?

P5: "That's not what Jesus looked like." "Wow! Maybe Jesus did look like that."

Commonalities: Compassion, understanding.

Feel:

P1: I will feel more comfortable telling others of the diverse nature of Jesus.

P2: Feel more open.

P3: Christianity is not as judgmental or narrow as many feel—if churches are embracing different representations of Christ.

P4: The doors of the church are open to all. Christ welcomes all people.

P5: Hopefully we would feel the conviction of Jesus' work in our lives.

P6: Uncomfortable.

P7: Uncomfortable, disoriented, confused with new images than what they are used to. Excited, relieved, welcomed, comforted by the inclusion of more diverse images.

Commonalities: Comfort, less judgmental, disoriented.

Do:

P1: Be more accepting of others.

P2: Talk about my faith more because it doesn't feel so narrow. Give me a reason to talk about Jesus to others.

P3: With expanded ideas church members can reach out to people they may not have helped before.

P4: Accept it in the long run.

P5: Extend open arms to all.

P6: Leave the church. Join the church. Join the church and bring more people with them.

Commonalities: Reaching out, invite, expand.

Summary: People will think, feel, say, do: acceptance/compassion, inclusivity, discomfort.

Why wouldn't they say (think, feel, do) that now?

We already relate to Jesus, so we assume everyone relates. This is what they know and don't know anything is missing. We're more inward focused on ourselves than outward focused on others. Other things take priority. We have a fear that we're wrong about Jesus—who he is or what I think. Jesus is more inclusive than we are. We don't know where to start with diversity or inclusion (or how to teach it).

Activity Three: Finding the Root Cause—5 Whys

*This activity somehow ended up going backwards. Some got to the root cause, while others got to the solution that would be achieved if this opportunity meets its goal. Again, I think it was because we are working with an opportunity instead of a problem, so the wording in the workshop guide feels a little backwards. Perhaps we should've been asking "Because?" instead of "Why?"

Edited NPO: Considering mainline churches we've discovered an opportunity to embrace more diverse imagery of Christ.

P1: Why? Inclusivity of others. Why? We are closed-minded. Why? We don't like things/ideas/people that are different. Why? It makes us uncomfortable. Why? Fear of the unknown. Why? It creates (might make us) doubt of who we are or what we believe or maybe what we stand for. Why? We don't like to be wrong. Why? Pride gets in the way.

P2: Why? We would like to make all who enter feel comfortable. Why? We want all to hear Christ's message. Why? The more who hear Christ's message—the more who will have an opportunity to accept it. Why? The more who accept it, the better the world will be. Why? More love will spread throughout.

P3: Why? New generation growth. Why? Something "I can relate to." Why? Real world imagery. Why? Others can relate to new reality of diversified imagery. Why? Acceptance.

P4: Why? So, we can understand and empathize with more diverse people than we are in our little bubble. Why? So, we can explore and understand ideas and learn how Jesus impacts all people. Why? So, we will figure out that all people are struggling with many of the same issues. Why? So we (mainline churches) can touch peoples' lives with more understanding by having reaching out. Why? So mainline churches can honestly and openly learn why Jesus came to earth to help all people by churches helping ALL types of people (from tax collectors to homeless).

P5: Why? To make the church closer to the diversity that Jesus had in mind. Why? Because the church today lacks diversity and imagination regarding Jesus. Why? Because we crave comfort and familiarity. "We grew up thinking this way." Why? Because we get scared by lack of control/when we are wrong. Why? Because lack of control requires greater trust/faith. Being wrong means we have to change.

P6: Why A? Because maybe we're wrong (in our representation of Christ). Why? Because maybe we're not quick to think how our repetitions/images impact others. Why B? It could give us a fuller/more whole view of God. Why? To think of God/Jesus more accurately? Why C? To expand our own view of God and others. Why? To know more of God and others, which can help us love God and others more. Why D? To make sure we are representing all people in our imagery. Why? Because everyone is loved by and matters to God.

P7A: Why? Because the church needs it to survive. Why? Because membership and attendance are declining. Why? Because Christ has less meaning in our lives. Why? Because we are prioritizing secular vs. the non-secular. Why? Short-term gratification.

P7B: Because the world needs a Savior that we believe in. Why? Because people are losing faith—or see no reason for it. Why? Because so much evil gets our attention—in the name of faith. Why? Because we don't hear the good messages of faith—especially if we're not in church. Why? Because we're inundated with messages—hard for anything to break through.

Summary: Reaching more people. Change ourselves/be more accepting. God will be more relatable to us. Church will be more relatable to others. Better reflects the message of Jesus.

Group 5—Whys (again, this came out backwards and took us to a solution instead of a root cause):

To increase our own understanding of acceptance and open-mindedness. Why? To open ourselves up to understand Christ better. Why? So, we can be more confident in carrying out the mission.

Why? So, we can expand who is impacted by the mission. Why? Because Jesus said so and the Gospel is too good not to share. Why? So that all can know God.

Edited 5 Whys:

Considering mainline churches, we've discovered an opportunity to embrace more diverse imagery of Christ. Why? Because the church struggles to embrace diversity (race, thought politics). Why? Because we're uncomfortable being around those that are different. Why? Because we struggle to see everyone as part of the kingdom of God. Why? Because we struggle to see everyone as equally deserving of the kingdom of God. Why? We think more highly of ourselves than those who are different. Why? Because we're naturally resistant to change.

Activity Four: Putting it together–NPO Statement

Considering mainline churches,

we've discovered an opportunity to embrace more diverse imagery of God,

to address our natural resistance to change and accept others.

If solved, it would mean we're more inspired to carry out God's mission to a more inclusive population.

Debrief:

As I continue researching this NPO, what should I ensure to examine? Pastors—interview a wide range. Talk to people who don't look, think, act like me. Look at what's currently being portrayed. Examine a variety of different populations. Find examples of who is doing it well. Consider churches with diversity and how that impacts it.

What are potential blind spots that I best explore? Unchurched people may have a range of exposure to images of Jesus. There's a potential to alienate people by showing them something different than what they love and grew up with. My own biases. Proving myself right/wrong.

What are potential pitfalls that I best avoid? Assuming people are exclusive. Shiny objects/rabbit holes/easy answers. Allow a fair weight to opinions other than mine.

ONE-PAGE POST-WORKSHOP MESSAGE TO STAKEHOLDERS

Hey everyone,

Once again, thank you so much for participating in my Discovery Workshop for my DMin. I have attached a one-page summary of our work together that I am sending to three individuals for one-on-one interviews to further the conversation. Please look over the summary and let me know if you want to add anything to the conversation. You may not have given this another thought since that

Saturday, or you may have new thoughts rattling around in your head. Please feel free to send me any additional insights. I am grateful to each of you for your contributions!

Peace,

Julie

Original NPO Statement: American Christians have a limited understanding of the nature of Jesus Christ due to their lack of diversity in Christian imagery in art and film.

After a four-hour workshop with seven participants from various backgrounds, here is what we found:

1. What are the key issues you are trying to address and why is it important?

Does Christian imagery reveal Jesus as relatable? We tend to imagine Jesus looking like us. Is this helpful or harmful? Is there a difference between imagery of the physical/historical Jesus as the man, vs. Jesus' character and ideals as the Christ? Much like scriptural interpretation, art interpretation is difficult because everyone sees things differently, so we have little commonality. God is difficult to define, and imagery tends to define a subject. Much of our artwork is from the early ages. Should our imagery change as time does? How accessible are our images? The story is crucial to the image. What story is our imagery telling?

2. Who is impacted by this NPO and whom should I focus on?

Current churchgoers; congregations as they are now and who they hope to grow to be, and those who are not yet in the church.

3. What social/cultural factors shape this NPO?

The Internet has made a greater variety of images more accessible.

4. What evidence do you have that this is worth the investment?

Our own experience of God impacts how we share God with others.

We see declining church attendance. Could it be that imagery is not relatable anymore? Many believe that Jesus is no longer relatable to their lives.

Revised NPO: Considering mainline churches, we've discovered an opportunity to embrace more diverse imagery of Christ.

5. How will the audience be impacted if this opportunity is addressed?

Christ can't be captured in one image. More imagery helps broaden the understanding of the Kingdom of God. The church will be seen as more inclusive. Understanding Jesus better will allow churchgoers to feel more confident in reaching out to those who are not already in the church and be more inviting. Christ will represent all who worship. Some will be resistant because new imagery will be different from how they have been taught. When we've had so many of our favorite images for hundreds of years, why would we need to change anything now?

6. Getting to the root cause. Why is this opportunity needed?

Considering mainline churches, we've discovered an opportunity to embrace more diverse imagery of Christ. Why? 1. Because the church struggles to embrace diversity (of race, though, politics, theology). Why? 2. Because we're uncomfortable being around those that are different from us. Why? 3. Because we struggle to see everyone as part of the kingdom of God. Why? 4. Because we struggle to see everyone equally deserving of the Kingdom of God. Why? 5. Because we think more highly of ourselves than those who are different than us. Why? 6. Because we're naturally resistant to change.

Revised NPO: Considering mainline churches, we've discovered an opportunity to embrace more diverse imagery of God to address our natural resistance to change and accepting others. The audience would be impacted by this opportunity by being inspired to carry out God's mission to a more inclusive population.



1. Masks when moving
2. Phones away from Pavilion
3. Be respectful
4. Confidential

1b

Key Issue

Relatability - we see Jesus like us

Who Jesus is - physical image
vs
character

Idea vs. everyday

Art interpretation - everyone sees
different
no commonality

Who Jesus was vs. what he taught 2
no commonality

Imagery is comforting / reminds of
childhood
| trait.

God is hard to define & images
tend to define.

Should our imagery change?

- ★ How important is imagery to the mission?
- ★ What we get from representations
- ★ Story is crucial to image
- ★ Accessibility of images is key

~~the is important?~~

3
Opportunity to increase our
imagination of the nature of Jesus
through our imagery.

Increase faith by broadening the

Abstract images have an opportunity
to have a greater impact ~~on~~ on
~~reasonably~~ our faith.

Do images limit or expand our
beliefs in Jesus?

Opportunity for churches to ^{embrace} ~~gain~~
~~additional access~~ ^{more} to diverse images
of Christ in teaching & symbols
to increase faith & acceptance of
one another.

Churches to embrace ~~the~~ more diverse imagery of Christ. 9

Who impacted?

Nonbelievers

Church goes

Congregation now + future

Cultural/Social

Internet

Evidence

- Our own experience of God impacts how we share w/ others.
- Declining church attendance.
- Jesus is no longer relatable.
- Our country is becoming less actively engaged.

5
Considering mainline churches we've
discovered an opportunity to embrace
more diverse imagery of Christ.

Think Feel Say Do

All 4 - Acceptance/Compassion
Inclusivity

Discomfort

Why not now?

Already relate to J - assume everyone relates

This is what they may not know anything is

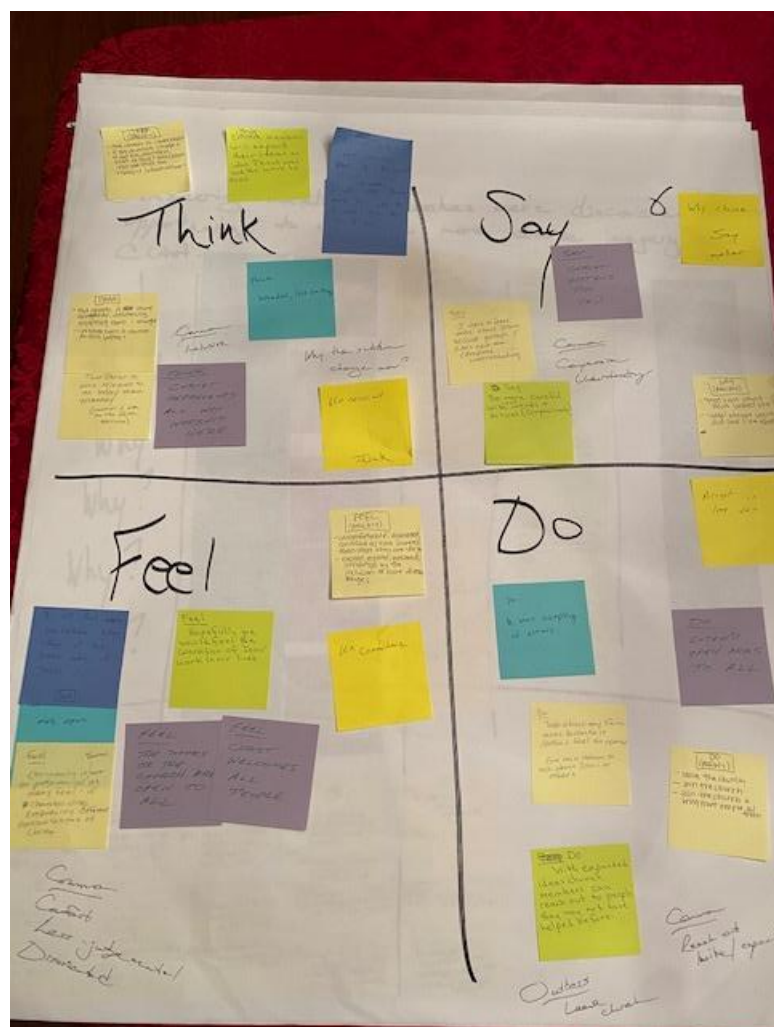
More inward focused/on self vs outward ^{missing} on others

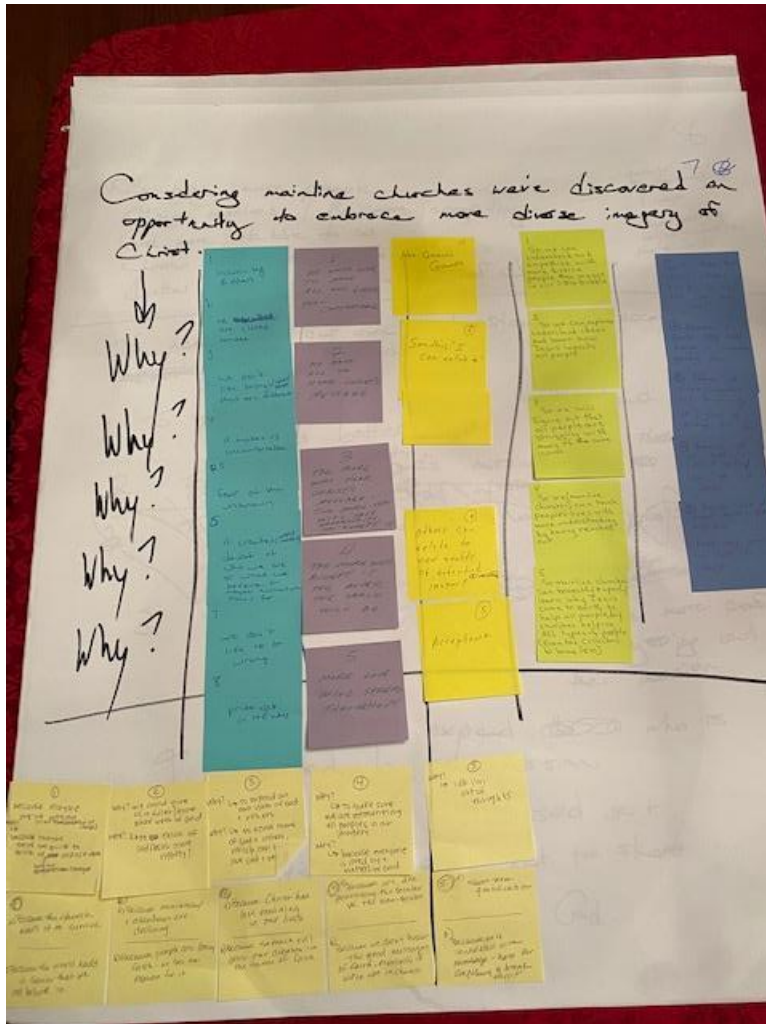
Other things more important

Fear that I'm wrong about Jesus who he is or
what I think

J is more inclusive

Don't know where
to start w/ diversity
or inclusion (teaching it)





ONE-ON-ONE INTERVIEW DOCUMENTATION

Interview #1

1. With what do you agree and why?

-A lot of proposal is dealing with diversity in an ethnic cultural sense. Trying to get more inclusive images is important. People's comfort level is to be like people like them. Even if we don't integrate this in reality, it's good to expand horizons spiritually and mentally.

-Reinhold Niebuhr's to "comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable." It's a balance. If you only afflict, people won't listen. If it's only comfort, they'll go to sleep.

-We don't perpetually live in a crisis, nor do we want to. We are in church because it provides a secure foundation. But we have to break out of that eventually.

2. With what do you disagree and why?

Disagree is a strong word. Places to branch out:

- A. If we're asking parishioners to branch out and see Jesus in different ethnic and cultural terms, we need to give them some theological reasons to do that. Not just that diversity is good. Not just that Jesus loves black people too. *Jesus and the Disinherited by Thurman. J is for the people whose backs are against the wall.

Sought out liberation for those who weren't finding it in this world.

Jose Clemente Orozco's Jesus with an ax. That Jesus is portrayed in Mark.

- B. Focus on diversity of theological images. Evangelical south focuses on Jesus as sacrificial lamb to save us from our sins. That's only one aspect. We lose the fiery prophetic Jesus. We lose the teacher of Wisdom Jesus. Jesus as ruler of the world—Jesus as kosmokrator.

Methodists tend to preach Jesus as prophet or rabbi. We listen to words of Jesus more than we worship Jesus. Need more images of teaching/prophet role to illustrate what we do in our sermons.

Early days was shaped by Jesus in Matthew. Now that he's older is shaped by the Jesus in John's Gospel. John took away the Jewishness of Jesus. But that mystical Jesus has become more and more important. Shift of Kingdom of God from not something that happens in the future but something that happens in another dimension. Orthodox church is full of those.

3. What am I missing?

Be sure to include theological diversity and not just ethnic diversity.

Sermon series may be an idea to try...project an image and talk about that kind of Jesus is portrayed using different characteristics.

Interview #2

I sent the workshop summary and my three questions to this person ahead of time, but they had trouble understanding what I was asking. They preferred to talk about their artwork instead and point me toward other religious artists and resources that may help in my research. I came up with the following questions instead to help clarify. What resulted was a two-hour conversation over the phone. These notes summarize that conversation. Some conversations have been excluded to help keep anonymity for the interviewee.

1. The US is becoming a much more culturally diverse environment, but our churches continue to stay predominantly segregated, including our artwork featuring Jesus primarily as European or white. Are there any pieces of art that you think I should study in order to get a better understanding of who Jesus is? Or that better reflect the diverse accessibility of Jesus to people of different cultures?

2. In order to allow churches to have a broader understanding of Jesus as portrayed in artwork or imagery, what topics or themes would you recommend I research?

Resources/people to study/books to read/artists to explore:

- Oscar Romero: Catholic Bishop/saint who stood up for Latino community. Someone who represented Christ.
- William Dearness
- Abraham Joshua Heschel
- Alejandro Garcia-Rivera
- Cecilia Gonzales-Andrieu: <https://www.americamagazine.org/faith/2020/08/21/melting-pot-outdated-image-america-we-need-new-metaphor-define-nation>
- Georges Rouault–1871-1958 artist
- Fra. Angelico--group of paintings, life of saint Francis. Close to Florence, beautiful frescos, older works.
- St Andrei Rublev–icon painter, 1430 died. Film about his life–Three Angels.
- The gospel according to saint Matthew film by Paselini: discusses the urgency of Jesus.
- Katie Colowitz
- John Gulianni order of Saint Benedict
- Fritz Eichenberg–Christ in the soup line. Lots of spiritual artworks, wood engravings.
- Last supper
- Marc Chagall: Crucifixions, Madonna. Even though he was Jewish he still did religious paintings.
- Robert Lentz–American
- Jose Clemente-Orozco–Jesus with the ax
- Paul Gogan–Agony in the Garden
- Edward Knippers–modern painter. Painted Jesus being whipped, 1993.
- Andrea Mantegna–Dead Christ
- “When you’re praying sometimes having an image will help you in your contemplation. Art can be devotional where you have an image or an icon to use.”
- Patricia Ferris–Via dolorosa
- Japanize writer–Saku Endo: The life of Christ book. What it was like (like a reporter talking about the bible), showing Christ as more kind and more loving rather than a God as harshly. Religious mentality: one who suffers with us. Depicts kindhearted maternal Christ.

- The Silence book: Jesuits that go back to Japan and tortured. Scorsese made a film. Harder to read.
- The Deep River—All these people go to where Buddha was, there's a moment reading that was transcendent. From Japan to India—Novel
- The Last temptation of Christ: Nikos Kazantzakis
- The Greek Passion book
- Charles White—A soul of the Nation. May or may not have religious art.
- Sandra Bowden: Was God Dead?
- Kokoschka Oskar: Not images of Christ but art of compassion and humanity, and people dealing with suffering
- Carl Dryer films
- The Passion of Joan of Arc, actress had to be institutionalized
- Joan Falconetti—Study in resistance to torture.
- Ordet movie: Fishing village, lots of faiths. Religion is powerful in village, conflict between groups.
- The Diary of a Country Priest book Georges Bernanos—French translation. Film done as well. Very powerful. Priest trying to help village and they resist. He doesn't feel very helpful.
- Langston Hughes: Rivers. The black man thinks of the rivers—looking at ancient rivers of world, my people are ancient as the rivers. His work on the river on Jesus' baptism.

Interview #3:

What did you agree with? Why?

- I don't really think of images of Jesus. Disregard all of them because they're all wrong. Jesus wasn't white.
- Grew up in a completely black church but still had images of "Barbie Jesus." People hadn't interrogated that yet. They also still used KJV. Mid 90's was first time she heard another version. White Jesus was the assumed Jesus.
- As the church began to experience the discontinuity of how white Christians treated black people, the chasm started to grow. More educated people started being more forthright. The rise of African America studies in colleges gave people permission to question why do we have white Jesus in church.
- The image of White Jesus has been very much a barrier.

-It's not just the image. I don't have an actual visual but more a description that tells what Jesus actually looked like: historically accurate, from the Middle East.

-I'm not interested in Dreadlock Jesus or Happy Jesus. Jesus was a human, born in a specific place and time, which means he had specific fixed characteristics.

-I would love to know what he actually looked like.

-It's not just the visual but the characteristics that are laid on him that are white culture but not actually Biblical. We're reverse interpreting.

-Triumphalism is a white characteristic. Jesus didn't point toward his own power. He pointed toward his Father's power and used it to heal people and bring people together, not to divide them.

-It wasn't my victory over and above yours; it was the wholeness of the creation. The kingdom of God has come. That's what he preached. Not the kingdom of God so everyone else is screwed.

-People love John 3:16 but v. 17 is crucial to include.

-The world is condemned by own actions. Not by not believing in Jesus. But living in a way that's hateful, that privileges some and denigrates others. That's how the world condemns itself. But we don't talk about that.

-Jesus was about wholeness but White Jesus is about triumphalism; it's about white victory over everyone else. That idea is placed onto actual Jesus as the norm. That's what's being preached in churches and not being interrogated, not being problematized at all.

-If you Google "Christians are so..." all the predictive texts are so negative. It's bigger than "I don't feel welcome if I walk into a space." It's the ideas that pervaded Christian culture that acts like a force field to repel people that actually are hurting and do need the gospel, but see how Christians act. They don't even ask or start. It's not about walking into a building, it's about, "I won't engage with that." For example, if I see something named Dixie, I'm not going there. You can be the nicest people with the best quality products, if it says Dixie, I'm not going. We're damaging our brand. It's beyond a physical location. It's an idea, a perception, an impression that our culture has of us. They won't see Barbie Jesus on the wall because we're presenting Barbie Jesus in how we talk and act.

Several themes that popped up in the workshop included being comforted by imagery and seeing Jesus as peaceful. Thoughts?

-Jesus was only meek and mild as an infant. Blond haired blue-eyed Jesus takes the bite out of who he really was. He never gave anyone a pass. You're unfaithful and you're wrong. It's up to you if you want to change. Jesus wasn't passive. We take away the reality of the incarnation. He felt things. He could sit with people and get dirty with people. Turn over the tables in the temple. He had a temper. That's holy.

-Yes I need Jesus to comfort me, but I need Jesus to tell people who are oppressing me to quit. Don't need a static image. A picture doesn't bring comfort. Why do you need this image as an adult to comfort you? At what point does Jesus come alive? Why do you need a picture to comfort you? Why do you need comfort? You have money, retirement, why do you need comfort? What does that mean? It's problematic when that's the only way Jesus can be.

Anything else I should be considering in my research?

-Think about Jesus in words. What images mean. What thoughts and beliefs the images bring with them. Descriptions of Jesus in literature and how they impact people...harmful or illuminating.

I've heard a lot of the black community resonates with the idea of Jesus as Liberator. Does that speak to you?

--Luke 4--Jesus reading from Isaiah. This is what we're called to do...help people be free. Freedom through Jesus.

-Liberator. It works systemically and personally. Loose us of the chains we've put on ourselves. Very few governments are about wellness and wholeness of people. Healer. Provider.

Paste your NPO Charter milestone into this appendix, less the cover page. No other changes are necessary to the document, as it serves as a milestone that has already been passed. The appendices will not be reviewed for Turabian compliance or style.

Appendix B– Milestone 2 NPO Topic Expertise Essay

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INTRODUCTION

Churches have long been a sacred space where worshipers can hear the Gospel preached and grow in their discipleship. Before scripture was fully accessible to all Christians, imagery of Jesus often told the story of the good news through stained glass windows and artwork. Throughout history the written word has become more accessible to Christians, but imagery of Christ has often remained limited. One particular image, Warner Sallman's *Head of Christ*, was made available for mass production, which allowed more global accessibility than ever before, not only in churches, but also in individual's homes and even pockets. The massive popularity and accessibility to this particular image confirmed for many that this was the accurate "photograph" of Jesus, and no other images were necessary.

Protestant churches in America often favor a limited visual representation of Jesus that is not historically accurate. Instead, the most beloved Christian imagery reflects Jesus with physical features closer to a white American male, as seen in *Head of Christ*. This single type of image as the dominant message in churches limits the nature of God and Christ, and perpetuates the systemic racism that is plaguing American communities. When a passive, peaceful, Caucasian looking Jesus is the main visual in a church, it sends the message that anyone outside of these characteristics cannot relate to Christ and may not be welcomed in the church. This can be very damaging to newcomers in the faith and limits the spiritual development of already established members.

With an opportunity to experience more diverse imagery of Christ which encompasses his many characteristics, Christians will gain a deeper understanding of who Jesus is and who is welcome in the church, and ultimately, in the kingdom of God. This essay explores the vast array of theological characteristics of Jesus that churches may often overlook, and if accessed, would give a broader image and understanding of Christ's diverse and accepting nature.

SECTION 1: BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

Imagery of Christ as Spiritual Development in the Biblical World

Jesus Christ is one of the most famous and influential people of all time, yet nobody really knows what he looked like. Stories of his life and ministry are common and beloved, but scripture fails to deliver an accurate description of his physical characteristics. According to professor and author Joan E. Taylor, "a physical rendering would have been too dangerous. If they described Jesus as beautiful, then explaining his horrific execution became difficult. If they characterized him as ugly, then many of the age would have questioned his royal lineage or assertions of divinity."³ A person's physical makeup says a lot about who they are, and much of Jesus' life, ministry, and teaching remains a mystery.

³ Edward J. Blum. "Picturing Jesus." *The Christian Century* 135, no. 24 (2018): 36-37.

With such a beloved character in history and religion, Jesus is often portrayed in various ways through art, movies, and other physical images. When reading any text about a person, it is natural for the mind to imagine some physical characteristics to better aid in understanding the person's identity. Yet due to his life and death so long ago, "there are no depictions of Jesus before the third century that have survived from a Christian ambiance."⁴ Much of the imagery Protestant Christian churches in America use today depicts Jesus as European. It seems to be some type of "universally agreed upon tradition of how he should be represented" a European man with long hair and a beard, dressed in long robes with long baggy sleeves."⁵

It is difficult to find a historically accurate portrayal of Jesus the man, the one who lived in Israel in the first century, because artists so often focus more on his divinity. His parentage alone makes it difficult to imagine what such a man would look like, with Mary as his earthly mother, and the Holy Spirit credited as Jesus' patriarchal parentage.

Knowing Jesus' lineage leads to the question asked of any visual portrayal of Christ: is this an image of Jesus as the historical man who walked the earth as a human, or is it an image of the Christ who was fully divine? Diving deeper into scripture gives a better understanding of the full nature of Jesus. Discovering in art and imagery a glimpse of Jesus' character, there is an opportunity to mirror when Jesus asked of his disciples, "Who do people say that I am?" Here a broader range of art and imagery is necessary to fully encompass all that Jesus was, is, and will become as declared in scripture.

Textual Discussions

Jesus was fully man and fully divine, yet most imagery is only capable of capturing one aspect or the other of Jesus' identity. It may seem odd to attempt to distinguish these two aspects of Jesus when he was one in the same, yet author Damian Howard argues the difference between "flesh-and-blood 'Jesus of history' and the 'Christ of the (Christian) faith.'"⁶ He claims the Christ of faith is "essentially the product[s] of dogmatic religious construction, [whereas] the Jesus who lived in and journeyed through Palestine two thousand years ago is a singular entity, really existing and, surely, unambiguous in his self-understanding."⁷ Jesus the Christ is a collaboration of scriptural and religious study throughout history that has come to mean different things based on interpretation and tradition. Jesus the man could have only had one physical description based on his features such as skin, eye, and hair color.

⁴ Joan E. Taylor, *What Did Jesus Look Like?* (London: Bloomsbury T & T Clark, 2018), 137.

⁵ Ibid, 1.

⁶ Damian Howard. "'Who Do You Say That I Am?': Christians and Muslims Disputing the Historical Jesus." *Neotestamentica* 49, no. 2, (2016): 298.

⁷ Ibid.

In contrast, there are many pieces of art depicting Jesus' divinity. Even his actions come into question when Jesus is seen performing signs or rituals that were not popular until long after Jesus' death. One such example is the Eastern Orthodox "artistic technique called Christ Pantokrator, where Jesus is painted while seated on the throne, holding up his right hand in a blessing and holding a book or scroll in his left hand."⁸ Additional examples appear in scripture where Jesus is described as the Good Shepherd (John 10:11), though he never actually tended sheep, and Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:6), yet he never sat on a throne or had leadership over an earthly kingdom.

Physical Characteristics of Jesus the Man

The Bible is filled with stories about Jesus' birth, life, miracles, human emotions, death, and resurrection, but no clear picture of Jesus' physical characteristics. Taylor argues, "The Christian Bible does not record any description of what Jesus looked like physically...there is nothing about his face, his hair, his height, or his body."⁹ However, some texts allude to Jesus with certain physical attributes leading to debate whether Jesus was considered handsome or ugly.

Isaiah 53:2-3 describes the suffering servant as forgettable: "...he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by others; a man of suffering and acquainted with infirmity; and as one from whom others hide their faces he was despised, and we held him of no account." Theologian Muilenburg confirms the description as "repulsive and revolting in appearance, the servant was despised and rejected."¹⁰ In third century Christianity Tertullian affirmed the prophecy declaring, "...he came in humility, not even with a handsome appearance, and thus: we saw him and he had no attractiveness of grace, but his form was unhonoured'...The human Jesus was 'lacking glory in countenance and appearance.'"¹¹

Origen contradicted this thinking arguing Jesus was ugly, and cited the description of the king in Psalm 45:2, declaring Jesus as handsome and "'more beautiful than the sons of human beings.'"¹²

Physical Characteristics of Jesus the Christ

⁸ J.R. Briggs, *The Sacred Overlap: Learning to Live Faithfully in the Space Between*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Reflective, 2020), 7.

⁹ Joan E. Taylor, *What Did Jesus Look Like?*, 141.

¹⁰ James Muilenburg, *The Interpreter's Bible*, ed. Nolan B. Harmon, vol. 5 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1956), 620.

¹¹ Joan E. Taylor, *What Did Jesus Look Like?*, 141.

¹² Ibid, 140.

Revelation 1:14-16 gives a physical description of Jesus, many claim as evidence. It describes Jesus having darker or bronzed skin and white hair. Due to the otherworldly nature of the description using multiple similes: "His head and hair were white as white wool, white as snow; his eyes were like a flame of fire, his feet were like burnished bronze."¹³ This describes Jesus the Christ post-resurrection, when Jesus was often unrecognizable to those closest to him before death. Theologians Catherine and Justo Gonzalez point to the former, noting Jesus "is dressed in the typical attire of a high priest or of someone very high in office. His white hair and blazing eyes are signs both of his great age and of perennial strength and authority. His feet are made of a metal alloy that the NRSV translates as 'burnished bronze' but which probably refers to a gold alloy that was almost as valuable as gold."¹⁴

Theologian James L. Mays affirms John's vision as "one *like* the Son of Man"¹⁵ and describes, "an epiphany of the heavenly Christ appearing to John on earth,"¹⁶ which may also be allegory of things yet to come.

Theological Characteristics of Jesus

There will never get an accurate depiction of what Jesus looked like while he roamed the earth, but relying on scripture can paint a fuller picture of who Jesus was based on his identity. Jesus was often associated with peace and the gentleness of a shepherd, or even a lamb. Another metaphor to Jesus' identity comes from Luke 13:31-35 when Jesus cries out for Jerusalem, wanting to "gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings."¹⁷ These are feminine attributes appointed to Jesus in the language of mother hen and "the feminine metaphor of gentleness and concern for children" with Jesus "in the role of public mourner, a role traditionally assigned to women."¹⁸ Many additional texts in Isaiah¹⁹ further confirm the "God as woman"²⁰ narrative describing creation like childbirth and labor pains, but none quite as explicitly

¹³ Unless otherwise noted, all biblical passages referenced employ the *New Revised Standard Version*.

¹⁴ Catherine G. Gonzalez and Justo L. Gonzalez, *Revelation*. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 18.

¹⁵ Rev. 1:13 (emphasis mine).

¹⁶ James L. Mays. *The Harper Collins Bible Commentary*. (New York, NY: HarperSanFrancisco, 1988), 1190.

¹⁷ Luke 13:34. See also Matt. 23:37.

¹⁸ Carol A. Newsom and Sharon H. Ringe, eds., *Women's Bible Commentary: Expanded Edition* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), 347.

¹⁹ Isaiah 42:14, 45:10, 49:15.

²⁰ *Ibid*, 176.

as Jesus the mother hen. It begs to ask if Jesus' identity can be separated from the Godhead of the Trinity.

Hebrews 1:3 likens Jesus to "a reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's very being." Jesus is made in the image of God's identity. This text "has plausibly been identified as a fragment of a hymn celebrating Christ's preexistence, incarnation, and exaltation."²¹

Looking at imagery in churches, most artists depict Jesus made in humanity's image instead of humanity made in the image of God. When Jesus is portrayed as fair skinned with blue eyes and blond or light brown hair, it is not an authentic portrait of a first century Palestinian Jewish man. The typical churchgoer will argue it is harmless to imagine Jesus as someone relatable, but this gives a limited understanding of Jesus' full identity by confining him a single race or culture for the sake of familiarity. Authors George Kalantzis, David B. Capes, and Ty Kieser argue:

Rather than allowing our view and vision of God to be drawn from that which he has revealed of himself through his encounters with humanity in the history of redemption, many modern Christians draw our ideas of God from our ideals...we prefer to think of him as the celestial candy-man cheerfully distributing good things to people who ask politely...we prefer to conceive of God in our image, rather than receive the revelation of God in the flesh of Jesus Christ, who is the exact imprint of the divine nature.²² (Kalantzis, George, Capes, David B., and Kieser, Ty, 203).

Colossians 1:15 emphasizes Jesus as "the image of the invisible God" which in itself makes God more relatable through Jesus. Unfortunately, "the character of God's visibility in Christ actually serves as a persistent reminder of divine transcendence in the face of fallen humanity's ever-present urge to contain God within the limits of the visible."²³ A single image of Jesus, whether focusing on the man or the Christ, will always limit one's understanding of the full scope of Jesus' identity. Exploring a wider array of images expressing various characteristics of Jesus will allow a fuller understanding of Jesus as man, Christ, and Trinity.

Synthesis of Themes, Values, and Commitments

Historically, stained glass windows and paintings used to tell the gospel story through visuals to appeal to a wider congregation, including those who couldn't read scripture on their own. Today, though scripture is much more widely accessible, religious imagery still has a significant impact on how we relate to Jesus. Any singular image of Jesus will give an incomplete

²¹ James L. Mays, *Harper Collins Bible Commentary*, 1150.

²² George Kalantzis, David B. Capes, and Ty Kieser, *Who Do You Say That I Am?: On the Humanity of Jesus* (Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books, 2020), 2-3.

²³ Paul E. Capetz, "The Divine Image: Envisioning the Invisible God—By Ian A. McFarland." *Religious Studies Review* 35, no. 1 (2009): 40.

story of whom Jesus is because he is typically depicted as either the historical man who walked the earth in the first century, or as the Christ who was fully divine. Scripture again reveals to us the dual nature of Jesus as the Christ that requires a wider variety of imagery to fully encompass all the characteristics of Jesus. In Revelation 1:8 Jesus declares, "'I am the Alpha and the Omega'...who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty."²⁴ Gonzalez and Gonzalez modify this text when noticing "these are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet, this would be like saying today, 'I am from A to Z.'"²⁵ Since Jesus is from the beginning to the end, and everything in between, imagery is needed that portrays Jesus' humanity and his divinity. It should include historical accuracy and general reliability.

Author J.R. Briggs fully developed this duality of Jesus as both/and, describing Jesus as "the Great Mandorla—the Son of God and the Son of Man, the Lion and the Lamb, the Alpha and the Omega. He was both tender and firm, both full of grace and truth, the Prince of Peace who also said that he did not come to bring peace on earth."²⁶ Exploring a multitude of Christian imagery with the mindset that Jesus was both/and would expand the church's accessibility to offering a deeper understanding of the nature of Christ.

SECTION 2: TOPIC HISTORY AND KEY VOICES

A Brief History of Christian Art

Imagery as Idolatry

Christian imagery has become beloved by many faithful churchgoers around the globe and has the power to enhance worship for congregations and individuals alike, painting vivid images and emotions the words of scripture alone cannot evoke. Yet the history of religious art has greatly evolved throughout the centuries, heavily influenced by local culture, and reflects how Christianity itself has grown and developed over the years. Throughout the span of time, any imagery relating to God or Christ runs the risk of becoming more than a tool for education if its viewers elevate it to an object of worship or idolatry.

Scripture reveals several warnings against creating images that would overshadow God as the true object of worship. The second commandment in Exodus explicitly states: "You shall not make for yourself an idol, whether in the form of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or worship them, for I the Lord your God am a jealous God..."²⁷ Theologian Ian McFarland emphasizes the danger of imagery in "...the reference to divine jealousy [which] suggests that the fundamental

²⁴ See also Rev. 22:13.

²⁵ Catherine G. Gonzalez and Justo L. Gonzalez, *Revelation*, 15.

²⁶ J.R. Briggs, *The Sacred Overlap: Learning to Live Faithfully in the Space Between*, 9-10.

²⁷ Exod. 20:4-5a. See also Deut. 5:8-10.

rationale behind the commandment is that to worship an image is necessarily to worship some being other than the God of Israel."²⁸ Jewish history also remembers the Israelites who lost patience as Moses convened with God on Mount Sinai, and upon his delayed return, they insisted on creating a god to worship. Exodus tells of Aaron melting down their jewelry to make a golden calf, building an altar, and breaking God's commands by worshiping it.²⁹ This story serves as a reminder that nothing should be worshiped above God. While stories from the Old Testament often get less emphasis than the Gospels in Christianity, McFarland confirms that "given the Christian conviction that the God of Jesus Christ is the same God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob who spoke to Moses on Sinai, it should come as no surprise that the rejection of idolatry carries over into Christianity."³⁰

Early Christian Imagery

Despite the risk of creating idols that detract from the devotion directed at God, artists have been creating drawings and paintings for centuries as a way to tell stories and capture historical details. Professor of Art History Jules Lubbock claims the earliest imagery depicting Christ is attributed to Jesus' followers. The disciples had walked with Jesus and experienced his life and teachings firsthand, documenting their time together in a variety of methods, including "original paintings as eyewitness records even before writing the Gospels."³¹ These paintings and mosaics were displayed in the early churches and became "independent visual testimon[ies] to Jesus' life, which complements the Bible, possessing equal authority."³²

Dominican monk Fra Giordano da Rivotto similarly attributes Nicodemus as one of the first witnesses to Jesus' crucifixion, and claims he "painted Christ on the cross in a beautiful picture...showing Christ's appearance and bearing so that whoever saw the picture fully saw almost all the circumstances, so well they have been portrayed."³³ Lubbock also affirms "it is common belief that the Magi took their own painter with them to record the event"³⁴ where they bestowed gifts upon the Christ child. While evidence of these earliest paintings has faded throughout history, three post-Byzantine icons depicting Mary, the mother of Jesus, holding the

²⁸ Ian A. McFarland, *The Divine Image: Envisioning the Invisible God*. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 15.

²⁹ Exod. 32:1-6.

³⁰ Ian A. McFarland, *The Divine Image: Envisioning the Invisible God*. 15.

³¹ Jules Lubbock, *Storytelling in Christian Art from Giotto to Donatello*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 9.

³² Ibid, 9.

³³ Ibid, 8.

³⁴ Ibid, 9.

Christ child have been “attributed in Ethiopian tradition to the hand of St. Luke the Evangelist” and “are considered sacred objects” that have been preserved and remain a “treasured possession of an Ethiopian church dedicated to the Virgin.”³⁵

Other early examples of Christian imagery that have remained preserved “come from Rome and date to the beginning of the third century C.E.”³⁶ Christian cemeteries gave an opportunity for bodies to be buried separately from their non-Christian neighbors and were “inscribed with simple epitaphs and often a figure or a symbol (such as a dove, praying figure, anchor, or fish)” as well as “some narrative images based on biblical themes.”³⁷ As time progressed, additional images and even figures appeared on Christian catacombs including Noah, Daniel, and Jesus performing various healings and working wonders.³⁸ While these paintings and carvings were much lower quality than other art throughout Rome at the time, they are still valued as some of the first examples of Christian art that have been largely preserved by their location underground in the catacombs, away from the natural elements.³⁹ In AD 312, Emperor Constantine started shifting places of worship from homes and small churches to larger public churches and basilicas, and in turn expanded the idea of catacomb imagery into larger scale décor in the churches.⁴⁰

Idolatry continued to threaten the balance of Christian art being seen as a means to further the faith of the churchgoer, to inform the illiterate, and to inspire the worship of God without leading to Christians worshiping the very images themselves above the God they represented. In the late AD 500’s and into AD 600 “Serenus, the bishop of Marseilles” was “bent upon destroying religious images in the churches of his diocese, on the grounds that many Christians were worshiping the images, thereby breaking the second commandment.”⁴¹ What allowed the bishop to distinguish between idol worship and imagery as an enhancer to worship remains unseen. At the thought of losing all access to Christian art, this prompted Pope Gregory, “one of the four great Fathers of the western Church,” to write letters to Serenus, urging education as a means to preventing idol worship as opposed to simply destroying all images, writing that “it is one thing to adore a picture, another through the story [historiam] of a picture to learn what must be adored. For what writing offers to readers, a picture offers to the ignorant who

³⁵ Marilyn E. Heldman. “St. Luke as Painter: Post-Byzantine Icons in Early-Sixteenth-Century Ethiopia.” *Gesta* 44, no. 2, 125.

³⁶ Robin Margaret Jensen, *Face to Face: Portraits of the Divine in Early Christianity*. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 1.

³⁷ Robin Margaret Jensen, *Face to Face: Portraits of the Divine in Early Christianity*. 1.

³⁸ *Ibid*, 3.

³⁹ *Ibid*, 3-4.

⁴⁰ Jules Lubbock, *Storytelling in Christian Art from Giotto to Donatello*. 6.

⁴¹ *Ibid*, 6.

look at it...what they ought to follow... a picture is a substitute for reading."⁴² When not everyone could read the scriptures, pictures served as a means to share the story of Christ with all people.

Art as a Reflection of Jesus' Identity

Much of early Christian art drew inspiration from the New Testament stories about Jesus and his miracles and actions. In order to portray a certain story or characteristic of Christ, language became very important. Professor of Christian history Jaraslov Pelikan explored the distinction that though "the New Testament was written in Greek...the language Jesus and his disciples usually spoke seems to have been Aramaic, a Semiotic tongue related to Hebrew but not identical with it. Aramaic words and phrases are scattered throughout the Gospels and other early Christian books."⁴³ This distinction was essential in understanding how scripture described Jesus, and in turn, how art depicted him. In scripture, "four Aramaic words appear as titles for Jesus: *Rabbi*, or teacher; *Amēn*, or prophet; *Messias*, or Christ; and *Mar*, or Lord. The most neutral and least controversial of these words is probably *Rabbi*, along with the related *Rabbouni*."⁴⁴ As language describing Jesus evolved, artistic renderings may shift from depicting Jesus as a teacher in the synagogue, holding a scroll or book, to Jesus as Christ or Lord, shown with a spiritual glow from behind or within. Pelikan further describes various titles for Jesus that impacted how he was portrayed, including the King of Kings, the Cosmic Christ, the Son of Man, the True Image, Christ Crucified, the Prince of Peace, the Liberator, and much more.⁴⁵ Each image may focus on one or more aspects of Jesus' identity, but it is clear that no one image was capable of encompassing them all.

Looking at a variety of art throughout the years, one key characteristic that stands out is Jesus' often stoic countenance. This speaks more to artistic styling than Jesus' identity or personality. According to Professor of History Colin Jones, the first painting revealing an open lipped smile that showed teeth did not appear until 1787.⁴⁶ During this time, "the smile came to be viewed as a symbol of an individual's innermost and most authentic self. In a way that was perceived as both novel and modern it was held to reveal the character of the person within."⁴⁷

⁴² Ibid, 6-7.

⁴³ Jaraslov Pelikan, *The Illustrated Jesus Through the Centuries*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 11.

⁴⁴ Ibid, 12.

⁴⁵ Ibid, 1-249.

⁴⁶ Colin Jones. *The Smile Revolution: In Eighteenth Century Paris*. (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 2014), 1.

⁴⁷ Colin Jones, *The Smile Revolution: In Eighteenth Century Paris*, 3.

Yet even during this early shift in artistic expression, showing a smile or open mouth was still uncommon in men, and was “still invariably seen as an unbecoming gesture for males.”⁴⁸ Only as time progressed and art evolved did it become common to show a smile, which explains the majority of Christian imagery revealing more historically accepted facial expressions.

As artistic mediums evolved, the film industry began to convey stories of Christ in 1897. Professor of Theology and Film Studies Lloyd Baugh cites the two earliest Jesus-films as “*The Passion of Christ*, commonly known as *Léar Passion*, was produced in France...and the finished film lasted only five minutes. All copies of this film have been lost. The second passion film, a record of the Passion Play performed at Horitz in Bohemia, was an American production” entitled *The Horitz Passion Play*.⁴⁹ Many films would follow, portraying Jesus through musicals, drama, and even comedy.

Contemporary Voices on Christian Art in America

Made in the Image of God

Images of Christ in Protestant Christianity in America have evolved and expanded throughout history. From early European catacomb paintings to an ever-increasing twenty-first century digital library, artwork is available to tell the story of Jesus’ life, ministry, death, and resurrection. With such a vast selection of artwork through paintings, carvings, mosaics, theater, film, and more, the issue of idolatry continues to be a concern for many theologians and scholars.

In seeking to connect with Jesus on a spiritual level, many churchgoers are drawn to an image that is relatable, which has caused many artists to portray Jesus not with historically accurate features common to a first century Palestinian Jewish man, but with features that reflect the intended audience. McFarland recognizes this inconsistency that “as the myriad images of Jesus that mark Christian literature and iconography show, however, there is no shortage of mutually inconsistent pictures of Jesus to choose from; and the fact that Jesus himself is now confessed to have ascended to heaven does not help matters.”⁵⁰ With the loss of the earliest images painted by Jesus’ closest followers, there is no way to reconstruct an exact portrayal of what Jesus historically looked like, and therefore any image is up for artistic interpretation.

In *Meditations of the Life of Christ* once attributed to Bonaventure, the author supports that in reading the birth narrative of Christ, instead of focusing on historical accuracy, “we should

⁴⁸ Ibid, 177.

⁴⁹ Lloyd Baugh, *Imaging the Divine: Jesus and Christ-Figures in Film*. (Franklin, WI: Sheed & Ward, 2000), 8.

⁵⁰ Ian McFarland, *The Divine Image: Envisioning the Invisible God*. 13-14.

all experience ourselves as participants in the scene before us.”⁵¹ The author further “questions the legitimacy of any visual art for the Christian: ‘It is impossible to represent Christ on the stage...nor is it really possible to represent him in the visual arts for, if he were visually recognizable, he would be a god of the pagan kind.’”⁵² This has caused much debate over the authenticity of Christian artwork concerning the humanity or divinity of Jesus.

Genesis tells us that God made humanity in God’s image: “‘Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness’...in the image of God he created them, male and female he created them.”⁵³ It is unclear if this presumes God and humanity share a physical image and likeness, or if humanity is made in likeness with God’s identity. McFarland argues that Genesis implies “a clear and absolute distinction between God the Creator and the human creature that contrasts sharply with various accounts...[understanding] human beings to be at least partly composed of divine material.”⁵⁴ Scripture tells us that God is other than humanity, yet humanity is in part divine due to the nature of creation. God’s humanity is experienced in the personhood of Jesus. Furthermore, the purpose of claiming “Jesus as the image of God is not to focus attention on humankind, but to prod people to look away from themselves to God as the source and guarantor of their identity.”⁵⁵

The Head of Christ

In 1940 one piece of art drastically changed Christian imagery forever when it became “the most widely produced piece of artwork in world history.”⁵⁶ Warner E. Sallman created an original oil painting entitled *Head of Christ* when Fred Bates from the Gospel Trumpet publishing house saw it and encouraged Sallman to create a lithograph copy for mass distribution.⁵⁷ The image portrayed a portrait style silhouette of Jesus’ face, with “smooth white skin, long flowing brown hair, a full beard, and blue eyes.”⁵⁸ Author Jemar Tisby recognized that this picture, that

⁵¹ David Brown, *Tradition and Imagination: Revelation and Change*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 80.

⁵² Ibid, 80.

⁵³ Gen. 1:26-27.

⁵⁴ Ian McFarland, *The Divine Image: Envisioning the Invisible God*. 5.

⁵⁵ Ibid, 6.

⁵⁶ Edward J. Blum and Paul Harvey, *The Color of Christ: The Son of God and Saga of Race in America*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 12.

⁵⁷ Jack R. Lundbom. *Master Painter: Warner E. Sallman*, (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2015), 84.

⁵⁸ Jemar Tisby, *The Color of Compromise: The Truth About the American Church’s Complicity in Racism*. (Zondervan Reflective, 2019), 147.

was mass distributed in wallet size “so that ‘card-carrying Christians’ could opposed ‘card-carrying Communists,’” was subtly reinforcing “the idea that Jesus Christ was a European-looking white man, and many added to that assumption that he was a free-market, capitalist-supporting American as well.”⁵⁹ The mass popularity of this image of white Jesus caused tension among people of color when it “became ubiquitous among black Christians.”⁶⁰

In contrast, Taylor describes Jesus in the *Head of Christ* as “serious, clean, determined, handsome and blue-eyed.”⁶¹ In her search to give a historically accurate account of what Jesus looked like, she agreed that “while it is a beautiful image, it has nothing to do with any evidence about what Jesus looked like, and—like so many other paintings—it misrepresents his ethnicity.”⁶² Due to the popularity of Sallman’s *Head of Christ*, among other images portraying Jesus with light skin, Taylor believes “we live in a world in which the European Jesus still holds sway as the standard type, even though scholars recognize the importance of insisting that Jesus was Jewish.”⁶³

As popular and beloved as Sallman’s paintings are, they are not immune to critique. Many love the image because it portrays Jesus as peaceful and passive, but others find this to detract from its beauty and clashes with how Jesus was perceived. Lutheran Scholar Paul Roth said, “we have a pretty picture of a woman with a curling beard who has just come from the beauty parlor with a Halo shampoo, but we do not have the Lord who died and rose again.”⁶⁴ Similarly, Professor of Religion and Creative Arts Harold Ehrensperger claimed, “The most famous picture of Jesus makes him look weak and effeminate. You present this famous picture of Jesus on some of our mission fields, and the people say, ‘Your God looks weak.’”⁶⁵

Feminine Imagery

The vast majority of images of Christ portray him as a man, but clearly the degree to which his masculinity is emphasized is up for debate. Nevertheless, Professor of Systematic Theology Jacquelyn Grant is confident that “the significance of Christ is not found in his maleness, but in his humanity.”⁶⁶ Though scripture describes Jesus historically as male, his identity as God in human

⁵⁹ Ibid, 147.

⁶⁰ Ibid, 147.

⁶¹ Joan E. Taylor, *What Did Jesus Look Like?*, 23-24.

⁶² Ibid, 24.

⁶³ Ibid, 25.

⁶⁴ Jack R. Lundbom. *Master Painter: Warner E. Sallman*. 152.

⁶⁵ Ibid, 152.

⁶⁶ Jacquelyn Grant. “About Jacquelyn Grant,” *The Office of Black Women in Church and Society*, March 26, 2021. <https://www.blackwomeninchurchandsociety.org/about>.

form is given higher emphasis than his gender. Even in learning how from Christ, McFarland proposes that:

"...Jesus' teaching us what it means to be human needs to be distinguished from his teaching us what it is to be male or female. At most, he [Francis Watson] argues, men may learn from Jesus 'to see through certain characteristically male illusions (about power and status, for example)'; but, he contends, 'they learn this from Jesus and not from Jesus' maleness."⁶⁷

Despite how his gender is depicted in art, "Feminist theologians have argued quite persuasively that it is precisely Jesus' maleness that gives force to his explicit and implicit indictments of those modes of power socially coded as 'male.'"⁶⁸ In other words, many of Jesus' actions, such as his kneeling down to wash the disciples' feet, is seen as a subservient role, and would "acquire an altogether different significance if he had been a woman."⁶⁹

It is unlikely that Sallman's intention was to portray Jesus with feminine characteristics, but with the variety of imagery that has developed over time, this aspect may make the *Head of Christ* more accessible in some aspects. Feminist theology seeks to fight against the patriarchal structures that insist upon the maleness of God and especially Jesus. Professor and author Sheila Collins acknowledged that "'God was viewed as a 'male Lord of hosts...a God who was as different from man as man was from woman...'" and whose maleness was "'in the very nature of things, just as his other qualities of infiniteness, omnipresence and omnipotence were.'"⁷⁰ While this masculine view of God is not uncommon, it does not express the views of all people. Grant informs how:

Feminist theology seeks to 'exorcise' this patriarchal view of God to open the way for replacing it with a wholistic view of God. God is not *He*, therefore. God can no longer be uniquely imaged in masculine form. Some feminists have begun to image God as being as much feminine as masculine. Some others have chosen to image God as female.⁷¹

Scripture clearly gives God characteristics of both genders, and while "God is primarily known as Father, Lord, King, and Master;"⁷² God is also described in scripture as "the God who gave you

⁶⁷ Ian McFarland, *The Divine Image: Envisioning the Invisible God*. 7.

⁶⁸ Ibid, 7.

⁶⁹ Ibid, 7.

⁷⁰ Jacquelyn Grant, *White Women's Christ and Black Women's Jesus: Feminist Christology and Womanist Response*, (American Academy of Religion Academy Series; No. 64. Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1989), 46.

⁷¹ Ibid, 46.

⁷² Ibid, 46.

birth,"⁷³ and crying out "like a woman in labor,"⁷⁴ and "as a mother [who] comforts her child."⁷⁵ God is described in both feminine and masculine language throughout scripture, so it is completely appropriate to include imagery that encompasses the characteristics of both.

Racism in the American Church

Protestant Christianity in the American church has taken on the identity of those who created it and upheld it. For much of the history of America, white people have held the majority in population and also in power. This has a significant impact on churches and in turn, the message that churches are teaching about God, Jesus, and who belongs. This is seen in Christian imagery, and as has already been discussed, that message is primarily that Jesus, and presumably God as well, are white. Professors and authors Alexander Jun, Tabitha L. Jones Jolivet, Allison N. Ash, and Christopher S. Collins point out this significance: "Jesus is perpetually depicted as White. This matters. White Jesus is a reflection of a historical scaffolding of dominance in the construction of knowledge, legitimacy, power, and ownership, and its construction...is being protected by a sacred canopy—a theological expression of White dominance."⁷⁶ In the documentary *White Savior—Racism in the American Church*, writer and director Aaron Christopher explains:

We've been taught that the US was founded on religious liberty, which means that the history of the American church is tightly bound to the history of American culture, including colonialism, racism, and white supremacy. But how is it possible that a religion founded in the boundless love and compassion of Christ could ever align itself with the ideologies that have only brought harm? It's all in the interpretation.⁷⁷

What most people fail to recognize is that theology is greatly influenced by culture and community. What Christianity looks like and teaches in the South in America looks vastly different than what it looks like in Africa or Asia or elsewhere. Yet for the most part, American Christians are often only exposed to one theology from one culture and style, and therefore view it as the only correct option. Dr. Soong-Chan Rah, Professor of Evangelism, weighs in:

⁷³ Deut. 32:18.

⁷⁴ Isa. 42:14.

⁷⁵ Isa. 66:13.

⁷⁶ Alexander Jun, Tabatha L. Jones Jolivet, Allison N. Ash, Christopher S. Collins, *White Jesus: The Architecture of Racism in Religion and Education*, First ed. (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2018), 4.

⁷⁷ Aaron J. Christopher, *White Savior: Racism in the American Church*. Aired in 2019, Amazon Prime. https://www.amazon.com/gp/video/detail/B07ZS6JY4V/ref=atv_hm_hom_1_c_iEgOEZ_2_4

When we talk about Western theology we don't say this is actually Swiss theology, or German theology or specifically American theology. We just say it's theology. We centralize Western theology by just calling it theology and all the others are on the periphery—black theology, womanist theology, liberation theology. And we've created an otherness because we're saying you're not the norm.⁷⁸

Considering theology as American Theology sheds light on the idea that the concept of White Jesus cannot fully blame significant pieces of art like Sallman's *Head of Christ*. There are many factors at work. Authors Edward J. Blum and Paul Harvey describe a particular account of how Joseph Smith, an American religious leader and the founder of the Latter Day Saints movement, shared a firsthand experience of his own encounter with Jesus.⁷⁹ What started as Smith's journey into the woods to pray led him into a vision of God where he was introduced to Jesus. It wasn't until twelve years later that Smith attempted to write about his experience, and his wording seemed to evolve with each retelling. He originally described his encounter as a "pillar of light above the brightness of the sun at noon day come down from above and rested upon me."⁸⁰

As his story progressed and was published, his description of whom he met continued to change, from a pillar of fire, to "two personages, whose brightness and glory defy all description, standing above me in the air," to eventually describing "the Jesus he beheld had a 'light complexion [and] blue eyes.'"⁸¹ Blum and Harvey express the ease with which a religious leader's influence had transitioned and spread. They grieved that "what had been painstakingly penned as blinding light, as a consuming fire, as defying all description, was now put in the form of a white man with blue eyes. In less than twenty years, Smith's account of seeing Jesus had shifted from one of lightness to one of whiteness."⁸² Religious leaders must be mindful of the story they are portraying to influential audiences and realize the impact their particular wording can carry.

Blum and Harvey continue to discuss the impact that White Jesus had on the church and un-church communities in regard to racial injustice and how religion can perpetuate the idea of white supremacy. They describe the tension here:

The transformation of Jesus from light to white in the young United States made him, on the one hand, a cultural icon of white power. But, on the other, his universal love, compassion, suffering, and triumph over death contradicted the dominance and control of white people. His holy whiteness could be used to trouble the waters

⁷⁸ Aaron J. Christopher, *White Savior: Racism in the American Church*.

⁷⁹ Edward J. Blum and Paul Harvey, "From Light to White: The Place and Race of Jesus in Antebellum America." *Historically Speaking* 13, no. 4 (2012): 13-15.

⁸⁰ Ibid, 13-15.

⁸¹ Ibid, 13-15.

⁸² Ibid, 13-15.

of white supremacy. Indians could make it a marker of the immorality of whites-that they killed their own God. African Americans could look to him as a holy white man who betrayed the tenets of white society and taught a higher law of love and liberty. Jesus became white in this land, but white power was never able to overcome all notions of right and wrong or divine justice.⁸³

There was a conflict in the idea that whites held the majority of the power, and imagined Jesus as white like them, when so much of Jesus' teaching focused on the marginalized and oppressed. This theology did not align well.

Liberation Theology

With the rise of Christian imagery favoring a White Jesus in America, and the events happening during the Civil Rights movement, many people of color began to reject the idea of a White Savior and recognized their own imagery of Black Jesus. James Cone became a powerful advocate and widely known theologian who emphasized the concept that Jesus was not a white man, but rather a liberator to the Black community. He focused on Jesus' historical significance to affirm the concept that Jesus was Black. He stood on the grounds that "*Jesus was a Jew*. It is on the basis of the soteriological meaning of the particularity of his Jewishness that theology must affirm the Christological significance of Jesus' present blackness. He *is* black because he was a Jew."⁸⁴ Cone further speaks about the limitedness of our imagery due to our cultural and historical backgrounds. He claims:

Because Christian theology is human speech about God, it is always related to historical situations, and thus all of its assertions are culturally limited...Although God, the subject of theology, is eternal, theology itself is, like those who articulate it, limited by history and time...[Our image of God] is a finite image, limited by the temporarily and particularity of our existence. Theology is not universal language; it is interested language and thus is always a reflection of the goals and aspirations of a particular people in a definite social setting.⁸⁵

Much of Cone's work revolved around liberation theology and transforming the way people see Jesus. Professor and author Kelly Brown Douglas affirms that Cone "offered a symbolic version of Christ's Blackness...[it] did not refer to Jesus' ethnic characteristics. It was a symbol of Jesus' existential commitments."⁸⁶ Much of scripture focuses on Jesus' time spent with the oppressed,

⁸³ Ibid, 13-15.

⁸⁴ James H. Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1975), 123.

⁸⁵ Jacquelyn Grant, *White Women's Christ and Black Women's Jesus: Feminist Christology and Womanist Response*, 10.

⁸⁶ Kelly Brown Douglas, *The Black Christ*, (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1994), 58.

the poor, and those that society rejected. It makes sense that the people of America who feel the same would relate so strongly to a person focused on liberation.

SECTION 3: SYNTHESIS AND CONCLUSION

In the 21st century there is no shortage of Christian imagery. Portrayals of Jesus, biblical stories and characters, and other religious symbols can be found in artwork from the ancient classics to the modern satire and cartoons. Jesus is often referenced in movies, television, greeting cards, toys, and more. In American culture, the dominant image frequently portrays Jesus as White, often with long brown hair and blue eyes. In other cultures around the world, artwork often portrays Jesus as mirroring the community for whom it was created: Asian, African, etc.

With such a diverse portrayal of Jesus in historical and contemporary art, it is clear that not every image portrays a historically accurate depiction of Jesus, the Palestinian Jew who walked the earth thousands of years ago. Instead, most imagery tends to focus on one or two characteristics of Jesus' identity, such as peaceful, suffering, Lord, or King. Any single image runs the risk of conflicting with the scriptural integrity that humanity is made in the image of God, and instead asks the question if humanity has made God in its own image. As much as Christian artwork can portray beauty and inspiration, it can only reveal a limited understanding of God or Jesus.

For far too long, the Church has allowed images that focus solely on one cultural identity to dominate its teaching, primarily White Jesus in much of American Protestant churches, and this has led to great harm being done in the name of the Church. When the primary image available emphasizes a certain culture or race, it gives the message that only people who match that image of Jesus are welcomed in the church and into the body of Christ. The Church has failed the people of God by not teaching about the dangers of making Christ in one's own image. It has also fed the culture of systemic racism by offering a limited representation of Jesus.

The Church has a duty to engage its congregation members in conversations about whom Jesus was historically, and how our imagery of choice portrays a story to all who see it. No matter how beloved a painting may be in an individual's own faith life, if it causes harm by portraying an image of white supremacy, whether intentionally or subtly, it cannot in good faith be the only image in a church building. It gives the message that anyone not matching that image is excluded or lesser.

Christian imagery was originally an important supplement to the scripture and sermon when many churchgoers were illiterate. Having a visual story to support the audial story was crucial. While scripture is much more accessible today for adults, the visual element of worship and education remains incredibly important for children. Many adults can point to an image they learned in childhood that was cemented in their memory and hugely shaped their understanding of who God and Jesus are. Those images and identities usually remain well into adulthood and continue to shape their understanding of who Jesus was and who belongs in the kingdom of God.

Taylor acknowledges the power that images play in our spiritual development when she says, ""The image people have of Jesus can be extremely powerful as an emotional and spiritual trigger. Meditation on a visual idea can lead to sublime experiential moments...the images of Jesus in statuary, paintings and other art forms create very deep resonances in the hearts and minds of the faithful. Altering a beloved image is not easy."⁸⁷ Despite the difficulty, the Church must decide which images, and therefore which characterizations of Jesus' identity it will teach through the use of visual and worship arts. The best opportunity is for churches to teach about what art symbolizes and allow a variety of characteristics and identities to offer a fully rounded teaching of Christ through a variety of different images.

While this research focused primarily on the physical characteristics of Jesus and how art portrays him in various visual representations, further research could lead to a broader understanding of Jesus' nature by exploring how art depicts him by different titles. Many are familiar with imagery that shows Jesus as a calm and serene shepherd or caring for children, but may not have experience with images where Jesus is shown getting angry, or casting out demons. Much is written about what liberation theology means to the Black community, but more could be said about what Jesus would require for the White community to understand reconciliation and justice.

In focusing primarily on Protestant Christian churches in America, this research has barely touched on the rich diversity of imagery from around the globe. Further research should focus on the voices of Asian, African, and other nationality churches within the US. Sunday mornings are still typically the most segregated hour in our society, which has allowed racism and injustice to grow without accountability. By embracing the variety of cultures within our communities and learning from one another how Jesus speaks to different people through word and art, the Church would grow stronger as it finds ways to unite together.

Recognizing that a person's connection with an image of Christ is often emotionally charged makes it difficult to know how to begin the process of unlearning a fixed idea about Jesus. With the help of the Church, education and intentionality can be helpful first steps. Coming together to share conversations with people from different perspectives may open up a deeper understanding to the limited teachings of Christ. When working together to discover how Jesus is revealed differently to various cultures, the Church's spiritual development will continue to grow, and communities will have an opportunity to reflect the beautiful diversity of the kingdom of God. Paste your NPO Topic Expertise Essay milestone into this appendix, less the cover page. No other changes are necessary to the document, as it serves as a milestone that has already been passed. The appendices will not be reviewed for Turabian compliance or style.

⁸⁷ Joan E. Taylor, *What Did Jesus Look Like?*, 24.

Appendix C–Milestone 3

Design Workshop Report

NPO STATEMENT

Bringing greater diversity of imagery of Christ into American churches can deepen Christians' understanding of Jesus' nature and character.

NPO SCOPE AND CONSTRAINTS

By the end of this program, I will offer a multifaceted experience of who Jesus Christ was and is, through use of storytelling, diverse artwork, and an inclusive gallery of characteristics. Equipping pastors with resources will highlight the both/and nature of Christ as gentle and strong, historically accurate and relatable, etc. The main audience is predominantly White churches willing to approach more inclusive teachings about Jesus. Costs could include hiring an illustrator or paying royalties to use images in a publication. Including Jesus' historically authentic and Christological nature removes most boundaries, as long as they are rooted in scripture and historical tradition.

NPO CONTEXT

My NPO ministry context includes Christian churches and their pastors. I will focus primarily on Protestant Churches in America, while using inspiration from global art and churches like Basilica of the Annunciation in Nazareth, which includes artistic renderings of Mary (and often Jesus) from artists of various countries. My target audience is predominantly White congregations, but my research field will include churches of all races as I learn from them about how Jesus is portrayed. My solution will be accessible to any church or small group that is able to offer a visual component to worship or Bible study, as the imagery is a key component. While this is geared toward people of any age, it will probably be better embraced by a slightly younger group, or ideally a diverse crowd open to discussion about what they are experiencing.

ROOT CAUSES

Many churches have primarily remained segregated over the years due to different worship and music style preferences and different theologies taught. Because of this, artwork portrayed often shows Jesus made in our own image instead of a historically accurate portrayal. When traditions are passed down generation to generation, those favorite images become sacred and the

teachings continue to portray Jesus primarily as Christ the King or Prince of Peace, with less emphasis on the man who constantly fought against the government and whose family were refugees. We like to think of Jesus as being like us; so, challenging these images makes us uncomfortable because they challenge our understanding of who Jesus came to serve. We are naturally resistant to change, so embracing more modern imagery and even worship communities can be difficult when it challenges our understanding of tradition and what we have always known.

THREE BIG IDEAS

1. A worship series pairing Christian imagery with biblical characteristics exploring the multifaceted nature of Christ.
2. A storybook sharing individual's experiences with imagery connecting the reader to a personal understanding of Jesus.
3. A children's book introducing diverse imagery at a critical age when children begin their faith formation.

DEFINITION OF 'DONE'

Create resources for churches to begin/further conversation about Jesus' diverse nature and character by exploring familiar and new concepts through art and imagery.

3 CONCEPT PITCHES

Concept Pitch 1

Big Idea: Create a worship series incorporating both/and characteristics of Jesus, affirming familiar concepts and introducing more obscure characteristics, i.e., Jesus as peacemaker and social justice advocate.

Audience: The sermon series is intended for predominantly white, Christian congregations. The series could be converted to a study guide for pastors to create sermons for their own context.

NPO: Jesus is more than our personal Savior, peacemaker, crucified, forgiver. Understanding Jesus better expands our understanding of the kingdom of God.

Benefit: By considering different characteristics of Jesus, the user will find familiarity in the unknown, resulting in reduced fear of the other.

Approach: The both/and nature of each sermon highlights the duality of Jesus; there is not one correct way of experiencing Jesus, but all people can identify with his nature.

Risks: Teaching diverse characteristics of Jesus might be interpreted as an attack on the individual's preferred understanding of Jesus, and the audience could resist learning anything new.

Assumptions: There is a need to see Jesus as more than a relatable, personal Savior. Experiencing Jesus as someone who does not look like us will improve our relationships with more diverse populations.

Benchmarks of success: Congregations will be exposed to imagery and characteristics that are not the norm for their context. Embracing expanded imagery using more mindful artwork will prove more openness to Jesus' full character.

Other approaches: Many people critique white Jesus imagery as historically inaccurate. This more accessible approach affirms people's favorites and encourages them to expand their imagery.

Concept Pitch 2

Big Idea: A book sharing stories from interviewing diverse individuals explaining their favorite image of Jesus, its symbolism, and how it evolved with their faith development.

Audience: The book would be targeted toward anyone interested in artwork, storytelling, or understanding Jesus on a deeper level.

NPO: Giving permission to embrace new imagery without losing traditional imagery encourages faith development.

Benefit: People benefit from connecting with real stories of real people. Hearing how specific imagery caused inspiration or harm allows a deeper connection with someone they might not originally relate.

Approach: Hearing stories of people's faith development leading to embracing new imagery of Jesus encourages others to see Jesus in a broader context. A social media gallery of images would accompany the stories.

Risks: Readers may not connect with storytellers they do not know; they may skip unknown images before reading the meaning and story behind them.

Assumptions: People connect with stories. Hearing how certain imagery harmed or inspired others could lead readers to be more compassionate and knowledgeable about harmful imagery.

Benchmarks of success: Storytellers sharing their personal faith brings more humanity and relatability to readers viewing imagery. Readers reconsidering old images or relating with new images encourages faith growth.

Other approaches: Brandon Stanton's *Humans of New York* garners compassion from readers through photography and stories of people living in New York. This approach shifts the theme from individual's lives to the uniting story of Jesus and how followers relate to his story.

Concept Pitch 3

Big Idea: A children's book sharing diverse imagery of Jesus through storytelling and metaphor expressing underrepresented images such as Jesus laughing, dancing, singing, etc.

Audience: This is intended for children, families, and churches to share a storybook with strong theology and authentic and imaginative imagery introducing Jesus at an early age.

NPO: Introducing diverse images of Jesus offers a strong faith foundation at a critical age in a child's life.

Benefit: The first image of Christ children grasp significantly impacts their lifelong faith. Resources offering diversity early prevents the need to unlearn harmful images later in life.

Approach: Teach children about Jesus through eye-catching illustrations and poetic storytelling introducing relatable images of Jesus dancing at a wedding, napping in a boat, and caring for others.

Risks: Blending storytelling with biblical accuracy that catches children's attention and meets parents' approval, and finding talented illustrators to capture appropriate images may be tricky and expensive.

Benchmarks of success: A story that captures children's attention without watering down the theology; that remains biblically accurate and faithfully displays historically accurate images of Jesus.

Other Approaches: Many children's books speak more about God and do not mention Jesus. Stories about Jesus often illustrate him as Caucasian. Books with more authentic illustrations focus only on one aspect of scripture, such as Jesus' birth or resurrection.

DESIGN WORKSHOP STAKEHOLDERS

1. United Methodist clergy, religion professor, Caucasian, male
2. United Methodist clergy, African American, male
3. United Methodist clergy, Caucasian, female
4. United Methodist laity, some seminary, Caucasian, female
5. United Methodist laity, Nigerian, female

ONE-ON-ONE INTERVIEWS

1. United Methodist Bishop, Caucasian, female
2. United Methodist clergy, Caucasian, male
3. United Methodist clergy, African American, male, outside my local conference
4. Evangelical Covenant Church clergy, author, Caucasian, male

ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Kristin Kobes Du Mez: *Jesus and John Wayne: How White Evangelicals Corrupted a Faith and Fractured a Nation*

Du Mez shares a detailed history of how white evangelicals greatly influenced the culture of American Christianity from the 1940's to the early 2000's. Popular faith leaders influenced Christians to steer away from traditional imagery of Jesus as feminine or weak and encouraged Christian masculinity and feminine obedience, creating a rugged, muscular Jesus image as their inspiration. Kristin Kobes Du Mez, Ph.D. is a history professor and author who focused her studies on "the intersection of gender, religion, and politics."⁸⁸ Her intended audience addresses Americans and Christians looking to understand conservative theology taught through evangelical traditions throughout history. Her stance offers a critique of conservative Christian teachings and Republican politics. This work highlights many images of Christ and how representations of Jesus' have evolved throughout the last 80 years, bringing great insight into why imagery plays such a significant role in how Christians views themselves and others.

Du Mez, Kristin Kobes. *Jesus and John Wayne : How White Evangelicals Corrupted a Faith and Fractured a Nation*. First ed. New York, NY: Liveright Publishing Corporation, a Division of W.W. Norton & Company, 2020.

Du Mez, Kristin Kobes. "Kristindumez.com." December 6, 2021. <https://kristindumez.com/>.

David Swanson: *Rediscipling the White Church: From Cheap Diversity to True Solidarity*

Swanson offers a critical look at how most churches attempt to bring more authentic diversity into their membership, and why it has not worked well in the past. He offers a new approach of re-teaching discipleship allowing transformation for white Christians to more fully embrace people outside of their own race. Instead of planting people of diverse races into white churches and hoping they are embraced, Swanson's approach involves allowing these transitions to happen naturally after realigning churchgoers' discipleship to include all God's people. David Swanson is a pastor in the Evangelical Covenant Church and works in multicultural communities in Chicago. He

⁸⁸ Kristin Kobes Du Mez, "kristindumez.com," accessed December 6, 2021, <https://kristindumez.com/>.

is “passionate about racial justice and reconciliation within the body of Christ”⁸⁹ and has experience working with multicultural churches and elevating the voices of people of color. His intended audience addresses any church leader that hopes to better integrate multi-ethnicity into their churches and work toward racial reconciliation. His stance supports inclusivity and equality among all people. This work offered several good ideas about how to approach adding diversity of imagery into predominantly white churches and being mindful about setting the groundwork within a congregation before introducing new images that could otherwise feel forced.

Swanson, David Winston. “dswanson.com.” November 18, 2021. <https://dswanson.com/>.

Swanson, David Winston. *Rediscipling the White Church: From Cheap Diversity to True Solidarity*. Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP, an Imprint of InterVarsity Press, 2020.

Dallas Jenkins: *The Chosen* TV Series

Jenkins is the Creator of the television series *The Chosen* featuring his understanding of a historically and biblically accurate representation of the life of Jesus, as told by his closest followers. It features many storylines that follow scripture almost word for word and adds thoughtfully imagined backstories for characters before they met Jesus that are not anywhere in scripture. Dallas is the son of evangelical Christian novelist Jerry B. Jenkins who wrote the apocalyptic novel series *Left Behind*.⁹⁰ The intended audiences are Christians and people new to the faith and appeals mostly to conservative and evangelical Christians. It follows an evangelistic approach for viewers. It does a good job to show the humanity and relatability of Jesus and his disciples and stays very close to the source scripture. While attempting to portray Jesus in a biblically and historically accurate representation, the majority of the actors are Caucasian Americans speaking with their interpretation of a Middle Eastern first century accent. It affirms my research and experience that many white Christians believe a tanned Caucasian man with long dark hair is an accurate representation of the Israeli first century Jew known as Jesus.

‘Dallas Jenkins.’ In Wikipedia. Wikipedia Inc. 2021. Accessed October 28, 2021. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dallas_Jenkins.

The Chosen. Season 1. Directed by Dallas Jenkins. Written by Dallas Jenkins. Angel Studios, September 20, 2017.

⁸⁹ David W. Swanson, “dswanson.com,” accessed November 18, 2021, <https://dswanson.com/>.

⁹⁰ Wikipedia 2021.

Catherine Pate: "White Jesus and Me"

Pate shares her experience as a biracial child adopted by two white parents and growing up in the predominantly white Anglican Church. She laments the struggle to transition from the white church she loved to learning about the racially divisive history the church was founded on. She hopes for more inclusivity in the church, but recognizes that it will require a careful examination of the church's leadership, liturgy, imagery, and theological themes that value whiteness, specifically the image of Jesus's forgiveness washing us "whiter than snow."⁹¹ Pate is the director of communications for the diocese of Islands and Inlets (British Columbia)⁹² and speaks as one of the only minorities on paid staff sharing her personal stance on imagery of Christ. Her experience is one of the types of stories that would influence the second big idea regarding shared stories of how imagery impacts faith.

Pate, Catherine. "anglicanjournal.com/white-jesus-and-me." December 12, 2021. <https://www.anglicanjournal.com/white-jesus-and-me/>

Pate, Catherine. "White Jesus and me." *Anglican Journal*, February 2021, 4. Gale General OneFile (accessed December 11, 2021). <https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A653082571/ITOF?u=newb64238&sid=bookmark-ITOF&xid=69a57d91>.

APPENDIX C.1

DESIGN WORKSHOP DESCRIPTION

My discovery workshop was Saturday, October 30, 2021, at Crossroads UMC. The agenda offered a 9:30 am gathering, 10:00 am start, and 2:00 pm end time, with lunch and breaks. Five participants attended in person. The classroom setup held an open rectangle of long tables, with everyone facing each other. Participants were asked ahead of time to submit their favorite image of Christ and come prepared to consider my current NPO.

The session followed the Design Workshop Guide as outlined in the documentation. Our first task was Empathy Mapping to get a better understanding of the NPO audience. Next we went through two Explore Activities including the 3-12-3 Brainstorm and the Anti-Problem. During the 3-12-3 Brainstorm we attempted to spend 3 minutes creating a pool of characteristics about the NPO. This seemed too abstract for the stakeholders, so we switched to naming ideas for addressing the NPO.

⁹¹ Catherine Pate, "White Jesus and Me," *Anglican Journal*, February 2021, 4. Gale General OneFile (accessed December 11, 2021). <https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A653082571/ITOF?u=newb64238&sid=bookmark-ITOF&xid=69a57d91>.

⁹² Catherine Pate, "anglicanjournal.com/white-jesus-and-me," December 12, 2021. <https://www.anglicanjournal.com/white-jesus-and-me/>.

The stakeholders divided themselves into two teams of men and women, each spending 12 minutes developing their chosen concepts to address the NPO and worked on sketches and prototypes. Each team then presented their ideas in 3 minutes. The women's team worked diligently to prototype possibilities. The men's team spent more time addressing the hurdles and roadblocks of the NPO. The Anti-Problem activity was designed to help participants become unstuck from their notion that the audience would immediately resist more diverse imagery of Christ. This was accomplished by looking at the NPO as if it is not a problem. They addressed many ideas, from the absurd to the factual, that turned our thinking in a new direction.

Our next activity was the Design Pitch where stakeholders selected three big ideas from our earlier brainstorming that could be prototyped into future projects. This led to additional brainstorming ideas for specific aspects of the problem to address before combining multiple ideas into three categories. They suggested a worship aspect including a sermon series with compatible children's messages, artwork displays, and music imagery that taught various characteristics of Jesus, starting with the most comfortable Sallman's *Head of Christ* and gradually introducing more unfamiliar images. Next was a social aspect that brought together multiple congregations of various races and facilitated bridge building activities and conversations where congregations could learn from one another. After a period of time building relationships between the groups, discoveries would be collected into a curriculum to allow other communities to follow the program. The last idea was a workshop where participants learned about various styles of religious art and were encouraged to create their own imagery. A gallery or art show would be conducted for the wider audience and new, diverse images would become permanently displayed around the church alongside the old favorites. We closed with debriefing and final thoughts. I give the workshop a 3.5-4 on the Likert Scale, moderately helpful to helpful in gaining clarity and information. Our discussions sometimes veered off topic or stayed too broad in regard to the report questions, but it offered much to explore further.

DESIGN WORKSHOP DOCUMENTATION

Design Workshop Leader's Agenda and Discussion Notes

Agenda

- 10:00 am: Welcome, introductions, ground rules
- 10:15 am: Revisiting the NPO Activity #1
- 11:00 am: Break
- 11:10 am: Explore Activity #1
- 11:45 pm: Lunch break
- 12:15 pm: Explore Activity #2
- 1:00 pm: Break

- 1:10 pm: Design Pitch
- 2:00 pm: Dismiss

10:00 am: Welcome, introductions, ground rules

- Introduce yourself
- Ice breaker questions—
 1. If you didn't have to sleep, what would you do with the extra time?
 2. What fictional place would you most like to go?
 3. When people come to you for help, what do they usually want help with?
 4. What are you interested in that most people haven't heard of?
 5. What could you give a 40-minute presentation on with absolutely no preparation?
- Ground Rules
 1. Be respectful—no side discussions, listen, no dumb questions/answers, give space for others to speak
 2. Confidentiality
 3. Be present—limit distractions, step out to answer phone
 4. Make your thinking visible
 5. Parking Lot

10:15 am: Empathy Map

Empathy Map

What

Goal: Gain a deeper understanding of key stakeholders or users impacted by the NPO or identify gaps in your knowledge.

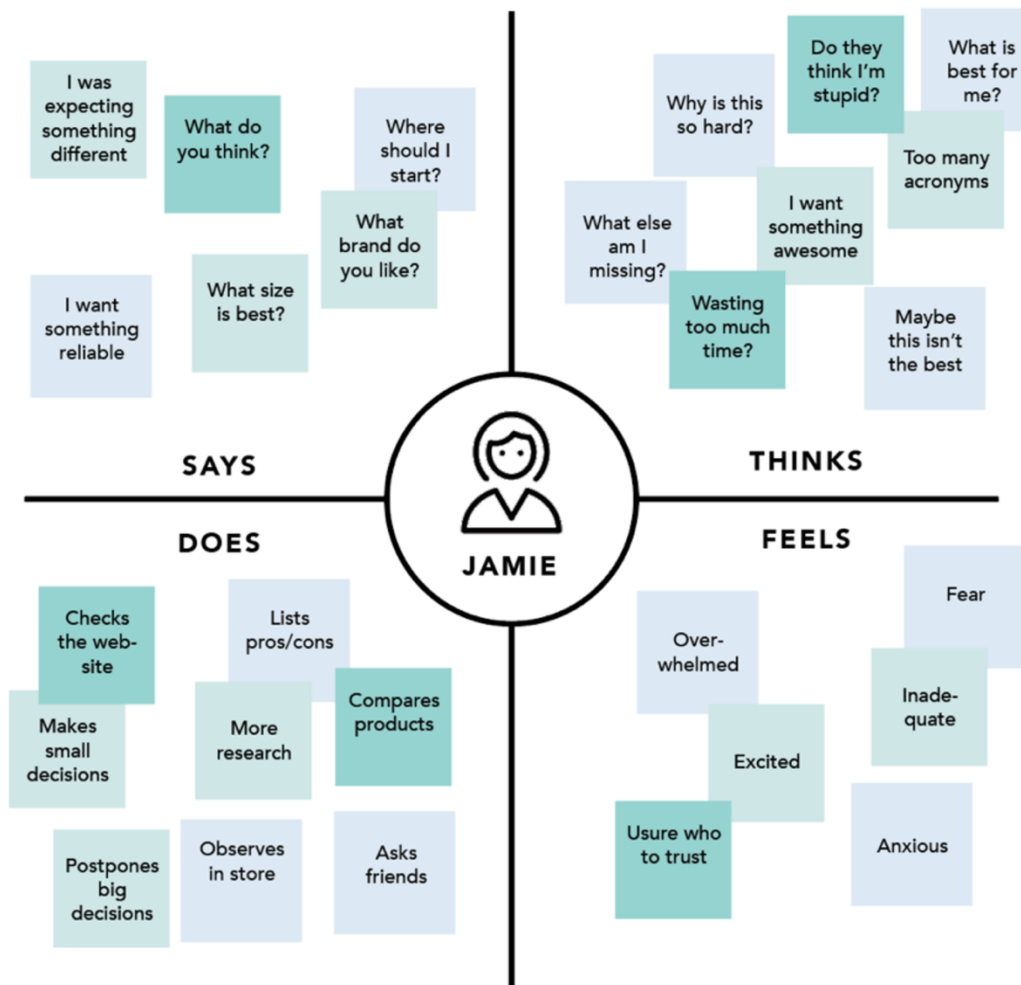
People: 3-10 people

Time: 20 minutes

Notes:

Empathy maps are best used from the very beginning of the design process.

Before you conduct a formal Empathy Mapping session, you will need to gather qualitative research, such as user interviews, field studies, diary studies, listening sessions, or qualitative surveys.



[Empathy Map template](#)
Process

1. Define scope and goals. What user or persona will you map? Define your primary purpose for empathy mapping.
2. On a flip chart, create four quadrants labeled Says, Thinks, Does, and Feels, with the user or persona in the middle. Empathy maps provide a glance into who a user is as a whole and are not chronological or sequential. Have sticky notes and markers readily available.
3. Distribute the research you will be using as evidence for your empathy map. Empathy mapping is a qualitative method, so you will need qualitative inputs: user interviews, field studies, diary studies, listening sessions, or qualitative surveys.
4. Request the participants read through the gathered research materials individually. As each participant digests the data, they can fill out sticky notes that align with the four quadrants.
5. Participants add their notes to the map on the whiteboard.
6. Participants review the stickies on the board collaboratively and cluster similar notes that belong to the same quadrant. Label your clusters with themes that represent each grouping off sticky notes.
7. The activity of clustering facilitates discussion and alignment. The goal is to arrive at a shared understanding of your user. What are the outliers? What themes were repeated in all the quadrants? What themes only exist in one quadrant? What gaps exist in our understanding?

* Adopted from [Gamestorming's Empathy Map exercise](#) and [Nielson Norman Group's approach to Empathy Mapping](#).

Results:

The NPO audience says: This is exciting; Thank you for sharing; What's wrong with the picture we have now?; Does it matter?; Don't mess with my Jesus; Why is the church last on this?; Why do we need to do this?; This Jesus was good enough for my parents and grandparents; Nothing; Nothing initially; What can we do?

The NPO audience thinks: Why do you want to do this?; It's always been this way; This is a progressive attempt to undermine; This is so new! Blown away!; It will be challenging; Positive; What took so long?; Similar to what is happening with our schools; Jesus is olive skinned.

The NPO audience does: Continues to believe; Listens intently; Offers counter statements and sarcasm; Arms crossed; Sits quietly; Resists putting up something new; Both And: add to but don't take away; Analysis; This moves race relations forward (it helps).

The NPO audience feels: Threatened; Uncomfortable; We never thought of Jesus as white anyway (same stuff); What is your real agenda?' Conflicted; Inspired; Included; Great; Positive.

Overall, the categories were combined into three characteristics: The NPO audience will experience this opportunity with resistance, neutrality, or by embracing it.

Further discussion:

-Target those who are excited and embracing it, hope the neutral will follow on. Start with excitement and positivity.

What evidence do you have that this is worth the investment?

-Based on the empathy map replies, this is worth the investment.

-If you can get them to embrace that Jesus does not look like you, it will help them understand how to be more accepting of others. They see the image of God in other people.

-Stakeholder 5 from Nigeria grew up with white Jesus and the crucifix. She is starting to understand that Jesus was not white or black. She now sees Jesus as the color of Arabs or Israelites.

-Stakeholder 2 who grew up in Mississippi commented that black churches had white Jesus imagery. This was the ideology that was being projected but he always questioned it. There was a hierarchy in day-to-day life and spirituality.

-Racial relations must start with hospitality.

-Stakeholder 1 felt there must be diversity of theological understandings of Jesus—too often the focus is on Jesus on the cross to the exclusion of all other versions of Jesus. John 3:16 is the favorite emphasis that Jesus saved us from our sins but it is limiting, not all encompassing.

-Jesus may be a symbol without a human form at all.

-Stakeholder 3 believes Sallman's Head of Christ feels very judgmental. With a Pentecostal upbringing she resisted that portrait because she felt like she was always being judged by it, and referred other images of Jesus.

-Be mindful of religious refugees—people come to Methodism after leaving other denominations because it is more middle way and neutral.

-Stakeholder 4 felt the church usually focused on building a personal relationship with Jesus—that is the Jesus that came to save them from their sins, not someone who came to change how the world works.

-Stakeholder 2 commented that if you do not tell the whole story of slavery and race at a young age, they think it is no big deal. If you do not teach kids that maybe Jesus was not white, they are already developing thoughts and theology.




-The audience consists of church people or potential church people and children who will lock onto an image early.

-Stakeholder 2 talked about an Oprah interview with JZ—about the impact he thought he and hip-hop made on society. We did more for race relations than the church. Music brings everybody together. Kanye West concerts attract everybody: gay straight, black, white, young, old. The church has done a poor job of doing race relations.

-Stakeholder 1 commented on the mindset of people in the Philippines who love white skin and want to lighten their own skin, but also celebrate the Feast of the Black Nazarene and celebrate an image of Jesus that looks like them with darker skin.

12:30: Explore Activity #1

3-12-3 Brainstorm

<p>What</p> <p>Goal:</p> <p>People: Up to 10</p> <p>Time: 20-30 minutes</p> <p>Note: Strict timekeeping is essential. The “ticking clock” forces spontaneous, quick-fire decisions and doesn’t allow for overthinking.</p>	<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around; align-items: center;"> <div style="text-align: center;">  <p>Brainstorming 3 min</p> </div> <div style="text-align: center;">  <p>Generation 12 min</p> </div> <div style="text-align: center;">  <p>Presentation 3 min</p> </div> </div>
<p>Process</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Post your NPO as concisely as possible for the group and distribute stacks of index cards or sticky notes and markers to all participants. 2. 3 Minutes - Generate a pool of aspects: Participants reflect on the NPO characteristics and write down as many of them as possible on individual cards. Note, think in terms of nouns and verbs that come to mind. 3. 12 Minutes - Develop concepts. Divide stakeholders into pairs. Each pair draws three cards from the pool of characteristics: With these as thought starters, each group has 12 minutes to develop a concept to address the NPO. Participants may create rough 	

sketches or prototypes—the key is in preparing for a short (3-minute maximum) presentation of their idea. Focus on solutions and challenges.

4. **3 Minutes - Make Presentations:** Tight timekeeping is critical here—every pair of stakeholders should have a *maximum* of 3 minutes to present their concept. When presenting, stakeholders may reveal the cards that they drew and how the cards influenced their thinking if they wish. After everyone has presented, the entire group of participants may reflect on what was uncovered.

After the presentations, facilitators have several options. They may guide the group to dig deeper into an individual concept or try to integrate several concepts. They may vote or rank the concepts to decide on which to spend more time developing. Often, concepts coming out of this exercise are more memorable to the participants, who are bonded in the time-driven stress of creating together.

* Adapted from <https://gamestorming.com/3-12-3-brainstorm/>

Women's Team Presentation:

- Sermon, exhibit, art workshop, poetry
- Sermon series for 4-6 weeks, thread together imagery of the Jesus we all know (whatever that church is most familiar with) and add newer images in later weeks. Talk about the images and what they mean.
- Artwork would be displayed around the Sanctuary or Narthex and the exhibit would grow each week, adding to instead of replacing images.
- The children's sermon could travel around the Sanctuary each week looking at different pieces of art in various corners. Each sermon would look at different images each week (sculpture, poetry, print, etc.).
- Suggestions include Jesus as Black Messiah, Asian Messiah, or other cultures or concepts.
- Add more artwork each week to change over time.
- Host a workshop for those who are artistic and have new ideas. They can come up with their own imagery.
- Display different imagery and member's imagery around the church long-term instead of only having one main image. The ongoing impact will add more imagery around the church to show diversity. Do not get rid of the original.
- Themes could include Christmas around the world, Advent showcasing different nativities, etc.
- Select a time period when people are most likely at church (not summer) to host the sermon series.

- Make it Adam Hamilton style—preach it and then write a curriculum book about it and include a video series for the visuals.
- Create a Sunday school series—talks about the theme one week and then respond in the sermon the next week. This shows the pastor is listening and the congregation has buy in. The pastor sums up with a culmination of what they discovered during Sunday school lessons.
- Or the reverse could work with the sermon series inspiring what they talk about the following week in Sunday school.
- Offer Facebook spotlights, promos, and different videos each week with clips from what is being taught.
- Most sermons are now online and this could spread by word of mouth for other churches to echo the theme.
- Create a bridge-builders group pairing a predominately black church with a predominately white church and have them bring what they know from different backgrounds.
- Talk to other churches from different races and find out how they experience Jesus, what images they grew up with, and allow people to learn from each other through their stories.

Men's Team Presentation:


- This will lead to a divided context and may have people looking to argue.
- Churches pretended to get along for decades and now we do not even pretend, which is more honest, but harder to have conversations around.
- Consider how to indirectly get into this topic so it is not as confrontational.
- Consider Fred Craddock's style—allowing people to overhear the Gospel. If the congregation has heard too much, perhaps a conversation with children during a children's sermon allows the adults to overhear the topic and it is not seen as confrontational.
- Ideas for what would go into a children's sermon series: What did Jesus look like, how did he dress, how did Jews feel about the temple? Paint him as more of a prophetic figure and introduce non-typical ways of seeing Jesus.
- Consider Erik Mason's book *Woke Church*. It describes three types of people: C1's, C2's, C3's. One type has fully assimilated to another culture. The black culture does not want to hear about diverse imagery because they have already assimilated to the white culture. The other type is fully assimilated to own culture, and the last type is in the middle, open and adaptable.
- It is helpful to hear stories of other people's lives that may be different from our own lives. People change by having a good friend on the sports team with them who tells their story. Most people do not change from intellectual arguments, but rather from empathy. How do we tell stories and see the world through different eyes?
- If we see Jesus as a cosmic figure or prophet of change or the firstborn of new creation, it is a backwards way of entering conversations of race/ethnicity/identity.

-People need to be in a teachable moment, in a space where they are ready to hear before you begin.

-If you make them angry they are no longer in that space to learn.

1:00: Explore Activity #2

Anti-Problem (aka Reverse It)

<p>What</p> <p>Goal: This activity helps participant teams get unstuck. By addressing the opposite to their current NPO, it becomes easier for teams to evaluate the NPO differently and break out of existing patterns.</p> <p>People: 5-20</p> <p>Time: 30-45 minutes</p>	
<p>Process</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Break the stakeholders into smaller groups of 3-4 people and describe what they'll tackle together: the current opposite of the NPO. The more extreme the opposite, the better. For instance, if the NPO is church membership decline, participants would brainstorm ways to purposely drive members away from the church. 2. Give the players 15-20 minutes to generate and display various ways to address the anti-problem. Encourage fast responses and a volume of ideas. 	

3. When the time is up, ask each group to share how they addressed the anti-problem.
4. Discuss any insights and discoveries that emerge.

Don't worry if the players don't generate many (or any) viable or actionable approaches. The intention is not to eliminate a complex problem in 30 minutes, but rather give participants a new approach that can lead to a solution. Since this activity tends to segue into a conversation about the real problem naturally, you could use any extra time to start that conversation while the stakeholders' ideas are ignited.

* Adapted from <https://gamestorming.com/the-anti-problem/>

Find the opposite of the NPO, if diverse imagery were not an issue to be solved. What would that look like?

- Completely divide the church by focusing on what Fox news says on one TV and what MSNBC news says on another.
- Create churches where everyone thinks the same way
- All churches would have one image and one understanding of who Jesus is.
- What is the race issue and where does the power reside? First it was slavery, then race, then gender, and now sexuality. Who currently has power?
- Jesus looks like me. It is a good thing that Jesus is relatable and Jesus looks like me.
- Advertising—we are not getting specific images anymore of what a person is on commercials or media images. If someone has brown skin they could be black, Asian, etc. If they have really short hair you cannot tell their hair type. People are not always identified as male or female. Everyone can identify in this person on the commercial because it could be anyone. I can see myself driving a Lexus.
- Sallman's *Head of Christ* is the true and only image of Jesus.
- Get other images out of society, books, and churches. The Catholic Church can send missionaries to other countries with the *Head of Christ* to teach it globally.
- Drive down White Road or Miller Bottom Rd in Conyers to see white Jesus on outside of building. These are international churches in Conyers with white imagery.
- Subversively have *Head of Christ* as every image ever. That is the only option. Every car commercial has that image.
- Consider relatability. Only speak about issues that are important to the white community. Jesus' actions are related to those concerns. Jesus is a believer in the 2nd amendment. If Jesus supports those things, it is easier to see Jesus as white.

-Put Jesus on the front page of the Bible as a white image. Drive up the sales of the Bible with Jesus on front page. Focus on the consumer economy. Ridicule anyone who thinks differently. Have professional athletes support that image as well. Every church, every home, every pocket should have images of white Jesus.

1:40: Design Pitch

How do we fix this problem?

-Emphasize the parts of scripture that make you think of Jesus being a radical version of love accepting of all people.

-Emphasize Matthew 25. Think about others. Emphasize that Jesus was a refugee, an immigrant, rebellious, subject to Roman oppression. Israeli was an occupied country. Everything Jesus said went against the government.

-Black liberation theology was birthed from that idea of Roman oppression.

-Revisit James Cone's *God of the Oppressed*. The Savior of the oppressed is now white Jesus. How do black children/teens wrestle with this?

-Templeton the Rat from *Charlotte's Web* represented the way many Christians think—what is in it for me? The white experience is being saved from our personal sin and the reward is heaven and an escape from punishment in hell.

-The oppression Jesus saved Israel from centuries ago is the same oppression African Americans need saving from every single day.

-Black theology and white theology is very different. The black church is more of a community with an understanding of this is who we are as a people. White church is more this is who I am as a person. White church is living to get to eternity and bringing heaven to earth now. Black church is escaping from current hell on earth.

-Watch Night on New Year's Eve is when they were praying for their liberation—the black church believes they are celebrating their freedom the next morning and will stay up all night.

-Sharing pulpits may be a way to grow in our beliefs. If we have different theology, would it work to have a pulpit swap and learn from other communities?

-The gospel is so full of liberation and social justice, but if you preach those same topics many consider it political and controversial.

-We need lots of prayer to solve this.

-Consider ways to convince anti-vaxxers to get vaccinated: You must acknowledge their concerns and fears and show that you care. You respond to those concerns and fears by moving them forward a bit. The same could work with moving forward with diverse imagery.

-A book written by a white female is going to be a unique perspective. Consider going into different churches and sharing the story of my research, from learning that black churches often portray

images of white Jesus, to stories from around the world in different cultures. A book of stories would summarize these findings.

-When we are getting close to death, we acknowledge that we want comfort from Jesus. As we move through life, sometimes we need the Jesus that kicks people out of the temple, and other times we need the comforting Jesus.

-Comforting Jesus to me may not look like a comforting Jesus to others. Comforting Jesus to a black person may look like a liberator rather than a peacekeeper.

-Create a book of stories from different cultures about who Jesus is to them. Do not limit it to academic research but share personal stories. Tell the pretty side of different sides of Jesus and why we have held onto white Jesus the way we have. Share it honestly.

-In the Japanese culture there was not a figure of Jesus that cared about individuals. Jesus caring about you was a new concept for them to hear about in Christianity. There is danger when we think Jesus just cares about me and when we do not recognize that Jesus cares about others, even our enemies.

-The good Samaritan. Samaritans were the enemy of the Jews. We forget about that part. We need to emphasize that Jesus is highlighting our enemies so often.

-Why did Jesus weep? If we focus on why he was weeping it wrestles with our comfort and support of war.

In Nigeria it is Muslims vs. Christians. They each want to be in power. The color of Jesus is not important. Both Muslims and Christians believe they are in the majority.

-In the Philippines President Duterte is seen much like Trump was in America. People will acknowledge that he is a bastard, but they take pride that he is their bastard.

3 Big Ideas

1. Worship—Questions to pursue further: Would I write the sermons myself or create an outline for other pastors to preach for their own context? Can I deliver eight well-developed sermons? Would an outline contain topics, subjects, and ideas of how someone else could develop their own sermons?

2. Social aspects—Create a bridge-builders group and manual including key points another pastor should consider when reaching out to another church. Allow the bridge builders to connect and share for a time and then share feedback with the results. Build a curriculum around it that can be done anywhere.

How are others approaching this?

-None of this has been done as part of a larger agenda (bridge builders is not done as part of a worship series or intentional program—it is an idea of two churches joining together) or program. None of this has been done from my perspective. Would three or more churches or cultures work?

3. Workshop—Introduce different images of Jesus outside of what the standard was before. Images will be displayed in the church for a long period of time (whether they bought the art, made it, etc.).

-If you have a new image, you build a new worship around that new image—with sermon, children's message, etc.

Debrief

In light of what emerged today...

A. What should I be sure to examine?

Look at presuppositions behind images we already have. Why are these images here and why are they beloved? The reasons one church has an image may or may not be the same as another church with the same images. Why do the black churches have white images? What would be some more faithful images for the black church that they have? That the white church might not have or might not necessarily think of? Worship and salvation is a communal thing, as opposed to a personal thing in the white church. Is the same imagery in Korean, Hispanic, etc. churches? If so, why?

B. What are the potential blind spots that I best explore?

There isn't a right image. Historical vs. theological vs. symbolical Jesus may all be different. There are probably images I am very uncomfortable with and need to be aware of that going into it. Coming at this as a white female would be different from a white male or black male. The audience is already projecting onto me a certain image.

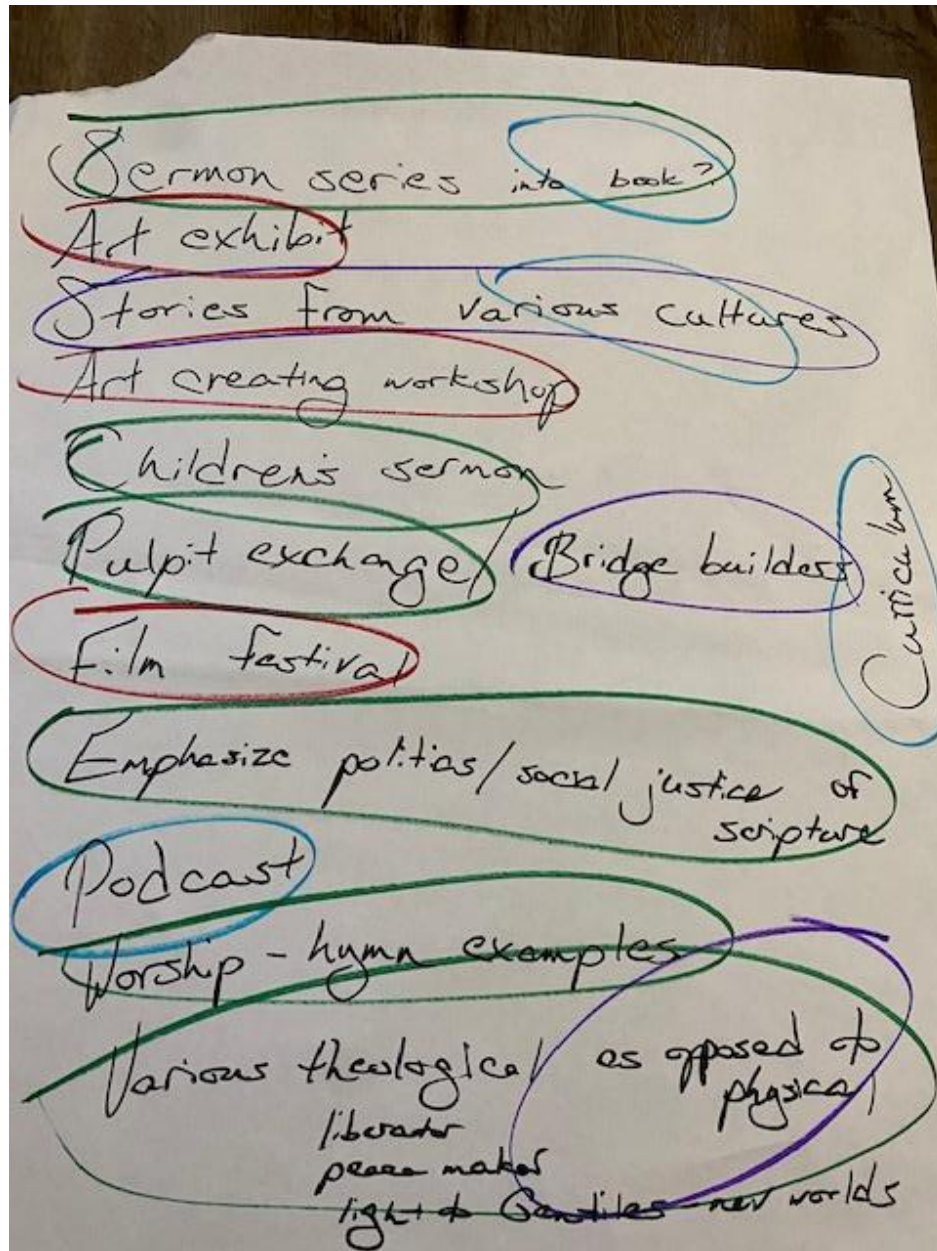
C. What are potential pitfalls that I best avoid?

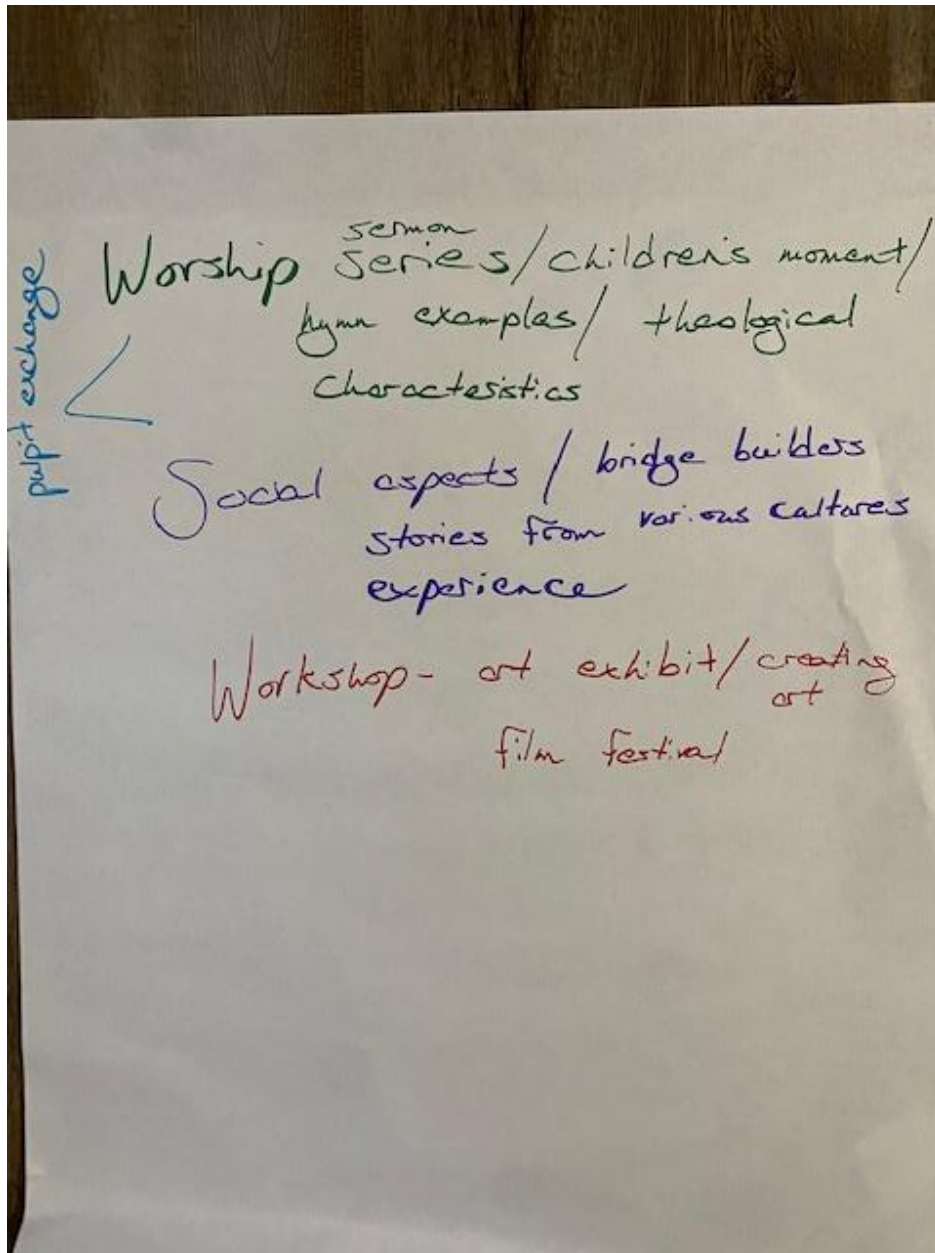
Be careful getting one perspective and focusing on one type of person or one type of church and assuming it reaches all. Find diversity in those I am reaching out to when gathering information. Work with people I cannot relate to and whose answers I will not like. Watch the timing. Do not directly associate this with denominational division in the UMC. Do not take criticism personally. When people say "no," keep trying to get to yes. Do not take "no" personally. Reach out to people who are not church and what their image is and why? If they relate to white Jesus, it may explain why they do not like church. Or their image may be Christ crucified and that is why they do not like it.

D. What *must* I research before I begin prototyping?

Look back at how images have been used in major conflicts. What images of Jesus were used during the Nazi campaign? Have that knowledge in my wheelhouse to relate to people who lived through that and remember that. Learn about other symbols that connected Jesus such as the cross of Jesus being burned. Read *The Cross and Lynching Tree* by James Cone. When we see the cross, we think of Jesus, but others think of racism. Look through next year's lectionary texts and see what images of Jesus pop up. If you ease into this topic, it could be really good. Continue planting seeds to prep people to receive other images.







ONE-PAGE POST-WORKSHOP MESSAGE TO STAKEHOLDERS

Dear Stakeholder,

Thank you so much for your time speaking with me about my DMin thesis regarding imagery of Christ. Your insight was very valuable and helped me to think about it in a new way. I wanted to share with you a summary of my findings after the stakeholder's workshop and one on one interviews and share the direction that I am currently heading. If you would like to give any

additional feedback or make any corrections to my findings, I would appreciate it and welcome further conversation.

NPO: Bringing greater diversity of imagery of Christ into American churches can deepen Christians' understanding of Jesus' nature and character.

My three big ideas to address this opportunity:

1. A sermon series pairing Christian imagery with biblical characteristics of Jesus that begin with the familiar aspects of Jesus as peacemaker, then gradually introduce more challenging ideas such as Jesus as a social justice advocate.
2. A collection of stories from interviews with various people about their favorite image of Jesus, what it means to them, and how it has evolved throughout their faith journey.
3. A children's book that introduces a more diverse portrayal of Jesus teaching some of the more underrepresented images of Jesus laughing, dancing, singing, or napping.

My goal is to offer resources to equip churches and pastors to begin or further conversations surrounding the importance imagery plays in our faith journey. These ideas will help the audience connect to Jesus in a deeper way that allows them to see Jesus in their neighbor.

ONE-ON-ONE INTERVIEWS DOCUMENTATION

Interview #1

*Documentation of this interview may not reflect the full conversation. We were originally scheduled to conduct the interview via Zoom, but due to loss of Internet connection with the interviewee, the method of interview was changed to a phone conversation at the last minute. I recorded the conversation with a personal recording device to allow me to focus more on the conversation than note taking, and then due to technical difficulties that recording was deleted.

1. What is your favorite image of Jesus, and why?

-I don't have a single favorite image that I can think of. I like images that represent different cultural expressions. I really like the artwork of John August Swanson, like his *Last Supper*, or the great haul of fish (*The Great Catch*). I think my favorite of his is the riding into Jerusalem (*Entry Into the City*) to reflect the desperation of people. I'm not really big into realism, so I love the imagery and color of Swanson. I'm not a fan of most Italian art. I have an image of Jesus as a shepherd carrying a lamb down a mountain. It's an African American painter who went to France. I think imagery really tells how you resonate with the divine. I like images of Jesus kneeling in the garden. There's one of the virgin Mary holding Jesus as an infant, and how feet are crossed on the cross, and his hand is held in the three fingers of the Trinitarian blessing. It shows the infant as a vulnerable human while also foreshadowing in the reflection.

2. A lot of imagery seems to be humanity making God/Jesus in our own image as opposed to us seeing ourselves in God's image. Do you think this is helpful or harmful to create Jesus in our image?

-I think it's helpful because there's this resonance of someone who looks like me.

3. After reading the summary of the Stakeholder's Workshop, with what do you agree?

-All of it.

4. Is there anything you disagreed with or think we may have gotten wrong?

-No, I don't think so.

5. Are there any biases that you noticed that I am not attending to?

-If there are I have the same ones, so none that I can articulate.

6. Is there anything else that I should be thinking through that has not already been mentioned?

-I think it would be great if you could figure out a way to expose people to new things and talk about what you find compelling and how we might think differently.

-Work toward a both/and approach. Don't take away any one image but add new ideas to what's already out there. We usually gravitate toward one person of the Trinity, and we get an unbalanced understanding of God. Find a way to reteach the ancient symbols of the Trinity with the three interlinked circles.

7. Do you have any ideas for further projects or solutions that might be helpful, that weren't already listed in the summary?

-We need to figure out how to challenge churches to become patrons of art. St Luke's in Windermere Orlando has done a good job of commissioning artists to create imagery and I think we should support that. There's also the Greek Orthodox Cathedral on Clairmont Rd (Atlanta) that has the tough looking Jesus mosaic. There are Catholic churches with pictures of gladiators and babies being killed. It's a different type of image than most of us are used to seeing.

8. What do you think is the best way to explore this project knowing that people may be resistant to diverse images?

-Start with smaller images like the bulletin covers for Advent and Lent. Pull in interesting art that speaks to the scriptures and theme each week and tells the story through imagery.

Interview #2

1. After looking over the Stakeholder Workshop Summary, with what do you agree or disagree?

-I do not disagree with anything. The expectations and objections rang true so there are no surprises there.

2. What am I missing?

-The focus seems to be more on finding a representation of Jesus that would work for the black community. It would work better not to have one common historical image. Everyone has their image ingrained/enrained in their brain. To take it away would be traumatic. Martin Luther King,

Jr. for many people of the Black Messiah, but just as many black churches would not have that image of MLK.

-Help people explore images they are not familiar with that might broaden their horizons.

3. Do you have a favorite image?

-Originally *Laughing Jesus* was one of my favorites because he was not really well defined in the painting. It is a bit fuzzy. You can read a lot into that. It is neither blond haired/blue-eyed or Arab or Hispanic. It is just a man. He is laughing with a wide, open-mouthed laugh. I see him as a bringer of joy that nothing else brings. He shares and teaches that joy.

-Another image comes from the PBS show with Bill Moyers and Josie Campbell about myth and religious topics. Campbell was a nonbeliever but loved Bible stories as myth. The image of the Gnostic Gospel Jesus at the Last Supper said that they began to dance and sing.

4. What are the potential blind spots that I best explore?

-We all have a natural bias of images we formed as children. I embrace a much more human Jesus. I imagine he was probably very popular with women, and he liked them back.

-Part of us likes Jesus as peacemaker and reconciler the way he taught. But also, as a guy who can bring it; someone with courage and will; strategic thinking, who would push back to create conflict. He was Alpha and Omega, Both/And. He was tough on Peter.

-I picture Jesus as tall, muscular, and strong. I picture him as I would have liked him to be. He could hold his own in a fight if needed. That is reassuring. The greatest strength ascribed is someone who can hear a person he disagrees with and be at war with, and still respect and love them.

-Have you heard of *The Last Temptation of Christ*? The book has more detail than the movie. I can relate to that image.

5. Anything else I should examine?

-Think back to the confirmation classes and your time with the youth. Have they (teenagers) come up with any different images? Do they have better ideas based on a modern image of Jesus? Is there a LGBTQIA+ image? Would Jesus be non-binary?

-I imagine Jesus probably traveled with more than 12 people, including women, and was able to relate to all of them. His feminine side came out when needed; his masculine side came out with needed. That may tell more about his Carol Jung psych than where his heart was.

Interview #3

1. Do you have any questions about the opportunity or the workshop?

-No but can I just jump right in? I had a meeting with a clergy covenant group yesterday and in the room where we met there was a piece of art. It was a piece of wood with The Last Supper. Everyone who was there with Jesus, everything was white. It was carved in wood, but it was light brown. You could see the features and the features were Caucasian. That made me think. Then the admin for the office of clergy services was there greeting everyone and showed me a picture of a painting he

had seen, of a featureless, gray-faced Jesus wearing a golden crown with black streaks coming down over the eye and forehead.⁹³ Growing up I always saw the blond haired, blue-eyed Jesus at age 4-6 in Sunday school. I looked at it and wondered, "Who is this?" When you are in an all-black church, all black environment; it stands out. You want to ask questions but sometimes you are afraid of the answer you will get. Can anyone give me reasoning why this is so? Something I always looked at but never really questioned.

-In seminary I started serving local churches. I asked myself: what is working in me? What is going on?

-I did not have an image in my head as a child of what Jesus looked like. I just remember characteristics of what I heard in the Bible. I did not know geography. Hearing is one thing, but knowing the area and geography and features; I did not get all that early on. Once you get to seminary you start to wonder. I learned geography and the picture did not match.

2. Do you remember the first time you saw an image that you did relate to?

-Yesterday's painting with the gray-faced Jesus. I have seen other portraits of Jesus with my flesh tone and darker, but the faceless gray struck home. We are living in this day and age of black and white and you mix to get gray. It felt more like me because there was a beard, and the hair was short like mine. Not sure what the no eyes, nose, or mouth meant.

3. What made him Jesus? Was it the crown?

-It was the gray. Many times we don't like to live in the gray area. We want to be all black all white. Getting to the gray means we are really interconnected, really intertwined and working on this thing together.

4. Are there any characteristics of Jesus that you think are underrepresented?

-Is liberation theology talked about enough? Not coming from the pastor to the church. Before that can be shared, there needs to be some type of snippet or background or footnote because springing it on people may cause an insurrection too quickly. Liberation is not just for African American's only. It's for the malnourished; those who need housing; those who are homeless. Frame it not just to include African Americans but all people. That may be a great way to approach it.

5. During our workshop there was a conversation that went like this: "Black theology and white theology is very different. The black church is more of a community; this is who we are as a people. The white church is more: this is who I am as a person. The white church is living to get to eternity and bringing heaven to earth now. The black church is escaping from current hell on earth." Do you agree or disagree?

-I do not agree. The black community tries to make Jesus as personal as they can. They don't want to escape; we just want the freedom, liberty, and justice that all persons should have. That's in work, and in the church. We want it to be noticed and want it to happen.

⁹³ He did not know the artist's name or title, but after he sent me a picture I was able to find it. The artist is Donice Bloodworth, Jr. and is a local artist in Decatur, GA. The image is titled, "Naturally King Blue." <https://www.pinterest.com/pin/433401164150870380/>.

What would that look like in the church?

-That's when you have a gray church. That's when the church will become gray.

If the church were all colors that would be great. Getting us to that greatness is the challenge. Do we really want to get to that greatness or is it just him discerning for his people? Not everyone wants gray. Some still want black and white only.

I was reading David Swanson's book on Redis discipling White America, and he said that you can't just force diversity. You have to teach it through discipleship first. What do you think about that?

-White people are trying to dictate what an event should look like. You have to be mindful. We're not here to overtake, dismantle, and alter the structure of something that's already working. If we're going to do this, it needs to be through collaboration. We have a lot of work to do.

6. It seems like a lot of people relate to a Jesus that looks like them, and sometimes we make God/Jesus in our own image, instead of seeing ourselves in God's image. Is it ok to make God in our image, or is that arrogant?

-It's not arrogant because we've been brushed with that white brush too long. We are made in God's image. It's the image and that image is a reflection. We need to see all these reflections are still part of the body of Christ. My brown, my mahogany, my purple skin. We're still humanity.

7. Any ideas for further projects or solutions that might be helpful?

-We are social media people. Images. Images will start a conversation. Create a gallery on an Instagram page. People will look for 3-5 seconds at that image and form a conclusion that will start conversations. Why is that picture there? It stirred up something in the person. Social media is where we are. It catches our sight. Images to share on social media. Give the title and name of the artist but maybe not any more description. It will peak someone's curiosity to dig a little deeper.

-What if you could use me as an example? Find an artist that could take my image as a child up through seminary that portrayed the white Jesus having a different Jesus that doesn't have any features but it's still white. Then transitioning it to the one that caught my attention in the gray one. Not be white but start getting to a flesh tone. Trying to decipher it. Now it's gray. From white, flesh tone, to gray. We're in that gray moment in our lives. That's my transformation of how I identify with Jesus now. It gives people an opportunity to show how important images are and how even authentic images can change as our faith grows.

8. What's the best way to explore this project, knowing people will be resistant?

-Do you have a group in North Georgia or outside NGA that includes persons of color? Do you have a core group who is supportive and nurturing? Collaborating with them and sharing information and images the same time could really help. Other people could be sharing the same type of thing encouraging people to open their minds to the possibilities of who Jesus is.

8. Are there any biases I'm not tending to?

-Is there a cross somewhere in the sanctuary? Images are one thing. The cross symbolizes that humanness dying for all sins. I love seeing a cross that doesn't have a figure on it. The cross helps to center me. I don't feel welcome in a place that doesn't have a cross. It has to play a roll somewhere in this life of the church. I need a cross first, then the gray image of Jesus next.

9. Any additional resources I should consider?

-I can send an email later if I think of any.

10. Anything else you want to share?

-Pray that all you've done will become available to more people. These have been on my mind all through ministry and I have never had a chance for open dialogue. Create spaces for that open dialogue.

Interview #4

1. Did you have a favorite image growing up or a first memory of an image, and how has that evolved over the years?

-I don't know if it was the Sallman but there was a similar image growing up. There were two kinds of visuals I remember: that, and a wood carving of The Last Supper, so no ethnic or racial particularities to that one. Now we don't have any in our home. The one I sent you from the church in Birmingham, the Wales Window and another one that I really like from the Southside of Chicago is St. Sabina Catholic Church (Mural Centerpiece). We live in the Southside of Chicago, mostly African American, with churches over 100 years old.

I'm finding that it's fairly common for black churches to have images of white Jesus. Do you know if that's typical in Chicago?

-I think that is less common in urban spaces than it is in rural communities. I don't think it would be impossible to have white Jesus in a black church, but I cannot remember seeing one in any of the churches that I've been in, which is quite a few.

2. Looking at all the imagery of White Jesus, Black Jesus, Asian Jesus, etc. It feels as if we are making Jesus in our own image as opposed to seeing ourselves in the image of God. We often prefer an image that we relate to...do you see that as helpful or harmful or are both necessary?

-It depends on social location. For those of us in the majority culture who are used to seeing ourselves depicted everywhere it is very helpful to see Jesus as NOT European. It serves as a reminder that our norm is not neutral. It's not normal for everyone. For minoritized communities it's incredibly helpful to see Jesus representing their ethnicity and culture because it's not their norm. They typically don't see themselves represented not only in the local culture but particularly in Christianity. I could make a case for both, but I think a lot of it depends on the starting point.

3. The goal of this conversation is to gain more ideas of possible projects to help explore this opportunity. Many people who are used to being in white churches have images that are very meaningful to them. If there is any indication that we're trying to take that away they're going to be very resistant. How do we either ease into this approach? I'm looking for 3 possible projects to prototype next semester including a sermon series (different global images or different characteristics of Jesus), an art exhibit with an invitation to create their own, and a storybook paired with images from people and how their image has evolved, or even a children's book...are there any that you feel would be more/less helpful or any new ideas you would want to share?

-Yeah, I love all of those. I'm all about the multi-pronged approach when it comes to congregations. There's no one size fits all. I think we can tend to overestimate the power of a sermon when it comes to formation stuff; we need more than the sermon. One of the things I encounter when I work with white churches is if we're not really clear on why we're asking people to make this change, there can be a lot of resistance. How we communicate that "why" becomes very important. How it will get characterized is very important because being multicultural for the sake of multiculturalism will not go over well. We need to be able to articulate a really compelling and attractive "why" so people aren't initially thinking we're saying to them "you are bad" for having this image of white Jesus. The default to shame and defensiveness is so finely tuned so you don't want to dumb it down, you want to tell the truth, but whatever the method is going to be, you want people to think, "this is actually interesting to me, or this is an opportunity to grow. I'm not being told I have to leave everything I love about Jesus behind." How we do that...I've seen some success when white people who have been very segregated get the chance to hear from Christians of color on these things—narrating their own experiences on this and why an image of a non-white Jesus might be helpful for their own development. Now this conversation is not theoretical but is coming from actual neighbors in the community who they know and are connected with.

4. During the workshop we talked about differences between the black and white communities. They made a statement that you may have some insight on. They said, "Black church is more of a community; this is who we are as a people. White church is more this is who I am as a person. White church is living to get to eternity and bringing heaven to earth now. Black church is escaping from the current hell on earth."

-Yes, absolutely. That totally tracks.

I'm not really sure what to do with that.

-It's a massive challenge. The projects you're talking about could potentially do some of that. One of the struggles with asking white people to genuinely love and care about people who they don't see themselves as being connected with. White Christians often see themselves having more in common with white non-Christians than other races. There's a spiritual development opportunity to ask white people to see themselves in the image of the brown or liberator Jesus and see that there are good reasons why other members of the body of Christ would resonate with an image like that. I'm not artistically inclined so this is a little out of reach for me, but I think it's a really intriguing way of coming from the back door with this question of individualism. You're sneaking in through this conversation looking at iconography in order to get white Christians to think beyond their own experiences.

5. So much of my faith development has come from classes I've taken on imagery of Christ in college and seminary, as well as my own travels around the world. I think if people get a taste of something new it will start to take away the fear of the unknown or the fear of the other. As we're talking through all of this, is there anything that you heard you really agree with that we should focus on?

-I didn't hear anything that didn't sound like it would be really great. One of the real challenges with white communities when we start introducing non-white images of Jesus, it could be certain months that are celebrating different ethnic groups, at some point we have to ask the question, "is there anything about whiteness worth celebrating?" As we start to elevate some of these others. There's a complicated question about white identity and what does it mean for these other images to be celebrated or to be thankful for these other images, there's a time to ask if there is anything worth celebrating whiteness. That's a hard conversation because I don't think there really is anything to

celebrate. The people facilitating these conversations will be very important. They would need to be prepared for those difficult questions and conversations where people think there should be a white heritage month.

6. Anything you disagree with or think we got wrong?

-No.

7. Any biases I'm not tending to?

-That's a tricky question. The answer is yes, but I've got my own too. There were no glaring things I saw that made me nervous about the project. This is why I think it's important for those of us who are white to be asking these questions because we know our own shadows but we also know these white spaces and so it can be tricky.

8. Any additional resources I should consider?

-James Cone's *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*. He engages with some artists in there that may be helpful.

-Gwendolyn Brooks has one or two poems about the crucifixion as a lynching that's pretty evocative of the imagination.

9. Any ideas for further projects or solutions that might be helpful?

-I don't think so.

10. If I were to do any characteristics of Jesus, are there any that are underrepresented (liberator, Jesus laughing, etc., Jesus mad, etc.)?

-This is not a particular characteristic, so disregard if not helpful, but I think that when white people begin engaging with some of these questions about race and racial injustice, we can make an assumption that most of the work is around resistance or a militant stand your ground approach, no justice, no peace, etc. We see some of those images. My experience actually in communities of color there is often important themes of joy and praise that escape the white assumption about what should be represented. What is absolutely happening in these places is resistance and liberation for sure, but also a lot of joy and celebration that are important.

10. Would any of these formats be more helpful for the church than others (sermon series, curriculum podcast, etc.) ?

-A few things...what is the particular goal for the congregation and secondly where the congregation is around some of these conversations. Those will bring some clarity about whether or not there is enough understanding already to do a sermon series around this or whether we are we starting at ground zero and need to start with a book discussion or watch movies together or Sunday school as opposed to sermon series. Maybe we throw a potluck and conversation with a Latino congregation. This is not one size fits all, we have to really be contextual with these congregations and find out where they are, because if we don't we actually make things worse. Even if there were a way for your project to share that this is not a one-size approach—what would you say to them to help them know where to start? So, what is the pre-work that needs to be done for each pastor as they decide where to begin? Clergy have not been prepared for that. They've been prepared to start with a book/Bible study and be ready to start, but there's not as much

confidence around doing the more cross-cultural missionary work in a congregation. Something like that could be really useful.

11. Anything other questions I'm not asking yet or anything else you want to share?

-The thing about all this work that's so good is the relationships that it leads to. That's not the goal; the goal is to move the needle in terms of injustice. But the great gift we get from this is the surprising friendships and relationships that grow are wonderful. Don't do this work in isolation. It's geared toward white churches and is necessary, but there's a way we can't completely do it on our own as white people, so whenever there are opportunities to and invite feedback and conversation with people of color is a really good thing.

Paste your Design Workshop Report milestone into this appendix, less the cover page. No other changes are necessary to the document, as it serves as a milestone that has already been passed. The appendices will not be reviewed for Turabian compliance or style.

Appendix D—Milestone 4

Design Research Report

PROTOTYPE SUMMARY AND FINDINGS

Prototype 1

Prototype Description: I created a Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/facingjesus>) and Instagram account (https://www.instagram.com/facing_jesus/) that focused on sharing imagery of Christ and encouraged colleagues and church members to interact and share the account. I posted a variety of images with background information on what each image represented, or posed an open-ended question to invite an audience response.

NPO Statement: Many Christian churches have Americanized Jesus by removing his authentic ethnicity in art and imagery. While this may make him more relatable to white audiences, it alienates and excludes many diverse audiences, further supporting the concept of white supremacy and damaging the nature of Christ as an advocate for the marginalized and minorities.

Research Question: Has the predominantly white imagery of Jesus throughout many American churches caused harm or confusion to people who do not present as white? What characteristics are people looking for in relating to a particular image of Jesus?

Assessment Benchmarks: The Instagram account reached a total of 25 followers, 20 from people I know, and 5 from unknown accounts. It received 60 likes and 13 comments across 22 posts. The Facebook account has 41 followers and 26 people who have liked the page. It received 98 likes, 25 comments, and 2 shares across 36 posts. Facebook insights report 901 people reached and 311 post engagements. I posted an invitation on Facebook to offer private feedback by answering a series of questions and nobody took the opportunity. I asked 15 people individually to respond to the questions, and 10 gave feedback, which is posted in the appendices.

Participant Description: It is hard to tell the demographic of the “organic” accounts that have followed, but of the accounts I know, the majority of those commenting and liking are white. Most of them are pastors or active churchgoers of various ages.

Learning Summary: Duplicate posts shared to my personal page received an additional 123 likes, 36 comments, and 6 shares, which shows that more established pages with more long-term followers are more effective than building a following from scratch on a new page. Facebook allows for more types of posts to be shared including videos, articles, and blog posts, compared to Instagram only allowing photo posts. More time and regular posting could help build the audience. I averaged 1 new follower for every post on Instagram. Adding hashtags to posts increases their chances of popping up in searches on certain topics. Participants responded best to posts that made them feel something (anger, discomfort, passion) or presented images they had not seen before or concepts they had not considered before. They were more likely to like and comment after others had responded.

Most Important Discovery: It takes a lot of vulnerability to create dialogue on social media pages. The reflection questions for each image might be better answered in a face-to-face setting where a small group has built community and trust to share openly.

Prototype 2

Prototype Description: I created a blog (<https://facing-jesus.com/>) that focused on sharing images of Christ and stories around three categories: artists creating diverse imagery and their inspiration, individuals whose image of Jesus has changed as their faith developed, and churches who changed their imagery after reflecting on what story their church imagery was telling.

NPO Statement: Many Christian churches have Americanized Jesus by removing his ethnicity in art and imagery. While this may make him more relatable to white audiences, it alienates and excludes many diverse audiences, further supporting the concept of white supremacy and damaging the nature of Christ as an advocate for the marginalized and minorities.

Research Question: Has the predominantly white imagery of Jesus throughout many American churches caused harm or confusion to people who do not present as white? What characteristics are people looking for in relating to a particular image of Jesus?

Assessment Benchmarks: <https://facing-jesus.com/> has received 552 overall views and 301 visitors across 7 stories, including 5 subscribers to the blog in just over a month. The majority of views were a direct link from the Facebook page, with a small amount coming from search engines and the Instagram account.

Participant Description: The blog has received visits from people in 10 countries with the majority of interaction from the United States, with South Africa and Ireland being the next largest numbers of participants. Four of the subscribers are people I know, all white women ranging from 40's to

60's, and one unknown subscriber, also a woman. The only comments on the blog (not individual posts shared to Facebook) are from a white man my age. I asked 15 individuals to answer questions giving feedback and 10 responded as noted in the appendices.

Learning Summary: The more controversial the post, the more views it receives. The story that received the most views, 105, was "Barbie Jesus" and shared the story of an African American female pastor sharing her dislike of the White Jesus imagery she grew up with in her Black church, and calling out the racism in the church for idolizing such imagery. This post was also shared on the blog, Facebook page, my personal page, and her personal page. Being able to tag the storyteller on Facebook helps get additional views who may not have yet found the Facing Jesus page. The second highest post with 55 views was "A New Last Supper" sharing the story of a church that commissioned an original piece of art to display in their church in an attempt to broaden their hospitality in a diverse community. The third highest post with 51 views was an artist sharing his story of quitting the ministry to become a full time artist, emphasizing how images can have a quicker and deeper impact than words.

Most Important Discovery: Controversial topics or new images draw more attention. Creating an organic following takes time, so having storytellers with an established audience such as Joya's Facebook page and NakedPastor's Facebook page, helps draw in views. People relate better to personal stories of transformation than they do information sharing about a particular artist or artwork.

BACKGROUND RESEARCH ESSAY ON THE EMERGING SOLUTION

The Need for Diverse Imagery

"So God created humanity in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. God blessed them, and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply.'"⁹⁴ God created humanity in God's image, which means that just as God is a creative being, so is humanity. The command to be fruitful and multiply was not simply an encouragement to populate the earth with more people but was an invitation to become co-creators with God. Artist Erwin Raphael McManus claims, "we are created by God and created by God to create, [so] the divine process must inform our process."⁹⁵ When we create art, imagery, words, and ideas, we are living into our calling as beings created in the image of God. Just as all of humanity is diverse in a variety of ways, our creations of art and imagery should reflect that diversity.

⁹⁴ Genesis 1:27-28, NRSV.

⁹⁵ Erwin Raphael McManus, *The Artisan Soul: Crafting Your Life into a Work of Art*. (New York: HarperOne, 2012), 107.

The psalmist celebrates how well God knows us: "For it was you who formed my inward parts; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you, for I am wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; that I know very well."⁹⁶ Similarly, we should reflect how well we know God through our creations of art and imagery. When an individual or church focuses only on one image or one type of image of God and Jesus, they are limiting their understanding of who God is and who we were created to be. Art gives us an opportunity to tell the story of Christ in a broader way that may not be fully articulated in scripture alone and serves as a needed compliment to preaching and teaching the word.

While Jesus did call for belief without physical witness when he said, "'Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe,'"⁹⁷ we recognize that most of our imagery of Christ has been created without ever having seen him. Yet imagery has a way of both affirming what we believe by putting our thoughts into visuals, and inviting others to believe by making an unknown God more known through relatable stories and images. McManus encourages everyone to understand themselves as creative beings with artistic souls who can help bring light to the spiritual: "We artisans are created to transform the invisible into the visible."⁹⁸ Faith artist Makoto Fujimura confirms, "artists can open new doors of theological illumination in sharing what Christians call the Good News of the gospel to a world that has only a dim idea, if any, of what is so good about it. Simply spreading our wings of art to take flight, we 'prove' that gravity, or God, exists."⁹⁹ Imagery expands and strengthens our understanding of who Jesus is, which is why it is so crucial to gain as full an understanding as possible of Jesus' many characteristics through a variety of diverse images.

In ancient cathedrals it seemed more common to commission artists to create frescos, mosaics, paintings, icons, tapestries, stained glass windows, and other Christian imagery to help tell the story of Christ. Many people were illiterate and would rely on the storytelling of the art to help shape their faith. Once congregations became more literate and scripture became more accessible, the importance of creating new artwork seemed to fade a bit. One interviewee posed the question, "How do we challenge churches to become patrons of art again?"¹⁰⁰ McManus agrees that "all art has an underlying narrative for which it advocates; all art is a declaration of meaning or the lack of it; all art is created for both self-expression and for the extension of self. Art changes the world,

⁹⁶ Psalm 139:13-14, NRSV.

⁹⁷ John 20:29, NRSV.

⁹⁸ Erwin Raphael McManus, *The Artisan Soul: Crafting Your Life into a Work of Art*. (New York: HarperOne, 2012), 93.

⁹⁹ Makoto Fujimura, *Art and Faith: A Theology of Making*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2020), 4.

¹⁰⁰ For confidentiality purposes, interviewees within the Background Research Essay are not named unless they had given written consent to be published. Interviewees are included in References without identifying context.

which is why art cannot be left in the hands of an elite few.”¹⁰¹ Worship art can also add another layer of meaning, as many people who have long-term favorite images of Jesus Another strength of continuing to add imagery comes from former Presbyterian pastor and artist David Hayward: “Art has the power to shock or surprise us. With words our minds build up all these defenses and we come with our prejudices, assumptions, and opinions. Art often bypasses those defenses.”¹⁰² Today, our churches need a fresh look at Christian imagery to continue reaching new generations and breaking down barriers to hospitality by embracing the full image of Christ in a variety of ways and a diversity of options.

Artist’s Inspiration

Throughout my research it was very difficult to get a personal audience with many professional artists. Most of the modern artists who are active and gaining popularity today offer a chance to contact them, but requests are frequently met with a host team responding that the artist is too busy to connect. Occasionally the host team asked for clarification about what my goal was in seeking an interview and how the information would be used, and that often led to a long delay in hearing back before usually receiving a response that an interview was not available.

A few of my personal interviews with people sharing stories about their favorite images or how their image had changed during their faith development led me to discover new artists and imagery. Without getting responses from the artists, I was hesitant to share their work on social media without permission. However, I scoured through their Instagram accounts to learn a bit of background on the images that were shared with me by the storytellers’ favorites. One artist I found after another church had shared her imagery is Jess at <https://saltandgoldstore.com/>. She has a beautiful series of works portraying Jesus washing various people’s feet called The Footwashing Series. In it Jesus is often the same, brown skinned, kneeling down and washing someone’s feet. The subject whose feet are being washed changes and portrays a wide variety of people, including extreme opposites such as Presidents Biden and Trump. Jess responded that she was not available for an interview, but her imagery was inspired by the TV show The Chosen.

Whitney Austin is a local artist in Charlotte, NC who created “Glorious” (<https://www.instagram.com/p/Ca9-Z0fuLHT/>): an image of Jesus that portrays Jesus as African American with textured hair and seems to be inspired by Revelation 1:14 describing Christ’s skin and eyes, “his eyes were like a flame of fire, his feet were like burnished bronze.”¹⁰³ Based on her descriptions on Instagram, this painting seems to be inspired by her baptism.

¹⁰¹ Erwin Raphael McManus, *The Artisan Soul: Crafting Your Life into a Work of Art*. (New York: HarperOne, 2012), 106.

¹⁰² David Hayward, personal interview by Julie Schendel, Zoom, April 8, 2022.

¹⁰³ Revelation 1:14-15, NRSV.

Another interviewee, whose story inspired the idea to collect stories from people whose image has changed as their faith developed, shared with me an image that had a profound impact on him. He is African American and grew up in the Black church, but as a child was only exposed to images of White Jesus. He recently saw an image that appears to be by artist Donice Bloodworth Jr. entitled "Naturally King" that depicts a gray featureless face wearing a gold crown: (<https://www.pinterest.com/pin/825425437965009575/>).

When I asked the storyteller "what makes this Jesus? Is it the crown?" he replied, "The gray." He was so inspired to see an image that didn't paint specific features and didn't depict Jesus as Black or White, but as a combination of the two, that this image touched his heart and inspired him to dream about how the church could come together. He sent me this image without knowing the artist or title. Upon further research I found the artist, and based on his other imagery of similar featureless gray faces, I do not think the artist intended this to be an image of Jesus. This image differs so much from his other paintings entitled "Black Jesus I" (<https://www.deviantart.com/dacre8iveone/art/Black-Jesus-I-59403784>) and "Black Jesus II" (<https://www.deviantart.com/dacre8iveone/art/Black-Jesus-II-69641876>).

What makes this image so powerful is that the storyteller saw Jesus in something that was not originally seeking to portray Jesus. He saw Jesus in an image of humanity. This shows how art is really up to interpretation and can mean so many different things to different people. Fujimura affirms the idea that art is up to interpretation and can have a variety of meanings, but that art is intended to be discussed: "Artists know instinctively that no discussion is purely an exchange of information. The moment we start discussing an idea, we use words, and words involve interpretation, metaphors, and expressions that stir the imagination."¹⁰⁴ The same can be true of scripture and faith development, which is why it is so important to have discussions around scripture and Christian imagery, and not just take either at face value.

Changing Images through Growing Faith

Inviting a congregation or even an individual to consider a new image of Christ can be difficult, especially when someone has a lifelong faith and has attached to a particular image that has significant meaning to them. Some of our imagery may even be instilled in us from our parents and what we were taught as children. Doctoral student Jennifer Zaha argued in her dissertation:

One's God-image can be impacted by many different factors, [but] the parent-child relationship is one of the greatest influences on the development of one's images of God. For instance, a child who grew up with a nurturing mother may have a greater tendency to view God as being nurturing.

¹⁰⁴ Makoto Fujimura, *Art and Faith: A Theology of Making*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2020), 24.

In contrast, one who grew up with a harsh and judgmental parent may experience God as being harsh and critical.¹⁰⁵

She further argued that there was a difference between one's image of God and one's concept of God, as "a God concept is a cognitively and consciously constructed understanding of God as opposed to a God image that is a psychological working internal model of the sort of person that the individual imagines God to be."¹⁰⁶ When people are beginning to see new imagery for Jesus, they have a difficult time differentiating between their favorite image, their concept of God/Jesus, and their image of God/Jesus, which is what leads to the need to defend their passion for a particular piece of art.

Fujimura believes "imagination, like art, has often been seen as suspect by some Christians who perceive the art world as an assault upon traditional values. These expectations of art are largely driven by fear that art will lead us away from the 'truth' into an anarchic freedom of expression." Imagining Jesus in a new characteristic or image conflicts with long-held beliefs of their "true" image. There was tension from individuals commenting on Facebook when their image of Jesus was being critiqued. I felt as if the critique of a piece of artwork was actually a critique of the actual Christ. Holding onto such a strong passion for one image can also be dangerous when an individual can no longer separate the image from the man Jesus. This was especially seen in the image portrayed in the 1973 version of *Jesus Christ Superstar* with actor Ted Neeley.

Ted Neeley, a blond-haired blue-eyed white man, portrayed the character Jesus Christ in Andrew Lloyd Webber's rock opera *Jesus Christ Superstar*, both in the film version, and in various Broadway and stage versions, for over 40 years. Throughout that time he gained a massive following of fans and enthusiasts, some of whom had trouble differentiating the actor from Jesus Christ himself. Johan Roeland and Joren Ijzerman conducted a study on Neely's fans and found that many of them "Neeley has had a profound influence on the way they think about Jesus. His physical appearance serves as a mental image for Jesus...also as an image of Jesus with regard to his character." They even found fans asking Neeley to bless them and claim healing after being in his presence. In these instances, a new image is needed in order to help individuals differentiate between the actors and the divine Jesus. Several additional actors have portrayed Jesus in the past 50 years that *Jesus Christ Superstar* has been running, including a racially diverse cast with John Legend playing Jesus in the televised *Jesus Christ Superstar Live in Concert* version, and Aaron LaVigne in the current *Jesus Christ Superstar 50th Anniversary Tour*. Each actor brings a different portrayal of Jesus both physically and characteristically.

Any time someone holds onto a single image of Jesus, there is a danger of this type of idol worship, where one piece of art, one actor, or one image can become someone's only connection with Jesus.

¹⁰⁵ Jennifer L.Zaha *Prayer, God-image, and Moralistic Therapeutic Deism* 71, no. 10 (2010): 6493, p. 6.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid*, p. 7.

When I spoke to various pastors who have been working toward more diverse imagery in their congregations, they spoke about the need for change to happen intentionally and over a period of time. Many of them are working to connect with congregations who are racially different from their own in order to allow each congregation to form connections cross-racially. There is also a lot of racial reconciliation work being done. Pastor and author Mark Deymaz recognizes that breaking down racial barriers must be done intentionally and with a multifaceted approach including music, "pictures, banners, and other visual media must also be considered to ensure that these too, promote a spirit of inclusion."¹⁰⁷

MVP (MOST VIABLE PROTOTYPE)

My most viable prototype has become a hybrid of the two prototypes. The Instagram account was the least helpful prototype because it drew the least attention. It was limited to offering image only and was not capable of sharing blog posts and other articles that were more likely to welcome conversation from followers. However, the Instagram account did draw the most unique followers who found the site through search engines as opposed to established friends already following my personal account. The blog was the most helpful to share stories of transformation and add more depth for readers to consider imagery more deeply due to the background information and personal nature to the stories. The Facebook page was the most helpful to tie all three together by including imagery, blog posts, and additional media. It also had the biggest draw when shared on other personal Facebook accounts who had an established following.

Based on the feedback received from participant responses, I will look for a way to continue drawing interest for a larger audience online, while also working toward formatting this information in a teachable curriculum that can translate to more personal settings. The social media accounts were structured to create a community that welcomed communication and feedback, while the blog was structured to share information in a more one-sided manner. Creating a study guide or curriculum that can be taught in churches could better garner a safe community where communication and feedback can be shared in a less public and vulnerable environment. Offering this information in a form that allows for face-to-face interaction instead of online will help target the conversations into churches where transformation needs to happen. It will also help those congregations come up with a plan for how to move forward to make such changes that lead to more inclusive hospitality.

¹⁰⁷ Mark Deymaz, *Building a Healthy Multi-Ethnic Church*. (Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 2020), 113.

Appendix E—Project Appendix Documentation

Appendix E.1: Advent Devotional

The Advent Devotional covers the four weeks of Advent. The introduction and first week are included in the Doctoral Project section. The remaining three weeks and footnotes are included here.

SUNDAY

4



Mary's Song, 2016. Artist- © Lauren Wright Pittman,
<http://www.lewpstudio.com/>. Used with permission.

Luke 1:46-55

And Mary said, "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed; for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name.

PEACE

His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty. He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, according to the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants forever."

- What is the first thing that catches your eye in this image? What details do you only notice upon further reflection?
- What is the strongest emotion being stirred within you as you see this image? Sit with that emotion for a few moments and try to discover what it is seeking to teach you.
- What is the artist seeking to portray? What is not being said?
- What is God revealing to you today as you look at this image?

From the artist, Lauren Wright Pittman:

"When I read through the Magnificat, I was overwhelmed with the gravity of this moment. Her reaction to finding out that she, a young virgin, would birth the Son of the Creator of the universe was to sing a song of overflowing praise affirming God's goodness and sovereignty. It seems as if the entire universe revolved on the axis of this moment. Her song carried me to the creation narrative where God's very words materialize water and sky and light and animals and people... everything we know to be and will ever know. As I read the Magnificat, I imagined that her tones of adoration, melody of acceptance, and rhythm of awe ushered in the heartbeat of Jesus within her womb. Mary's song became the score for a new creation narrative. In this piece, I imagined all of creation embracing Mary in this moment as the creation narrative echoes in her womb." [5]

How does this image help you rethink the radical predictions Mary sang about? Where do you see these actions coming into play in Jesus' life?

MONDAY**5**

Mary and Elizabeth, Expecting. Artist–Carlye Daugird,
<https://www.carlyecreates.com/>. Used with permission.

PEACE

- What is the first thing that catches your eye in this image? What details do you only notice upon further reflection?
- What is the strongest emotion being stirred within you as you see this image? Sit with that emotion for a few moments and try to discover what it is seeking to teach you.
- What is the artist seeking to portray? What is not being said?
- What is God revealing to you today as you look at this image?

Second Look:

In Jesus' time, the expectations were for a Savior to come and liberate the people of Israel. They needed someone to bring peace to the oppression that was overwhelming the Jews. Instead of a mighty warrior, they welcomed an innocent newborn and had to continue to wait until he was grown for his true message to be revealed. Yet Mary knew exactly what would become of her young child. She sings of his prophecy before he is even born and has great expectations for the work he will do for the people of Israel. His cousin, John the Baptist, recognizes his greatness while still in the womb, leaping for joy as he senses Mary's arrival at Elizabeth's home.

What conversations do you imagine took place between Mary and Elizabeth while they stayed together during their pregnancies?

TUESDAY

6



Prince of Peace. Artist–David Hayward, ©nakedpastor.com. Used with permission.

Isaiah 9:6

For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. His authority shall grow continually, and there shall be endless peace for the throne of David and his kingdom. He will establish and uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time onward and forevermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.

PEACE

- What is the first thing that catches your eye in this image? What details do you only notice upon further reflection?
- What is the strongest emotion being stirred within you as you see this image? Sit with that emotion for a few moments and try to discover what it is seeking to teach you.
- What is the artist seeking to portray? What is not being said?
- What is God revealing to you today as you look at this image?

Second Look:

As many of his disciples would come to learn, following Jesus was often dangerous. He would challenge the status quo, debate with authority figures, and spread ideas that caused people to think in a new way. Scripture prophesied that he would become the Prince of Peace, and yet much of his life was filled with conflict and danger.

Nelson Mandela is credited with saying:

“Peace is not just the absence of conflict; peace is the creation of an environment where all can flourish regardless of race, color, creed, religion, gender, class, caste or any other social markers of difference.”[6]

In what ways was Jesus an instrument of peace?

Have you experienced a sense of danger or discomfort in your journey following Christ?

WEDNESDAY**7**

Israeli Arabs recreate the Nativity scene in Nazareth, December 2017
(Credit: Baz Ratner/ Reuters)[7]

- What is the first thing that catches your eye in this image? What details do you only notice upon further reflection?
- What is the strongest emotion being stirred within you as you see this image? Sit with that emotion for a few moments and try to discover what it is seeking to teach you.
- What is the artist seeking to portray? What is not being said?
- What is God revealing to you today as you look at this image?

PEACE

There is no shortage of Nativity scenes around the world. Christians often recreate that infamous scene through art and imagery, plays and live reenactments, bringing in children dressed in oversized bathrobes as shepherds or homemade tinsel halos as angels. Yet what might that first nativity scene have actually looked like?

Mary and Joseph probably had expectations about how they would welcome their first child, and it likely did not include traveling in the late stages of pregnancy, going through labor in an unknown place, and welcoming unexpected strangers who came to visit.

If we were to imagine Jesus being born in our time, how would this scene look differently? In what setting would it take place? What obstacles would the Holy Family face today?

THURSDAY

8



Scene of the Massacre of the Innocents, 1824. Artist–Léon Cogniet. Public domain. On view at the Museum of Fine Arts of Rennes.

Matthew 2:16-18

When Herod saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, he was infuriated, and he sent and killed all the children in and around Bethlehem who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had learned from the wise men. Then was fulfilled what had been spoken through the prophet Jeremiah: "A voice was heard in Ramah, wailing and loud lamentation, Rachel weeping for her children; she refused to be consoled, because they are no more."

PEACE

- What is the first thing that catches your eye in this image? What details do you only notice upon further reflection?
- What is the strongest emotion being stirred within you as you see this image? Sit with that emotion for a few moments and try to discover what it is seeking to teach you.
- What is the artist seeking to portray? What is not being said?
- What is God revealing to you today as you look at this image?

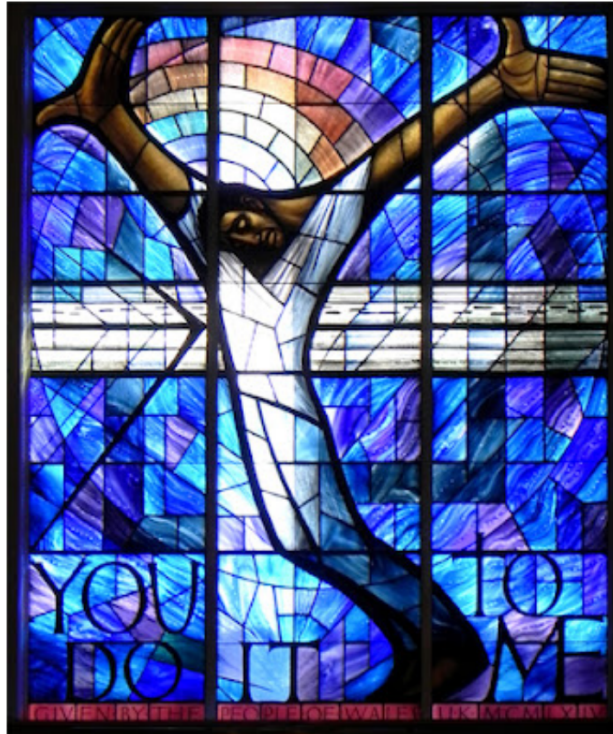
Second Look:

This scripture is one that is often passed over or read hastily in order to gloss over the horrific details. We know that Jesus was spared because an angel warned Joseph in a dream to take Mary and the baby and flee to Egypt. Yet how close of a call was it before they left their country for a strange new land? Did any of their friends or neighbors face the trauma and circumstances of being left behind while their children were hunted?

We imagine the birth of the Prince of Peace in a picturesque and beautiful way, yet the raw truth of the news of his birth threatened the power of royalty and leadership. In what ways are we still searching for peace from our government today?

FRIDAY

9



Wales Window, 1965. 16th Street Baptist Church, Birmingham, Alabama. Designed by John Petts.

16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama has become known around the world after experiencing great loss due to a bombing explosion one Sunday morning in 1963. Four young girls were killed and over 20 others were injured. According to writer Jon Eastwood, a Welsh stained glass artist read about the tragedy and offered to make a replacement window to help in the restoration of the church. The people of Wales rallied together to raise the funds needed and offered the window as a gift from their country. Eastwood says: "Petts' depiction of a black Christ is recognized throughout the world as one of the Civil Rights Movement's most iconic pieces of art and stands at the front of the rebuilt 16th Street Baptist Church. The right hand pushing away hatred and injustice, the left offering forgiveness. An overarching rainbow, representing diversity." [8]

PEACE

- What is the first thing that catches your eye in this image? What details do you only notice upon further reflection?
- What is the strongest emotion being stirred within you as you see this image? Sit with that emotion for a few moments and try to discover what it is seeking to teach you.
- What is the artist seeking to portray? What is not being said?
- What is God revealing to you today as you look at this image?

Second Look:

There is often tension between the expectation of peace, particularly on a Sunday morning in church, and the reality that peace does not always come without having first worked for it.

What are the tensions at work in your community that is keeping all people from experiencing peace?

What part are you playing in working toward justice and equality, forgiveness and peace in your midst?

SATURDAY**10**

Untitled, 2020. Artist—Ieva Slare and family. Pebbles and sea glass on sand, North Devon, England.[9]

PEACE

- What is the first thing that catches your eye in this image? What details do you only notice upon further reflection?
- What is the strongest emotion being stirred within you as you see this image? Sit with that emotion for a few moments and try to discover what it is seeking to teach you.
- What is the artist seeking to portray? What is not being said?
- What is God revealing to you today as you look at this image?

Sometimes we find God in unexpected places. Sometimes we encounter peace when we least expect it, or work hard to ensure that justice prevails and peace may be found. This nativity scene was created on a beach in the middle of the Covid pandemic by a family who wanted to encourage others. This and other pieces of artwork offered a bit of peace in the midst of a trying time.

Where do you look when you are searching for peace? What are you doing to actively bring about peace in your environment?

SUNDAY

11



IMary & Elizabeth, 2018. Artist- © Lauren Wright Pittman,
<http://www.lewpstudio.com/>. Used with permission.

Luke 1:39-45

In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leapt in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leapt for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord."

JOY

- What is the first thing that catches your eye in this image? What details do you only notice upon further reflection?
- What is the strongest emotion being stirred within you as you see this image? Sit with that emotion for a few moments and try to discover what it is seeking to teach you.
- What is the artist seeking to portray? What is not being said?
- What is God revealing to you today as you look at this image?

From the artist, Lauren Wright Pittman:

"Mary and Elizabeth affirm, comfort, and support one another in the unexpected, strange circumstances of their pregnancies. Elizabeth instantly recognizes that Mary is pregnant and is filled to the brim with the Holy Spirit, so much so that she exclaims that Mary is blessed among women and the mother of the Lord. What an amazingly confident and prophetic statement she makes. It is unclear, exactly, of the reason for Mary's visiting Elizabeth. She may have been seeking comfort or community, or she may have been wanting to offer comfort to Elizabeth. Whatever her intentions, it is clear that Mary is emboldened and empowered by Elizabeth's affirmations as she breaks into the Magnificat. It is as though Elizabeth's words, "Blessed is she who believed," creates space in Mary's heart to proclaim the broad implications of what is taking place within her womb. I wanted to depict the creative energy, communication, and power that was taking place in Mary and Elizabeth's wombs in this moment. Mary's womb swirls with the knitting together of the One through whom all things came into being, while Elizabeth's womb radiates joy with the leaping of the one who will spend his life directing attention, awe and reverence to the One in Mary's womb." [10]

What does it mean to be filled with the Holy Spirit?

Think of a time when you have experienced such joy. How did you express it?

MONDAY

12



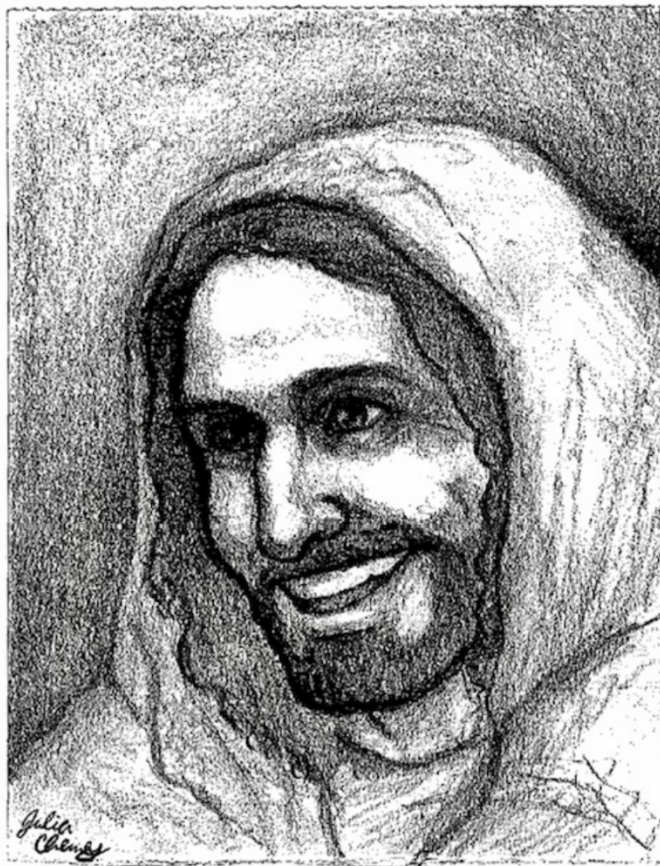
Millennial Nativity Set, 2016. Artists: Corey and Casey Wright,
www.modernnativity.com

- What is the first thing that catches your eye in this image? What details do you only notice upon further reflection?
- What is the strongest emotion being stirred within you as you see this image? Sit with that emotion for a few moments and try to discover what it is seeking to teach you.
- What is the artist seeking to portray? What is not being said?
- What is God revealing to you today as you look at this image?

JOY

This Nativity scene is far from traditional but imagines instead what the birth of Christ would look like in modern times. Mary and Joseph snap a selfie with their new baby. The wise men arrive on segways with gifts from Amazon. Other symbols hint at the hipster lifestyle in a distracted society.

Does this scene align with your imagining of a modern nativity? If so, what feels most relatable? If not, what styles or symbols would you replace?

TUESDAY**13**

Jesus Laughing. Artist: Julia Chenby

Luke 6:21a

Blessed are you who weep now, for you shall laugh. New American Standard Version

JOY

- What is the first thing that catches your eye in this image? What details do you only notice upon further reflection?
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- What is the artist seeking to portray? What is not being said?
- What is God revealing to you today as you look at this image?

So much of Jesus' life was filled with trouble and stress, yet scripture describes him as someone to whom crowds were drawn. His disciples followed him with few questions asked, and he welcomed children to come near. What are some moments where you imagine Jesus laughing? Was he serious all the time, or was he known to crack jokes and respond with sarcasm?

WEDNESDAY

14



When Heaven Sings Joy to the World. Artist–Carlye Daugird,
<https://www.carlyecreates.com/>. Used with permission.

Luke 2:8-14

In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger." And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!"

JOY

- What is the first thing that catches your eye in this image? What details do you only notice upon further reflection?
- What is the strongest emotion being stirred within you as you see this image? Sit with that emotion for a few moments and try to discover what it is seeking to teach you.
- What is the artist seeking to portray? What is not being said?
- What is God revealing to you today as you look at this image?

The angels approaching the shepherds brought great joy with their announcement and spread that enthusiasm to the shepherds. The shepherds were quick to leave in order to witness this miraculous event and found Mary, Joseph, and the baby. Once they left, they spread the good news to everyone they met and praised God for the angels' appearance.

What images of Jesus help to connect this newborn Savior with the lowly shepherds of the field? What stories of shepherds are told throughout other places in scripture?

THURSDAY**15**

Artist: Dale House. On view at Senoia United Methodist Church in Senoia, GA.

JOY

- What is the first thing that catches your eye in this image? What details do you only notice upon further reflection?
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- What is God revealing to you today as you look at this image?

Jesus' arrival is one that brought much attention to Mary and helped her to become one of the most loved and well-known people in history. She is often instantly recognizable in various forms of art around the world and is endlessly depicted with Jesus in her arms. In many traditions, Mary is portrayed as wearing blue, a color rich in symbolism of "truth and heavenly grace," but also known to express "heaven, hope, health, and servanthood." [11] Yet here the blue color is reserved for Jesus, and Mary is portrayed in pink. What might this color symbolize as it points to the Mother of Jesus?

What symbols do you notice that transcend both Christmas and Easter? What thoughts come to the surface as you explore the connection between the two?

FRIDAY**16**

Icon of Our Lady of Mercy, Caribbean. Artist unknown. On display at the Episcopal Ordination of Monsignor David Macaire as Archbishop of Saint Pierre and Fort-de-France in Martinique, March 2015.[12]

JOY

- What is the first thing that catches your eye in this image? What details do you only notice upon further reflection?
- What is the strongest emotion being stirred within you as you see this image? Sit with that emotion for a few moments and try to discover what it is seeking to teach you.
- What is the artist seeking to portray? What is not being said?
- What is God revealing to you today as you look at this image?

Second Look:

Iconoclasm, or the destruction of icons and religious art, has been much debated throughout Christian history. Those who are against Christian imagery believe that any depiction of Christ could lead to idolatry and cause the observer to worship the image instead of Jesus himself. Much of early Christian artwork was destroyed in order to prevent this distraction from happening. Yet many icons have been preserved and restored today, with newer images adding to the conversation. Gazing upon imagery of Christ can be a meaningful practice in our faith, as long as we remember that it is not Christ himself we are viewing, but simply a symbol or representation of him.

Are there any images in your life that have had a profound impact on your faith life? Is there ever a danger of that image becoming more sacred than symbolic?

SATURDAY

17



Nativity, 1996. ©Laura James. Used with permission.

Isaiah 9:2-7

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness—on them light has shined. You have multiplied exultation; you have increased its joy; they rejoice before you as with joy at the harvest, as people exult when dividing plunder. For the yoke of their burden and the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor, you have broken as on the day of Midian. For all the boots of the tramping warriors and all the garments rolled in blood shall be burned as fuel for the fire.

For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders, and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Great will be his authority, and there shall be endless peace for the throne of David and his kingdom. He will establish and uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time onward and forevermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.

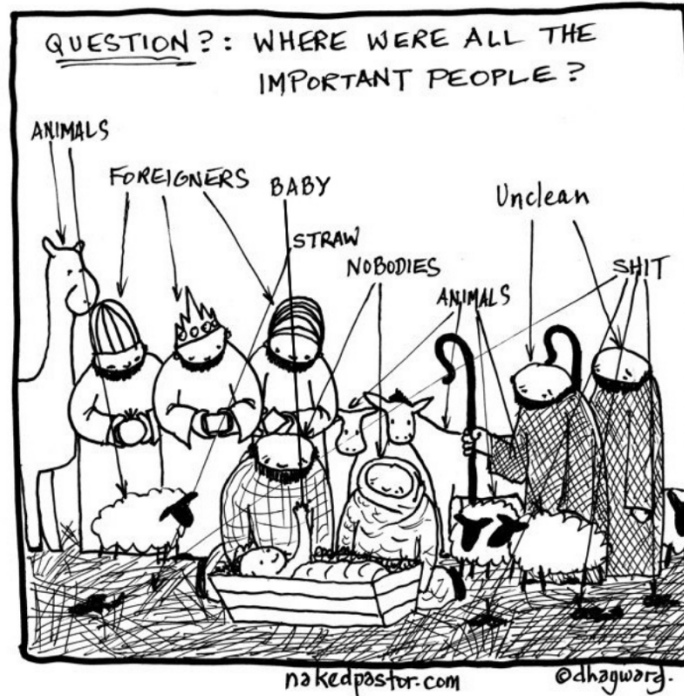
JOY

- What is the first thing that catches your eye in this image? What details do you only notice upon further reflection?
- What is the strongest emotion being stirred within you as you see this image? Sit with that emotion for a few moments and try to discover what it is seeking to teach you.
- What is the artist seeking to portray? What is not being said?
- What is God revealing to you today as you look at this image?

Joy to the world, the Lord has come! We celebrate and rejoice at the news of the birth of Jesus. How is that joy permeating in your life today?

SUNDAY

18



All the Important People. Artist–David Hayward, ©nakedpastor.com. Used with permission.

Titus 2:11-14

For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all, training us to renounce impiety and worldly passions and in the present age to live lives that are self-controlled, upright, and godly, while we wait for the blessed hope and the manifestation of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ. He it is who gave himself for us that he might redeem us from all iniquity and purify for himself a people of his own who are zealous for good deeds.

LOVE

- What is the first thing that catches your eye in this image? What details do you only notice upon further reflection?
- What is the strongest emotion being stirred within you as you see this image? Sit with that emotion for a few moments and try to discover what it is seeking to teach you.
- What is the artist seeking to portray? What is not being said?
- What is God revealing to you today as you look at this image?

Second Look:

Jesus' birth was unlike any other and his ministry reflected a message that took people by surprise. From his humble beginnings to his miracles, healings, and teachings, Jesus was always looking out for the ones who needed him most.

This image asks a very important question that reflects who Jesus would hang out with from the time of his birth until his death, resurrection, and ascension. His love for the humble, marginalized, and outcast became one of his greatest legacies. The important people were the ones with whom he surrounded himself. Who would they be today?

MONDAY**19**

Black Madonna, Prophecy and Promise. Artist—Rev. Dr. Donna Cox. On view at Five Rivers Medical Center in Dayton, Ohio. Used with permission.

LOVE

- What is the first thing that catches your eye in this image? What details do you only notice upon further reflection?
- What is the strongest emotion being stirred within you as you see this image? Sit with that emotion for a few moments and try to discover what it is seeking to teach you.
- What is the artist seeking to portray? What is not being said?
- What is God revealing to you today as you look at this image?

Second Look:

There is often tension between the cradle and the cross. We know from Mary's magnificat that she knew before Jesus was born how he would shake things up and transform the world. The love and adoration she felt for him was far greater than a mother's love for a child. She looked upon the face of her child and saw the promise of a Savior.

From the artist Rev. Dr. Donna Cox:

"Notice the cross on her earrings and her bracelet. Even while she holds the promise she knows the cross is coming." [13]

How does our understanding of Jesus change when we look at images of his birth foreshadowing his future?

TUESDAY

20



The Adoration of the Magi, ca. 1290-1300. Altenberg-an-der-Lahn, Hesse, Germany, stained glass. On view at The Met Cloisters, New York. Public domain.

Matthew 2:1-2, 9b-12

In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, asking, "Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage."

LOVE

...they set out, and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

- What is the first thing that catches your eye in this image? What details do you only notice upon further reflection?
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- What is the artist seeking to portray? What is not being said?
- What is God revealing to you today as you look at this image?

Second Look:

The magi, the wise men, or the strangers from the East play a significant role in the nativity story. Though many nativity sets include the magi near the infant's manger scene, it was likely it took them much longer to reach the child. Some traditions celebrate their arrival merely twelve days after his birth on Epiphany. Others imagine it took nearly two years to follow the star and travel the distance, a timeline which aligns with Herod's order to kill all first-born sons aged two and under. Regardless of the timing, the magi explored ancient prophecies and followed the signs that would bring them to Jesus. Upon their arrival, they worshiped him and celebrated his birth with gifts fit for a king.

How was adoration shown in Jesus' early days? How do we show our adoration for Christ today?

WEDNESDAY**21**

LOVE

Madonna and Child, 2013. Artist unknown, Ethiopian mosaic in the Basilica of the Annunciation, Nazareth, Israel. Royalty free.

- What is the first thing that catches your eye in this image? What details do you only notice upon further reflection?
- What is the strongest emotion being stirred within you as you see this image? Sit with that emotion for a few moments and try to discover what it is seeking to teach you.
- What is the artist seeking to portray? What is not being said?
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Second Look:

Another mosaic from the Basilica of the Annunciation, this image portrays Mary and Jesus together, most commonly referred to as the “Madonna and Child.” The term madonna comes from the Italian “ma donna,” which means “our lady.” It is used as a form of respect to address Mary.

When looking at images of Mary, what characteristic stands out most for you? What emotion does Mary most typically portray?

What do you think this image says about Ethiopian culture?

THURSDAY

22



LOVE

Presentation in the Temple, 1988. Artist–John August Swanson.
<https://johnaugustswanson.com/>. Used with permission.

Luke 2:22-23

When the time came for their purification according to the law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord (as it is written in the law of the Lord, "Every firstborn male shall be designated as holy to the Lord"), and they offered a sacrifice according to what is stated in the law of the Lord, "a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons."

- What is the first thing that catches your eye in this image? What details do you only notice upon further reflection?
- What is the strongest emotion being stirred within you as you see this image? Sit with that emotion for a few moments and try to discover what it is seeking to teach you.
- What is the artist seeking to portray? What is not being said?
- What is God revealing to you today as you look at this image?

From the artist, John August Swanson:

"Mary and Joseph take the child Jesus to the temple with the offering of two doves. This was the offering of the poorest. It was a symbol of thanksgiving for their firstborn. At the entrance they meet Simeon and Anna who are both old and waiting and praying in the temple. They both approach the family and honor the new born Jesus. Mary and Joseph stand amazed at the two elders Anna and Simeon as they take the baby in their arms." [14]

What signs and symbols do you notice in this image? What other stories are being told?

FRIDAY**23**

LOVE



Fleeing to Egypt. Artist–David Drake, nephew of the late Brother Laurence. Carved from fallen live oak trees after Hurricane Hugo in 1989. Located in the gardens of Mepkin Abbey, Moncks Corner, South Carolina.

Matthew 2:13-15

Now after they had left, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Get up, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I get you; for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him." Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother by night and went to Egypt, and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet "Out of Egypt I have called my son."

LOVE

- What is the first thing that catches your eye in this image? What details do you only notice upon further reflection?
- What is the strongest emotion being stirred within you as you see this image? Sit with that emotion for a few moments and try to discover what it is seeking to teach you.
- What is the artist seeking to portray? What is not being said?
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We often forget that at a young age, Jesus and his family became refugees fleeing from a country that was no longer safe for them. Even his birth was controversial due to the prophecies that foretold of his power, a power that was enough to threaten King Herod. This may have impacted his teachings later in life as his arms became a safe place for others who had been rejected by society.

What is the most difficult thing you have been called to do out of love for someone else?

The medium for this carving was born out of something tragic, and used to create something that tells a powerful story. How have you transformed some of your toughest tragedies into an expression of love and resilience?

SATURDAY

24



Madonna and Child: First Steps, 2008. Artist–Patricia Brintle, <https://www.patriciabrintle.com/>. Used with permission.

- What is the first thing that catches your eye in this image? What details do you only notice upon further reflection?
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LOVE

All Advent long we anticipate the birth of Christ. We celebrate his arrival on Christmas Eve as we sing Joy to the World! Then just two or three months later, we begin the season of Lent, where we prepare ourselves for his death and resurrection. The cycle of Jesus' birth, life, ministry, and death is one that seems to pass far too quickly. We miss many of the details of Jesus' boyhood and early days. Yet this beautiful imagery from Patricia Brintle gives us a moment to enjoy some of Jesus' earliest miracles...time with his mother, his first steps, and the light he brought into the world from the day he was born.

This Christmas Eve, let us sit with an image that invites us to stop for a moment and ponder this most holy child and all the love he brought into the world.

SUNDAY

25



Nativity of Christ Icon. Artist unknown. Royalty free.

Luke 2:12

This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.

Luke 23:53.

Then he took [the body of Jesus] down, wrapped it in a linen cloth, and laid it in a rock-hewn tomb where no one had ever been laid.

Isaiah 1:3

The ox knows its owner, and the donkey its master's crib; but Israel does not know, my people do not understand.

LOVE

- What is the first thing that catches your eye in this image? What details do you only notice upon further reflection?
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- What is God revealing to you today as you look at this image?

The birth of Christ was one that pointed forward to a time of liberation and freedom from oppression. It also pointed back as a fulfillment of ancient prophecies. This icon is rich in symbolism connecting the birth of Jesus, wrapped in bands of cloth, lying in a manger, and sheltered by a cave, which foreshadows his death, where he is once again bound in cloth and laid in a cave. It is a story that points toward the end even from the very beginning, and once it ends, points us back toward the beginning again. What signs and symbols do you notice in this icon? What symbols of hope, peace, joy, and love have you recognized this Advent?

As we celebrate the birth of Jesus this Christmas Day, let us rejoice at all of the ways we've been invited to see Jesus anew through artwork and imagery.

FOOTNOTES

All scriptural passages are from NRSV unless otherwise noted.

[1] Introduction: Douglas Kaine McKelvey, *Every Moment Holy*. (Nashville, TN: Rabbit Room Press, 2017), 83.

[2] Sunday November 27th: <https://rscj-anz.org/sr-annetts-cosmic-christ/>

[3] Wednesday Nov. 30th: Richards, J. Kirk, Light in the Wilderness, 2021, Oil and acrylic on panel, 5 x 5 x 0.25 in. J. Kirk Richards. Used with permission. The Book of Mormon Art Catalog, <https://bookofmormonartcatalog.org/catalog/light-in-the-wilderness-2/>.

[4] Saturday December 3rd: Sligting, Scott, A Perfect Brightness of Hope, 2020. The Book of Mormon Art Catalog, <https://bookofmormonartcatalog.org/catalog/a-perfect-brightness-of-hope/>.

[5] Sunday December 4th: Pittman, Lauren Wright. Marys Song, from Art in the Christian Tradition, a project of the Vanderbilt Divinity Library, Nashville, TN. <https://diglib.library.vanderbilt.edu/act-imagelink.pl?RC=57074> [retrieved February 13, 2023]. Original source: Lauren Wright Pittman, <http://www.lewpstudio.com/>.

[6] Tuesday December 6th: “Nelson Mandela Foundation.” n.d. [Db.nelsonmandela.org](http://db.nelsonmandela.org). http://db.nelsonmandela.org/speeches/pub_view.asp?pg=item&ItemID=NMS914&txtstr.

[7] Wednesday December 7th: <https://www.jpost.com/middle-east/in-pictures-see-how-the-middle-east-celebrates-christmas-519898>

FOOTNOTES

[8] Friday December 9th: <https://www.16thstreetbaptist.org/our-history/>, <https://www.birminghamtimes.com/2018/10/the-iconic-wales-window-inside-16th-street-baptist-church/>

[9] Saturday December 10th: <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-devon-59729000>

[10] Sunday December 11th: Pittman, Lauren Wright. Mary and Elizabeth, from Art in the Christian Tradition, a project of the Vanderbilt Divinity Library, Nashville, TN. <https://diglib.library.vanderbilt.edu/act-imagelink.pl?RC=57086> [retrieved November 13, 2022]. Original source: Lauren Wright Pittman, <http://www.lewpstudio.com/>.

[11] Thursday December 15th: Judith Couchman, *The Art of Faith: A Guide to Understanding Christian Images*. (Brewster, Massachusetts: Paraclete Press, 2017), 174.

[12] Friday December 16th: https://aleteia.org/slideshow/slideshow-x-stunning-images-of-the-madonna-and-child-from-around-the-world/?from_post=53659

[13] Monday December 19th: Cox, Donna. Interview by Julie Schendel. Zoom. October 20, 2022.

[14] Thursday December 22nd: Swanson, John August. Presentation in the Temple, from Art in the Christian Tradition, a project of the Vanderbilt Divinity Library, Nashville, TN. <https://diglib.library.vanderbilt.edu/act-imagelink.pl?RC=56557> [retrieved November 22, 2022]. Original source: Estate of John August Swanson, <https://www.johnaugustswanson.com/>.

Appendix E.2: Lenten Devotional

The Lenten Devotional covers the six and a half weeks of Lent from Ash Wednesday to Easter. The introduction and first week are included in the Doctoral Project section. The remaining five and a half weeks and attributes are included here.

WEDNESDAY 3/1



Together in Christ. Artist–Emma Taylor. Used with permission.[7]

1. What is the first thing that catches your eye in this image? What details do you only notice upon further reflection?
2. What is the strongest emotion being stirred within you as you see this image? Sit with that emotion for a few moments and try to discover what it is seeking to teach you.
3. What is the artist seeking to portray? What is not being said?
4. What is God revealing to you today as you look at this image?



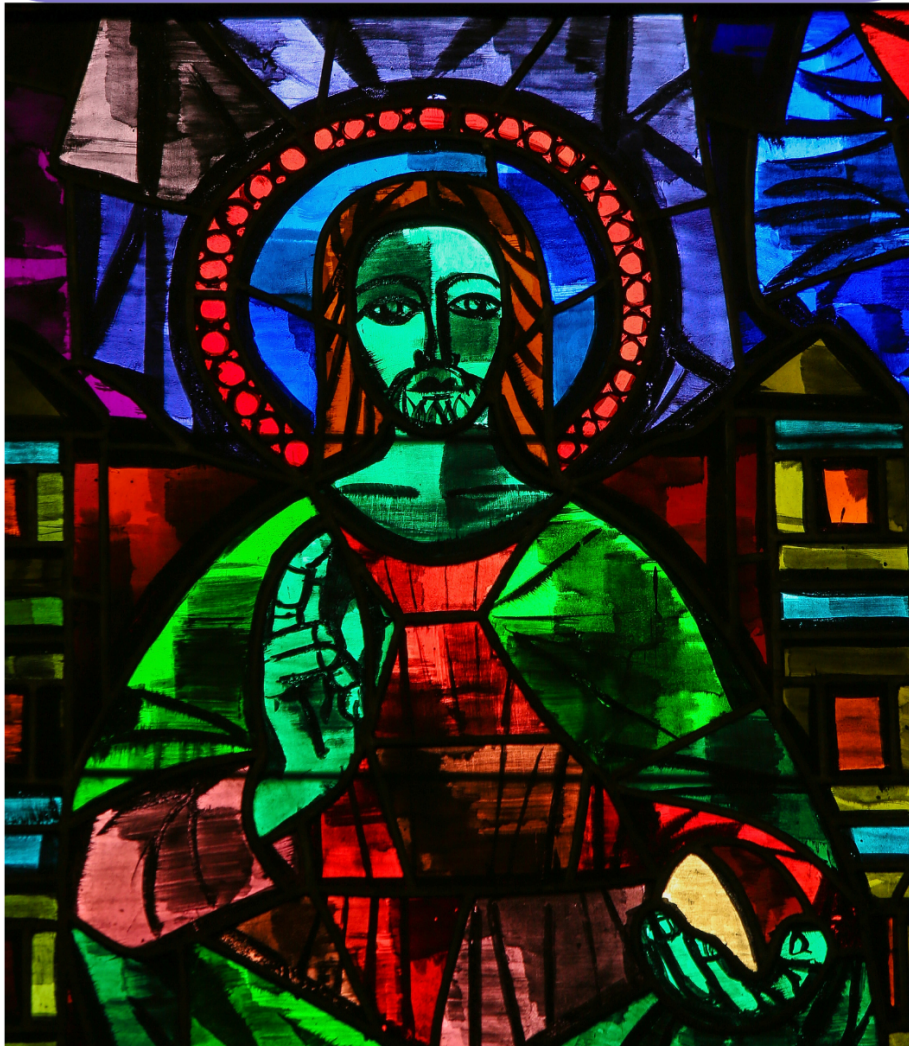
Perhaps the most common type of Christian imagery is relational, where the viewer is invited to connect with the subject in a relatable way. Audiences tend to favor images where Jesus feels approachable and familiar, like you could have a friendly relationship with him if he showed up in your life. Relational images typically favor Jesus' humanity, but often take it one step further and model Jesus after the intended audience or after the artist's own culture. An Indian artist may paint Jesus with Asian features. An African artist may incorporate their cultural dress into an image of Christ. Many images popular in American churches show Jesus with Caucasian features with light colored hair, blue eyes, and long, flowing hair.

Scripture tells us that humanity is made in the image of God, but much of the artwork we see today begs the question: have we made Jesus in our own image? Why might we relate to Jesus more when we think he looks like us? Why do we have such a hard time relating to people who are different?



Prayer: Dear Jesus, suffering servant, compassionate healer, resurrected Christ, continue to speak to us anew each day, that we might understand you more deeply. Open our eyes that we may see you in a new light, and discover how you can be found in the face of each person we encounter on a daily basis. Amen.

THURSDAY 3/2



Stained glass window depicting Jesus Christ giving a blessing in the Church of Martina Franca, Apulia, Italy. Artist unknown. Royalty Free. [8]



Christian imagery is frequently filled with symbolism to tell a wider story and reveal hidden meaning. The use of light and shadow, colors, and popular Christian symbols can all play a role in how an image is perceived. Symbolic images are used to teach about Jesus and make him more recognizable, especially when multiple people appear together in a piece of art. Crowns and halos often encircle Jesus' head to show him as Christ the king or signify him as holy, even though he would have never worn a gilded crown on earth.

In this image, Jesus is depicted with green skin and red hair. What impact does skin color play on how we view Jesus? When skin tone is replaced with a non-human color, what does our mind automatically do to make sense of what we are seeing? Jesus also holds his hands in the form of a blessing, a symbol that is common in ancient iconography. Depending on how the fingers were positioned could signal different meanings. His other hand holds what appears to be bread which is a frequent symbol in scripture and often a metaphor for the body of Christ.



If you worship at a church that has stained glass windows, take some time to look around and notice the details of how Jesus is portrayed. Are the images more historically accurate, or do they feature the divinity of Christ? Has Jesus been portrayed to look like the congregation to be more relatable, or are the images primarily symbolic?

If you have noticed that the majority of the images in your church are relational and designed to appeal to the members of the congregation, take some time to discern what kinds of people can relate to these images. What groups of people would feel welcome in this space and see themselves in these images. What groups of people may not recognize themselves in Christ and feel excluded?

FRIDAY 3/3



Christ in the Wilderness, ca. 1515-20. Artist—Moretto da Brescia (Alessandro Bonvincino). Italy. Public Domain.[9]

Mark 1:12-13

And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. He was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him.



1. What is the first thing that catches your eye in this image? What details do you only notice upon further reflection?
2. What is the strongest emotion being stirred within you as you see this image? Sit with that emotion for a few moments and try to discover what it is seeking to teach you.
3. What is the artist seeking to portray? What is not being said?
4. What is God revealing to you today as you look at this image?



Jesus was baptized by his cousin John, and it was a moment when he was surrounded by God the Father and the Holy Spirit, speaking love and acceptance into him. He needed this moment of assurance and connection, because immediately afterward, the Spirit drove him into the wilderness for forty days where he fasted and faced temptation. The season of Lent is mirrored after this story. Christians spend forty days fasting and praying, seeking to gain discipline in focusing more fully on Jesus. What connections do you feel to Jesus when you spend time in fasting and prayer?

If you did not know the story behind this painting, what would you imagine was happening? Do the colors and characters in the image set the tone for how you imagine Jesus' time of fasting? What would you add or change?

SATURDAY 3/4



Christ in the Wilderness, 1872. Artist–Kramskoĭ, Ivan Nikolaevich, 1837-1887. Russia. Public Domain.[10]

- What is the first thing that catches your eye in this image? What details do you only notice upon further reflection?
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- What is God revealing to you today as you look at this image?

Luke 4:1-13

Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, where for forty days he was tested by the devil. He ate nothing at all during those days, and when they were over he was famished. The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become a loaf of bread." Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'One does not live by bread alone.' "

Then the devil led him up and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. And the devil said to him, "To you I will give all this authority and their glory, for it has been given over to me, and I give it to anyone I please. If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours." Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.' "

Then the devil led him to Jerusalem and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, for it is written, 'He will command his angels concerning you, to protect you,' and 'On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.' "

Jesus answered him, "It is said, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.' " When the devil had finished every test, he departed from him until an opportune time.



The Gospels often share similar stories about the life of Jesus. Each author tells the story from a slightly different perspective. Similarly, different artists can paint the same scene in dramatically different ways. Compare yesterday's image from Italy with today's image from Russia. What details do you notice in each? What details are missing? Which image fits best with your own imagining of this story?

SUNDAY 3/5



Resurrection Appearance to the Fishermen. Artist–Frank Wesley, 1923-2002. India. Used with permission.[11]

- What is the first thing that catches your eye in this image? What details do you only notice upon further reflection?
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Jesus encountered many people after he was raised from the dead, yet they did not immediately recognize him. We likely do the same when we see someone out of context, especially when we are not expecting that person. Yet these were not casual encounters that Jesus was making. He was visiting his closest friends and disciples, the ones who should have known him anywhere. Was Jesus so transformed by his death and resurrection that he appeared completely different to them? As we are journeying through Lent, we are spending time seeing Jesus with new eyes and discovering a deeper level of understanding of his nature. By the time we encounter the resurrection on Easter morning, how do we expect him to be different?



MONDAY 3/6



The Encounter, wall mural in the Magdala Chapel in Israel. Artist—Daniel Cariola. Chile. Photograph by Diedra Harrell.

Mark 5:25-34

Now there was a woman who had been suffering from a flow of blood for twelve years. She had endured much under many physicians and had spent all that she had, and she was no better but rather grew worse. She had heard about Jesus and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, for she said, “If I but touch his cloak, I will be made well.” Immediately her flow of blood stopped, and she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease. Immediately aware that power had gone forth from him, Jesus turned about in the crowd and said, “Who touched my cloak?” And his disciples said to him, “You see the crowd pressing in on you; how can you say, ‘Who touched me?’ ” He looked all around to see who had done it. But the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came in fear and trembling, fell down before him, and told him the whole truth. He said to her, “Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease.”



- What is the first thing that catches your eye in this image? What details do you only notice upon further reflection?
- What is the strongest emotion being stirred within you as you see this image? Sit with that emotion for a few moments and try to discover what it is seeking to teach you.
- What is the artist seeking to portray? What is not being said?
- What is God revealing to you today as you look at this image?



This image has become quite popular among a newly opened archaeological site near the Sea of Galilee. What started as a construction site for a new retreat center in 2009 quickly became an exciting historical discovery when archaeologists found the remains of a first century synagogue. As they continue to uncover ancient relics, the surrounding area has become a center for worship and discovery. The Magdala Chapel features this floor to ceiling sized mural called "The Encounter" depicting the hemorrhaging woman touching the hem of Jesus' cloak. The power leaving his body to heal her ailment is clear from the flash of light at the center of the painting.[12]

This historical image brings to life one of the most famous healing stories in scripture, in which a woman risks everything, defying the boundaries of entering society while ritually impure, and seeks out the healing powers of Jesus. With only the visual of some feet and one hand, we can follow what is happening in a single moment.

What details in this painting reveal the key parts of this story? What keeps us from approaching Jesus when we are in need of healing?

TUESDAY 3/7



Christ in the Apse–Basilica of Cosmas and Damien, 527. Italy. Used with permission.[13]

- What is the first thing that catches your eye in this image? What details do you only notice upon further reflection?
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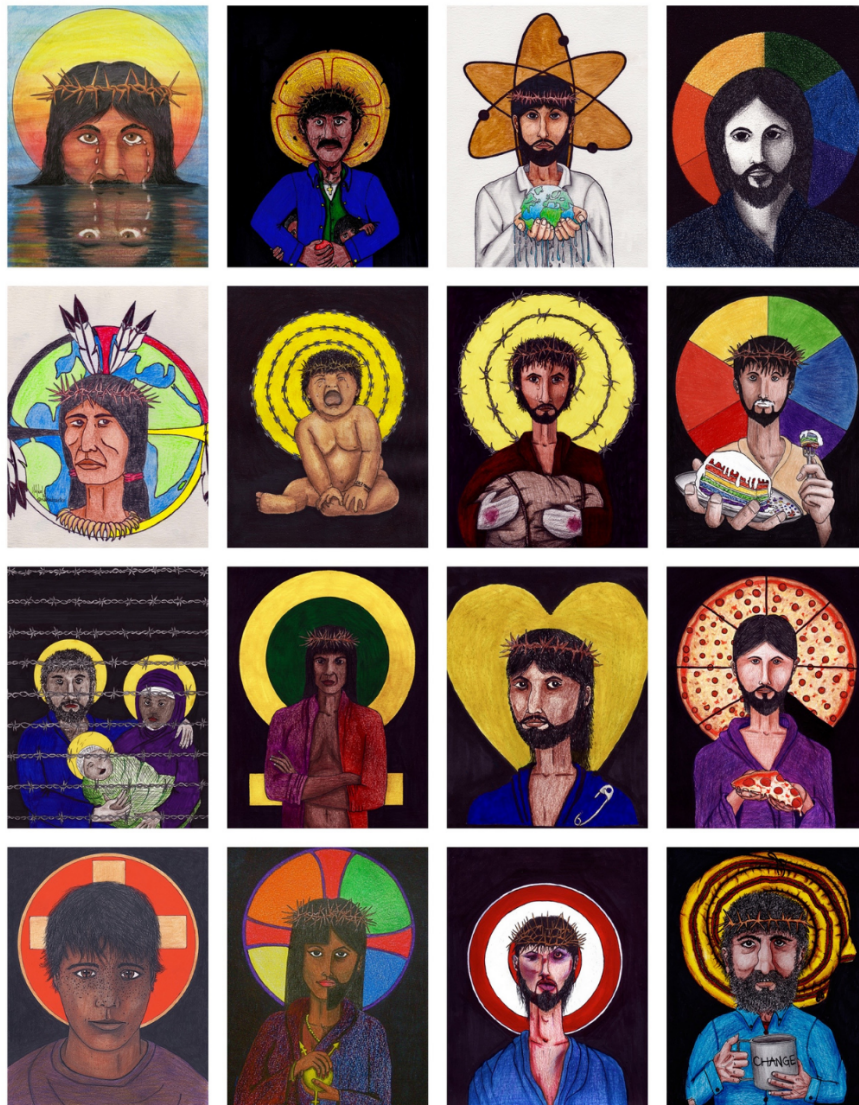
A note from the donor:

This figure of Christ is the center of the apse mosaic. Christ is bearded, and has distinctive olive skin. It has been noted that the craftsmen of the mosaic perhaps were Syrian, due to an influx of trade workers in Rome following an earthquake in Syria. The basilica hall was attached to a round temple that has been identified as the Temple of Jupiter Stator, which has been dated to the 3rd century BC.



This mosaic is a unique image that could be categorized as both historical and Christological. Jesus' olive colored skin and facial features are believed to be created by craftsmen from the Middle East, pointing toward Jesus' humanity and Israeli birthplace. The Christological theme can also be seen in the portrayal of Jesus as Christ of the Cosmos set against the backdrop of the blue night sky, decked in a gilded robe and surrounded in a golden halo. The fuller image of this mosaic shows Jesus surrounded by Peter and Paul and could point toward the story of Jesus' transfiguration.

WEDNESDAY 3/8



Images of Christ–Christ Collage. Artist–NakedPastor, David Hayward.
Used with permission.[14]



- What is the first thing that catches your eye in this image? What details do you only notice upon further reflection?
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- What is God revealing to you today as you look at this image?



Art often expresses an idea or makes a statement. NakedPastor uses his art to express radical inclusivity through his images of Christ. This relational image is one where Jesus is painted to reflect modern imaginations of marginalized groups of people. You may not agree with every statement made in this collection, but you are invited to consider them.

In this collage are 16 images from NakedPastor's Images of Christ series. They include Jesus Cries, MexiChrist, Science and Wonders, Includer, Standing Rock, Border Baby, RefuJesus, Let Them Eat Cake, The Holy Family, Shesus, Safety, The Pizza Christ, Questioner, Neither, Survivor, and Change.

To learn more about each image, check out this video from the artist describing in detail the symbolism in each piece. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kc9ONJFIKFc>.

What symbols do you notice in each of the halos?
 Which of these 16 images did you have the hardest time with?
 Which of these was your favorite?

THURSDAY 3/9



Jesus as Mother Hen, mosaic in the floor of the Church of Dominus Flevit on the Mount of Olives in Israel. Artist unknown. Royalty Free.

[15]

- What is the first thing that catches your eye in this image? What details do you only notice upon further reflection?
- What is the strongest emotion being stirred within you as you see this image? Sit with that emotion for a few moments and try to discover what it is seeking to teach you.
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- What is God revealing to you today as you look at this image?

Luke 13: 34

“Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!”



The Church of Dominus Flevit is translated from Latin as “Jesus Wept.”

Jesus mourns for Jerusalem, responding to the Pharisees who warned Jesus that Herod wanted to have him killed. This verse is also in Matthew 23:37, as shown in the mosaic.

While we often think of the Holy Spirit depicted as a bird, such as the dove that appears at Jesus’ baptism, birds are also used as symbols for Jesus. Here, Jesus compares himself to a mother hen, longing to gather her children under her wing. This shows Jesus’ protective and nurturing side when he knows danger is lurking. This symbolic image features a mother hen with a halo behind her head, her body upright with wings outstretched, forming the shape of the cross, and her children gathered below her, shielded from the outside world.

What other characteristics, often associated with femininity, do you see in Jesus? How would the story be different had Jesus been born a woman? If Jesus were to walk the earth today, what form do you think he would take?



FRIDAY 3/10



Marriage at Cana, 2008 ©Laura James, Used with permission.



- What is the first thing that catches your eye in this image? What details do you only notice upon further reflection?
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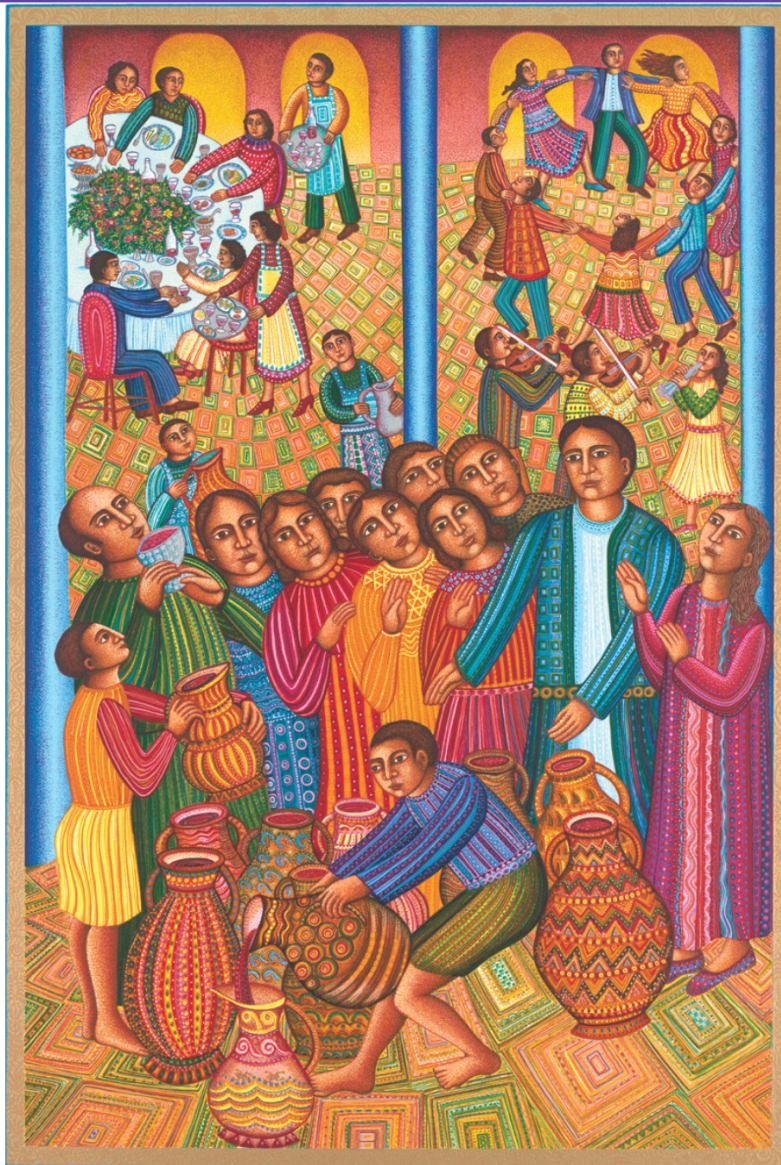
John 2:1-11

On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. When the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said to him, "They have no wine." And Jesus said to her, "Woman, what concern is that to me and to you? My hour has not yet come." His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you." Now standing there were six stone water jars for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. Jesus said to them, "Fill the jars with water." And they filled them up to the brim. He said to them, "Now draw some out, and take it to the person in charge of the banquet." So they took it. When the person in charge tasted the water that had become wine and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), that person called the bridegroom and said to him, "Everyone serves the good wine first and then the inferior wine after the guests have become drunk. But you have kept the good wine until now." Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee and revealed his glory, and his disciples believed in him.



This is the story of Jesus' first public miracle, done only at the prompting of his mother. Much of Jesus' story shows his serious side where he is healing, performing miracles, and showing compassion. Imagine this story before the wine ran out, or after he produced new stores. Where do you imagine Jesus spent most of the party: laughing and eating, dancing with other guests, telling stories, or catching up with old friends?

SATURDAY 3/11



Wedding Feast, 1996. Artist-John August Swanson. Used with permission.[16]



- What is the first thing that catches your eye in this image? What details do you only notice upon further reflection?
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- What is the artist seeking to portray? What is not being said?
- What is God revealing to you today as you look at this image?



How would you categorize this image? Historical? Relational? Christological? Symbolic?

Compare this image with Laura James' image from yesterday. What differences do you notice? What similarities?

Jesus had begun gathering his disciples but had not yet performed any public miracles. When he entered into this celebration, it is presumed he went as an ordinary man, a welcome friend and wedding guest. When his mother tried to force his hand to remedy the wine situation, he was unwilling at first, saying it wasn't his time. At her persistence, he reluctantly performed his first miracle. How do you think his actions may have changed once his powers became known? How do you think others started to view him once word spread?

SUNDAY 3/12



The Epic of American Civilization: Modern Migration of the Spirit (Panel 21), 1932-34. Artist-Jose Clemente Orozco. Mexico. Commissioned by the Trustees of Dartmouth College, Hanover, N.H. Public Domain.



- What is the first thing that catches your eye in this image? What details do you only notice upon further reflection?
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From the Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth:

“In this apocalyptic scene, a defiant, resurrected Christ, painted in acid colors and shedding his skin to reveal a newly enlivened body, returns in judgment to sweep away ideologies and institutions that thwart contemporary human emancipation and spiritual renewal. Orozco presents a Christ figure who not only rejects his sacrificial destiny by felling his cross but condemns and destroys the sources of his agony, military armaments and religious and cultural symbols here relegated to the junk heap of history behind him.”[17]



This resurrection scene is far from serene. The beautiful garden is nowhere to be found, the peaceful setting is absent completely. Yet there is something profound about the way Jesus is depicted here, after conquering death and defeating the cross. There are very few paintings of Jesus where he appears angry, ugly, or even powerful. What characteristics of Christ stand out to you the most here?

MONDAY 3/13



“What Is Truth?” Christ and Pilate, 1890. Artist–Ge, N. N. (Nikolaï Nikolaevich), 1831-1894. Russia. Public Domain.[18]

- What is the first thing that catches your eye in this image? What details do you only notice upon further reflection?
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What is truth? When we look at an image of Jesus, how do we know what is truth and what is artistic license? Realist paintings such as this one aim for historically accurate details to make the image believable. Yet how many of us struggle to picture Jesus this way: worn, dirty, and shrinking into the background? No one knows the true image of Jesus, yet it is a question that is asked again and again...what did Jesus look like? Based on the imagery that is widely popular in many of our churches, it is easy to expect Jesus to look like we do. We have taken the idea that we are made in God's image and turned it around, often making Jesus in our image. We love the idea that the Savior looks like we do, yet this can be dangerous when we take it too far.

Theologian Erna Kim Hackett is famous for her theory of Disney Princess Theology. She says,

"White Christianity suffers from a bad case of Disney Princess Theology. As each individual reads Scripture, they see themselves as the princess in every story. They are Esther, never Xerxes or Haman. They are Peter, but never Judas. They are the woman anointing Jesus, never the Pharisees. They are the Jews escaping slavery, never Egypt. For the citizens of the most powerful country in the world, who enslaved both Native and Black people, to see itself as Israel and not Egypt when it is studying Scripture, is a perfect example of Disney Princess Theology." [19]



The light points toward Pilate as the subject of this image as Jesus fades into the shadows. Without knowing the title, we could imagine this is Barabbas or another criminal. Considering Hackett's concept of Disney Princess Theology, how often do we find ourselves relating to the hero of the story? With whom in this picture do we most identify?

TUESDAY 3/14



Woman at the Well, 2000 ©Laura James, Used with permission.

- What is the first thing that catches your eye in this image? What details do you only notice upon further reflection?
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Read John 4:5-30



Though Jesus appears very human and approachable here, this story is one that shows Jesus' divinity through his power of knowing the woman at the well. He has knowledge of her story before even meeting her, and instead of avoiding her like all the rest, he engages with her and shows her compassion, offering her a new way of life that will no longer leave her wanting.

What does it mean to be known? How do you know when someone truly understands you? In our society we struggle to know our neighbors and connect with people outside our immediate circles of influence. We may think we're being inclusive when we claim to be colorblind or that we don't notice differences, but that is not the goal. The goal is to see one another and celebrate each other. When we say we don't see color, we are erasing the parts of that person that make them beautiful. When we pretend not to notice differences, we are choosing to ignore the challenges that different races face each day to simply exist. To know them is intentionally to learn the parts of their story that are hard to hear and work to dismantle the systems that uphold their oppression.

Throughout scripture, Samaritans are painted as "the other." They were hated by Jews because of their different styles of worship. Yet here was Jesus, a Jew, spending time with a Samaritan woman. Think of the type of person that you hate the most, that you are most afraid of, that you avoid at all costs...and now imagine that person approaches as you are waiting for a drink of water. Will you walk away, like the other women in town, or will you engage in conversation, like Jesus did?

The woman at the well becomes one of the first evangelists, sharing the good news of Jesus and giving testimony to what she witnessed. What other good news might be spread when we take the time truly to see and know those who are different?

WEDNESDAY 3/15



The Black Messiah. Artist–Rev. Dr. Donna Cox. Used with permission.
<https://www.donnacoxcreations.com/>

- What is the first thing that catches your eye in this image? What details do you only notice upon further reflection?
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Throughout my studies on the imagery of Christ, I have come across many people who are willing to share their stories of how their understanding of Jesus changed as their faith grew, and their image of Jesus evolved. Those of us who grew up in church often remember that first image of Christ, whether or not we connected to it. I have been surprised to hear how many people grew up in the Black Church and remember paintings on the wall of White Jesus. Classmate, friend, and artist of *The Black Messiah*, Rev. Dr. Donna Cox shared how she reconciled being in a church community that looked like her, but worshiping someone who did not. “I don’t think I ever connected the image of Jesus with the real Jesus.” In other words—the Jesus she saw and the Jesus she worshiped were not connected. The images weren’t historical, and they weren’t relatable. As her faith has grown, she has come to find her strength in painting her own images and portraying Jesus in a way that speaks from her heart, sharing her talent and passion with the world.

I heard a similar story from a colleague and friend, Rev. Tasha Wiggins. She too grew up in the Black Baptist Church and distinctly remembers images of White Jesus. They were so prominent in her church and even her grandmother’s home that as a little girl she asked, “Do we turn white when we go to heaven?” That was a turning point for the family when they were unable to satisfy her curiosity or answer her questions about why Jesus was white. The excuse had always been, “Well that’s how we grew up, that’s all we’ve ever known.”

I hear the same thing from similar generations who are white, describing their own worldview and their challenges talking about racism, white privilege, and white supremacy. “That’s all we’ve ever known.” Except now is the time to recognize that we should know better, and now is the time to have the difficult conversations around how we portray Jesus and who we say Jesus is. It’s ok to have an image where we find Jesus relatable, but it’s still worth a conversation to ask: why do we have such a difficult time relating to people who don’t look like we do?



THURSDAY 3/16



Stained Glass in the Basilica of the Holy Blood in Bruges, Belgium. Artist unknown. Royalty Free.[20]

- What is the first thing that catches your eye in this image? What details do you only notice upon further reflection?
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The pelican is another bird whose symbolic nature points to Jesus. Legend has it that in times of great need, a female pelican will pierce her breast with her beak and feed her young with the blood, emphasizing Jesus' sacrificial act of offering his blood and body as nourishment in the wine and bread of the communion meal. Another legend varies in details but speaks of the mother's ability to bring her chicks back to life by shedding her blood on them. Once again, Jesus' willingness to give his life to save his children is compared to a mother bird and is celebrated as a powerful symbol.[21]

Where do you think the legend of the pelican comes from? Which image comparing Jesus to a mother bird speaks to you most: Jesus as a mother hen gathering her chicks, or Jesus as a pelican sacrificing herself to feed her young?



The legend was so strong that religious leaders used pelican language in their prayers. Here is one from St. Gertrude the Great.

"Gracious Pelican, Jesus Christ, who cleansed us unworthy of our sins with your precious blood, I give thanks to you for saintly and sweet wounds, that you sustained on the cross, when your eternal love opened with its arrow your holy side and entered your holy heart. Praise be to the sacred wound and sacred blood and water to wash away all our sins."[22]

FRIDAY 3/17



Put Out Into Deep Waters. Artist–Patricia Brintle. Haiti. Used with permission.[23]

- What is the first thing that catches your eye in this image? What details do you only notice upon further reflection?
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Luke 5:4-11

When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch." Simon answered, "Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing. Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets." When they had done this, they caught so many fish that their nets were beginning to burst. So they signaled their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both boats, so that they began to sink. But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus's knees, saying, "Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!" For he and all who were with him were astounded at the catch of fish that they had taken, and so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. Then Jesus said to Simon, "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people." When they had brought their boats to shore, they left everything and followed him.



What does it take for us to recognize the Lord?

What actions or words or characteristics help us to see Jesus in our daily lives?

How would you characterize this image: historical, Christological, relational, or symbolic?

SATURDAY 3/18



The Great Catch, 1993. Artist—John August Swanson. Used with permission.[24]

John 21:1-8

After these things Jesus showed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias, and he showed himself in this way. Gathered there together were Simon Peter, Thomas called the Twin, Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of his disciples. Simon Peter said to them, "I am going fishing." They said to him, "We will go with you." They went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing.

Just after daybreak, Jesus stood on the beach, but the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to them, "Children, you have no fish, have you?" They answered him, "No." He said to them, "Cast the net to the right side of the boat, and you will find some." So they cast it, and now they were not able to haul it in because there were so many fish. That disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on his outer garment, for he had taken it off, and jumped into the sea. But the other disciples came in the boat, dragging the net full of fish, for they were not far from the land, only about a hundred yards off.



Yesterday's story from Luke shared Simon Peter's first encounter fishing with Jesus toward the beginning of his ministry. After a long night of empty nets, Jesus encouraged Simon to cast again. This time his nets were filled. This sign was enough for Simon to fall down before Jesus and begin to follow him as a disciple. In today's story from John, Jesus once again appears to the disciples after his resurrection. They do not recognize him until he commands them to cast their nets on the right side of the boat. The great catch they draw in must bring back memories of that first casting when Jesus called them to become fishers of people. They immediately recognize him as their Lord.

What signs and symbols help point to Jesus in Christian imagery? How can we tell that the subject is Jesus as opposed to someone else?

Compare Patricia Brintle's image from yesterday with John August Swanson's image from today. What similarities do you notice? What signs and symbols do you see? Which speaks to you more?

SUNDAY 3/19



"Other Sheep I Have" an original oil painting by Elspeth C. Young. Used by permission.

John 10:14-16

I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father. And I lay down my life for the sheep. I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd.



- What is the first thing that catches your eye in this image? What details do you only notice upon further reflection?
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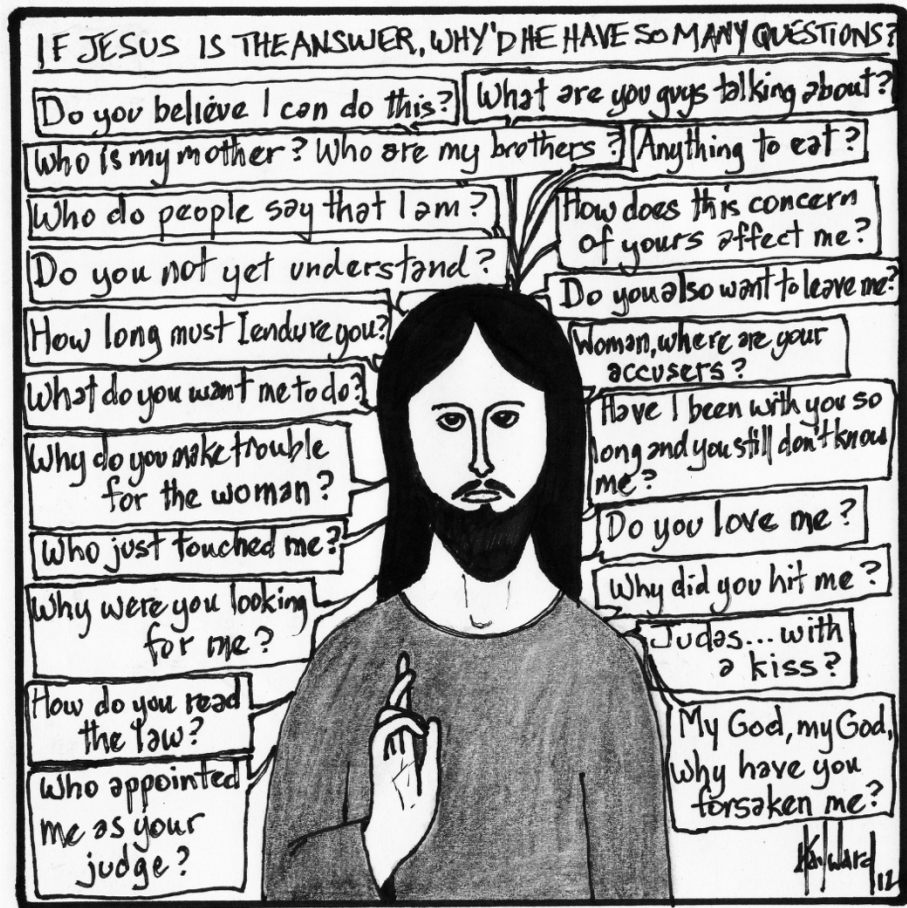


Jesus was the Messiah the Jews had been waiting for, yet throughout his ministry he started adding to his flock with sheep from another fold. A Canaanite woman changed Jesus' mind when she called him out on his refusal to help her demon-possessed daughter. In Matthew 15:24-28 Jesus said:

"I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel...It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs." She said, "Yes Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table." Then Jesus answered her, "Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish." And her daughter was healed instantly.

Jesus as the Good Shepherd is a beloved image because we imagine ourselves as the found sheep. Yet in Matthew we hear Jesus calling a Samaritan woman a dog. It isn't until she challenges him that he hears her request and expands his ministry to the woman and her daughter. What does it say about Jesus that he originally turned her away? How do we see Jesus differently after this encounter?

MONDAY 3/20



Jesus Questions. Artist-NakedPastor, aka David Haywood. Used with permission.



- What is the first thing that catches your eye in this image? What details do you only notice upon further reflection?
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Jesus was well-known for asking more questions than he answered. Witnessing a piece of art may also leave us with more questions than answers. Take a moment and read through these questions and see if you can identify which story in scripture they are taken from. Which question makes you the most curious? Which question leaves you the least satisfied?

TUESDAY 3/21



Naturally King. Artist—Donice Bloodworth Jr. aka DaCre8iveOne. Used with permission.[25]

- What is the first thing that catches your eye in this image? What details do you only notice upon further reflection?
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One of my favorite questions to ask people is this: What is your favorite image of Christ? Some people answer immediately with a favorite from their childhood. Others have a harder time thinking of a favorite. When I asked my friend Morris, an African American UMC pastor who grew up in the South, he couldn't answer me right away. He never grew up with an image that spoke to him or helped him connect with Jesus. In his church, there was only the blond haired, blue eyed Jesus. "When you're in an all Black church, an all Black environment, it stands out. You want to ask questions but you're afraid of the answer you'll get," he said.

Yet when a friend showed Morris this image just last year, it immediately spoke to him. I asked him what made it so special; what made it Jesus? "It's the gray," he said. "We're living in this day and age of black and white, and you mix to get gray. Many times we don't like to live in the gray area. We want to be all black, all white. Getting to the gray means we're really interconnected, really intertwined, and working on this thing together."

"This image felt more like me because there was a beard and short hair like mine. The Black church tries to make Jesus as personal as they can. We don't want to escape; we just want freedom, liberty, and justice that all people should have. Getting to a gray church with all colors present would be great, but not everyone wants gray."

Representation matters in our churches, our leadership, and our imagery. Too often our churches have been separated into black and white, and there is little room for gray. What is one step we could take to allow more room for gray?

WEDNESDAY 3/22

The Stations of the Cross

The Stations of the Cross are a series of devotions popular in the Catholic Church. They reflect on Jesus' journey to the cross from the time Pontus Pilate condemned him to death, until after his body is removed from the cross. In Jerusalem, the Via Dolorosa, or The Way of the Cross, is a route believed that Jesus took while carrying his cross. Along the way are stops to commemorate each station. They include:

1. Jesus is condemned to death
2. Jesus carries his cross
3. Jesus falls the first time
4. Jesus meets his mother
5. Simon of Cyrene helps Jesus to carry his cross
6. Veronica wipes the face of Jesus
7. Jesus falls the second time
8. Jesus meets the women of Jerusalem
9. Jesus falls a third time
10. Jesus' clothes are taken away
11. Jesus is nailed to the cross
12. Jesus dies on the cross
13. The body of Jesus is taken down from the cross
14. Jesus is laid in the tomb.[26]

In 2000, Pope John Paul II added a 15th station: The Resurrection.[27]

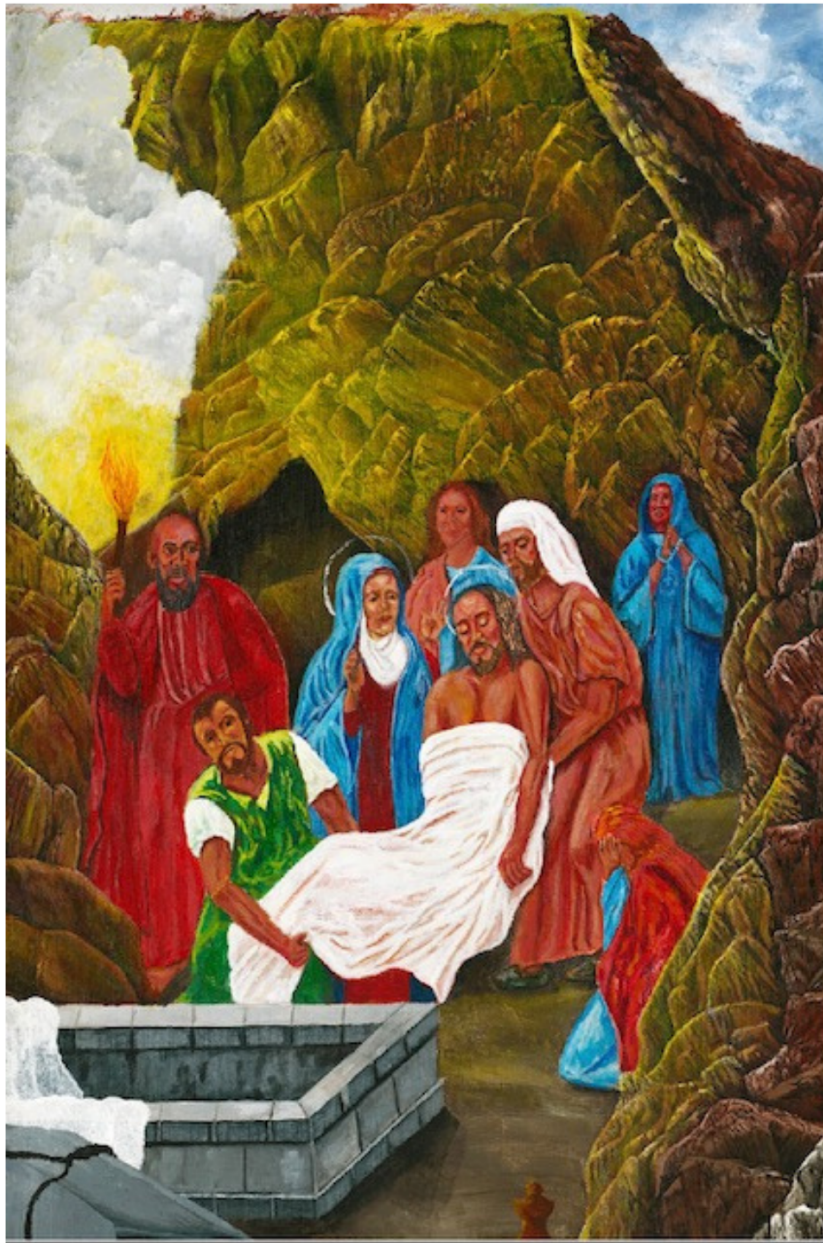
A few years ago a group of men in Tennessee came together to paint Jesus in a series of the Stations of the Cross. Take a moment to look at a selection of their paintings before reading about the group of artists.



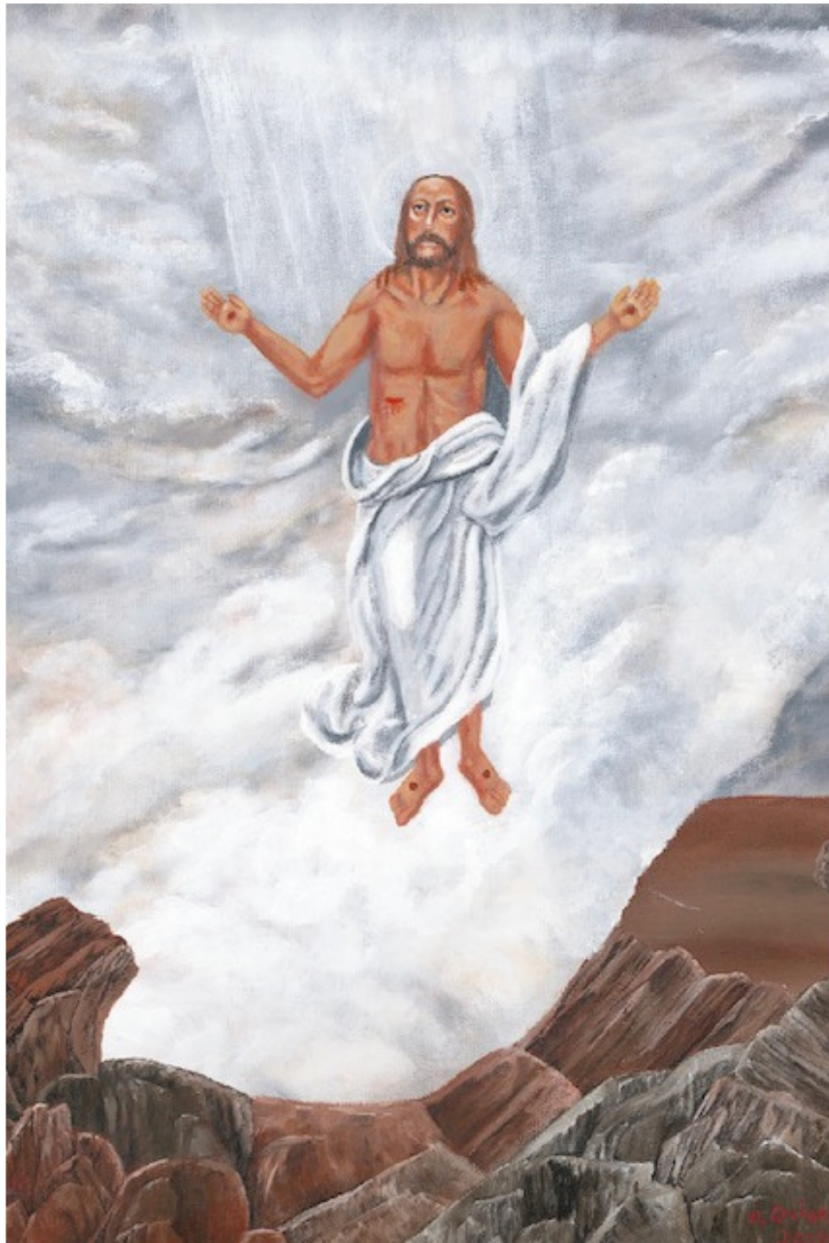
**Station 7: Jesus falls a
second time**



Station 12: Jesus dies on the cross



**Station 14: Jesus is laid in
the tomb**



Station 15: The resurrection

- What is the first thing that catches your eye in this image? What details do you only notice upon further reflection?
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This series of paintings was created by men on Tennessee's death row. As men who had also been condemned to death, they felt a connection drawing them to Jesus' last walk toward his state-sanctioned death.

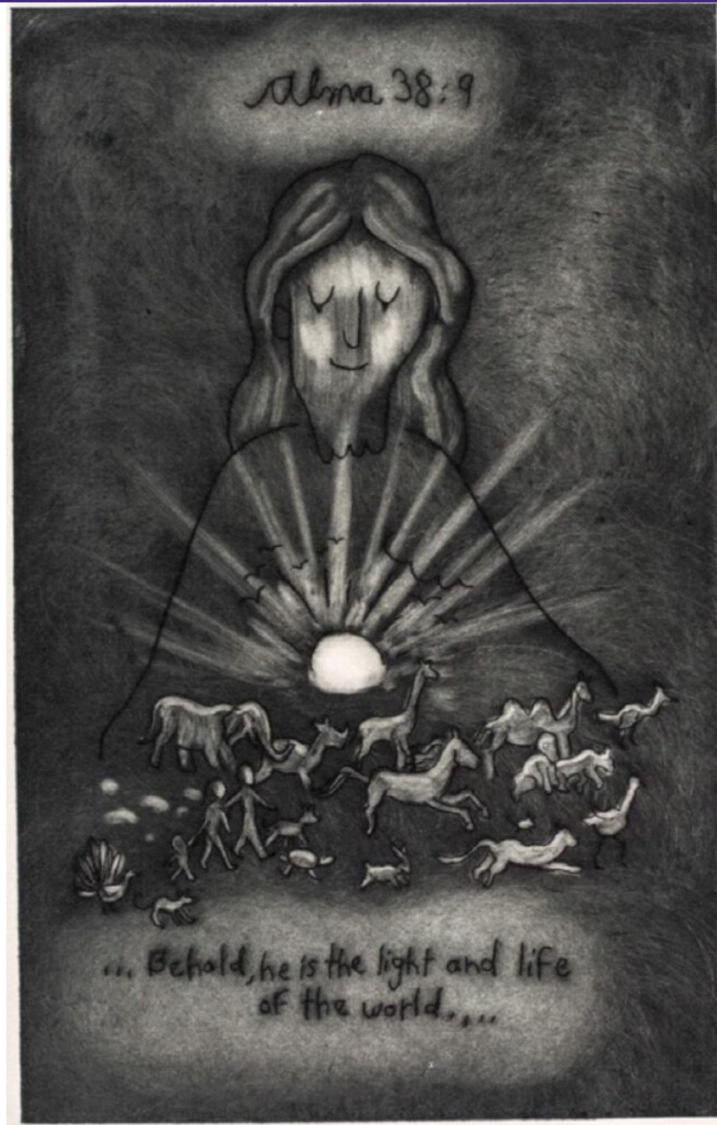
Derrick Quintero, one of the artists, shared these words about their project: "When Jesus was executed, justice looked different than it does today. However, justice today has some of the same components as it did back then. The guilty, as are the innocent, are subjected to this state-sanctioned process. As we understand it, state-sanctioned means that "We the People" – collectively speaking – uphold this system of justice. So, based upon our support, this system of justice reflects our community's sense of morals and values." [28]

What was your reaction upon reading that the artists of this series were serving on death row? Did it change the way you looked at the paintings? Did it impact the way you experience Jesus during his last day before crucifixion?

The Catholic Church opposes the death penalty. The United Methodist Church is also against capital punishment and believes that "the death penalty denies the power of Christ to redeem, restore, and transform all human beings." [29]

So much of the story of Christ is about forgiveness, mercy, and grace. How might we look again at Jesus' state sanctioned death on the cross and the role we play in condemning others to death?

THURSDAY 3/23



He Is (Book of Mormon Series 29), 2017. Artist–Annie Poon. Used with permission.[30]

- What is the first thing that catches your eye in this image? What details do you only notice upon further reflection?
- What is the strongest emotion being stirred within you as you see this image? Sit with that emotion for a few moments and try to discover what it is seeking to teach you.
- What is the artist seeking to portray? What is not being said?
- What is God revealing to you today as you look at this image?

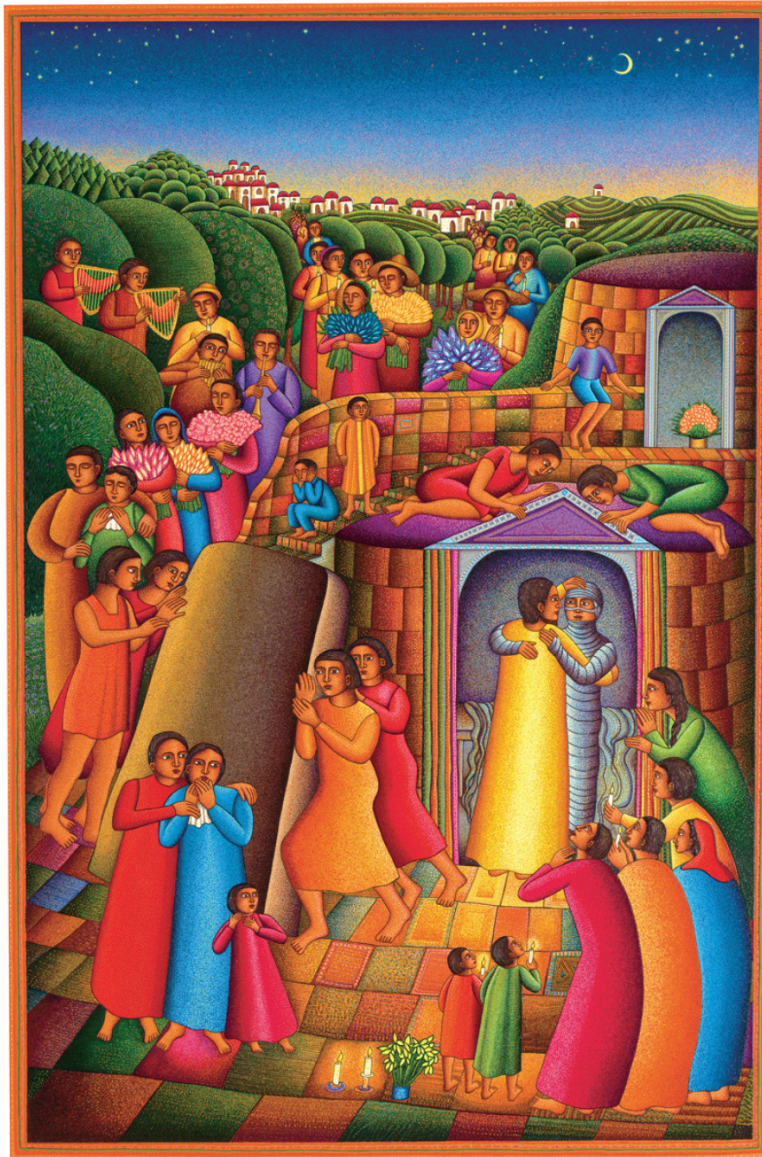
Ephesians 5:8-14

For once you were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light. Walk as children of light, for the fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true. Try to find out what is pleasing to the Lord. Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness; rather, expose them. For it is shameful even to mention what such people do secretly, but everything exposed by the light becomes visible, for everything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says, "Sleeper, awake! Rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you."

Jesus is the light of the world that reveals truth to things that are hidden. So many beautiful things begin in the dark: a baby in the womb, a seed in the ground, even Jesus, buried in a darkened tomb, awaiting the chance at life again. Scripture speaks of those walking in darkness as people who have not yet come to realize the fullness of life in Jesus. Like other things begun in the dark, they are on their way to reaching full potential. Coming into the light by knowing Jesus gives the opportunity to reveal their full beauty to the world.

In art, a picture is enhanced when contrasts of color and light play together, offering different values between shades to draw attention toward one direction or another. What roles do shadow and light play in this image?

FRIDAY 3/24



Take Away the Stone, 2005. Artist–John August Swanson. Used with permission.[31]

- What is the first thing that catches your eye in this image? What details do you only notice upon further reflection?
- What is the strongest emotion being stirred within you as you see this image? Sit with that emotion for a few moments and try to discover what it is seeking to teach you.
- What is the artist seeking to portray? What is not being said?
- What is God revealing to you today as you look at this image?

John 11:17-27

When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days. Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, some two miles away, and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them about their brother. When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, while Mary stayed at home. Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him." Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." Martha said to him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day." Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?" She said to him, "Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world."

Jesus raised people from the dead: Lazarus, Jairus' daughter, the widow's son, but they were merely resuscitated. They were revived with the breath of life but would one day die again. Jesus' resurrection was extraordinary, because he would not die again.

What signs of life and death do you notice in this image? Where do we see signs of life among death in the world?

SATURDAY 3/25



Jesus Raises Lazarus to Life, 19773. Artist-Jesus Mafa. Africa. Used with permission.[32]

- What is the first thing that catches your eye in this image? What details do you only notice upon further reflection?
- What is the strongest emotion being stirred within you as you see this image? Sit with that emotion for a few moments and try to discover what it is seeking to teach you.
- What is the artist seeking to portray? What is not being said?
- What is God revealing to you today as you look at this image?

John 11:38-44

Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. Jesus said, "Take away the stone." Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, "Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead four days." Jesus said to her, "Did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?" So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upward and said, "Father, I thank you for having heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you sent me." When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth and his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Unbind him, and let him go."

A note from the artist, Jesus Mafa:

The Lazarus story comes alive in this painting of the Cameroon community's dramatic interpretation. In this rendering of Lazarus' resurrection, Jesus' posture is dynamic, showing through his movements the call to Lazarus to rise and "Come out!" We see the joyous and surprised responses by the onlookers, who include his sisters Mary and Martha. Their hands are in a clapping, celebratory stance while they gaze at their brother whose face emotes a mixture of shock, relief, and happiness. This painting invokes within the viewer a sense of awe and elation similar to the story it portrays.[32]

Compare Mafa's painting with Swanson's piece from yesterday. What similarities and differences do you notice?

SUNDAY 3/26



The Resurrection of Christ (right wing of the Isenheim Altarpiece), c.1512 - c.1516. Artist–Matthias Grünewald. Public Domain.[33]



- What is the first thing that catches your eye in this image? What details do you only notice upon further reflection?
- What is the strongest emotion being stirred within you as you see this image? Sit with that emotion for a few moments and try to discover what it is seeking to teach you.
- What is the artist seeking to portray? What is not being said?
- What is God revealing to you today as you look at this image?



Scripture leaves us in the dark about Jesus' resurrection, quite literally. The women headed for the tomb while it was still dark, and when they reached the place where Jesus' body should be buried, it was gone. Instead the women encountered frightened guards and angels telling them what had occurred.

What roles do light and dark play in this image? How do you picture Jesus' resurrection? Was it done with light and power and dramatic flair, as we see here, or do you imagine a more quiet and simple rising, like someone sneaking out of bed while the rest of the world still sleeps?

MONDAY 3/27



The Last Super, 2022. Artists—Laura Walters, Gabby Howard, and Megan Illick. Located at Conyers First UMC in Conyers, GA. Used with permission.

- What is the first thing that catches your eye in this image? What details do you only notice upon further reflection?
- What is the strongest emotion being stirred within you as you see this image? Sit with that emotion for a few moments and try to discover what it is seeking to teach you.
- What is the artist seeking to portray? What is not being said?
- What is God revealing to you today as you look at this image?



Ora Bailey grew up in a predominantly white church, and all of the imagery therein reflected the same. It wasn't until recently that she noticed the need for change. Her community had gradually become more diverse over the years, and the leaders of the church noticed that their congregation no longer reflected the community.

With compassion and courage, Ms. Bailey sought to create a gift for the church that would take a small step in normalizing different skin tones and hairstyles. She worked with the artists at the local art studio, "The Sketching Pad," to commission a more authentic version of The Last Supper that could hang in the church. She wanted Jesus and his disciples depicted with more Middle Eastern characteristics: "We need a more open worldview and to be more inclusive on all fronts." It was her hope that offering an image of people with brown skin would give a bit of representation to people who might walk into the church, so that all may feel welcomed.



What do you see when you walk into your church? Does your congregation reflect the people in the community? Does your artwork and imagery represent each person who you hope will walk in your doors? While we may have beloved artwork that speaks to our souls about who Jesus is to us, can we recognize that not all imagery is created equal? What might it look like to create space for additional images that reflect a more diverse invitation?

TUESDAY 3/28



Christ Shows Himself to Thomas. Artists–Rowan and Irene LeCompte. Washington National Cathedral mosaic. (CC)[34]

- What is the first thing that catches your eye in this image? What details do you only notice upon further reflection?
- What is the strongest emotion being stirred within you as you see this image? Sit with that emotion for a few moments and try to discover what it is seeking to teach you.
- What is the artist seeking to portray? What is not being said?
- What is God revealing to you today as you look at this image?

If you could see Jesus face to face, what would you need to know it was him?

John 20:19-29

When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors were locked where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."

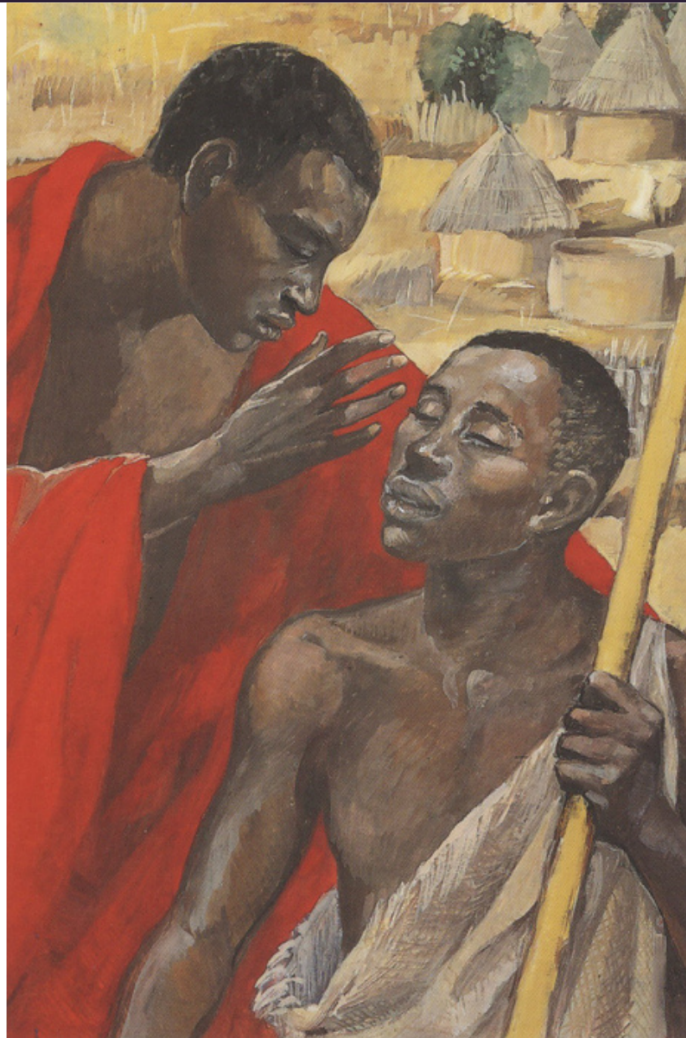
But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe."

A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe." Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe."



Sometimes seeing is believing, yet all who believe today have never seen Jesus in the flesh. We wonder what he would have looked like, yet understand more about who Jesus is based on the stories of scripture and the experiences we feel in Christ's presence.

WEDNESDAY 3/29



Jesus Cures the Man Born Blind, 1973. Artist–Jesus Mafa. Africa. Used with permission.[35]

- What is the first thing that catches your eye in this image? What details do you only notice upon further reflection?
- What is the strongest emotion being stirred within you as you see this image? Sit with that emotion for a few moments and try to discover what it is seeking to teach you.
- What is the artist seeking to portray? What is not being said?
- What is God revealing to you today as you look at this image?

A note from the donor:

In this simply beautiful painting of one of Jesus' healings, we see a caring Jesus bend over a blind man holding his walking stick. From the story in John's gospel, we know that the religious leaders struggle with accepting Jesus' activity, and Jesus responds saying, "If you were blind, you would not be guilty of sin; but now that you claim you can see, your guilt remains." The Pharisees do not look at the blind man as a person, but as a symbol and Jesus points out their error. We are reminded that we should see the humanity in all people, refusing to use them for our own ends. We must look past our own issues and see the individuals.[35]



Jesus had a beautiful way of seeing people that others ignored. He went out of his way to bring people into the center whom society had pushed to the edge. He noticed who was missing from the table and made sure to invite those who would not otherwise have received an invitation.

As we look around our churches, who are we missing in our midst? Who needs an invitation to come and be a part of a loving, forgiving, and accepting community? What small steps might we take to ensure that all are welcome and included?

THURSDAY 3/30



The Hand of Christ, The Palm of Peace. Artist–Akseli Gallen-Kallela (1865–1931). Finland. Public Domain.[36]

- What is the first thing that catches your eye in this image? What details do you only notice upon further reflection?
- What is the strongest emotion being stirred within you as you see this image? Sit with that emotion for a few moments and try to discover what it is seeking to teach you.
- What is the artist seeking to portray? What is not being said?
- What is God revealing to you today as you look at this image?



Some imagery does not show Jesus' face and simply relies on signs and symbols. What signs do you notice that help tell the story of this image? How does the title help you out?

Throughout this season we have seen many signs and symbols pointing toward Jesus including a mother hen, a pelican, a king, the light. What has been your favorite symbol for Jesus? What symbols do you wish were represented more in Christian artwork?

Mexican poet and academic, Cesar A. Cruz said "Art should comfort the disturbed and disturb the comfortable." This line was later quoted by British street artist Banksy.[37]

The words closely mirror a quote often spoken in Christianity claiming the church should "comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable." Yet this too is taken from a misquote by Finley Peter Dunne, American journalist and humorist, who claimed the newspaper "does everything for us...comforts the afflicted, afflicts the comfortable." [38]

Do you agree with these quotes? How does art disturb and comfort? How does the church do the same?



FRIDAY 3/31



Anointed, 2018. Artist–Lauren Wright Pittman. Used with permission.
[39]

- What is the first thing that catches your eye in this image? What details do you only notice upon further reflection?
- What is the strongest emotion being stirred within you as you see this image? Sit with that emotion for a few moments and try to discover what it is seeking to teach you.
- What is the artist seeking to portray? What is not being said?
- What is God revealing to you today as you look at this image?

John 12:1-8

Six days before the Passover Jesus came to Bethany, the home of Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. There they gave a dinner for him. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those reclining with him. Mary took a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard, anointed Jesus's feet, and wiped them with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (the one who was about to betray him), said, "Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and the money given to the poor?" (He said this not because he cared about the poor but because he was a thief; he kept the common purse and used to steal what was put into it.) Jesus said, "Leave her alone. She bought it so that she might keep it for the day of my burial. You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me."



A note from the artist Lauren Wright Pittman:

"This is the posture that Jesus calls all of us into; a profoundly uncomfortable, shockingly reverent position; coming face to face, intimately engaging with the residue of Christ's footsteps to smell and almost taste the journey of Christ." [39]

- Which aspects of your faith have called you into uncomfortable positions?
- How have you embraced or avoided those moments?



SATURDAY 4/1



Mary Magdalene Grieving Over the Dead. Artist unknown. Royalty Free.[40]

- What is the first thing that catches your eye in this image? What details do you only notice upon further reflection?
- What is the strongest emotion being stirred within you as you see this image? Sit with that emotion for a few moments and try to discover what it is seeking to teach you.
- What is the artist seeking to portray? What is not being said?
- What is God revealing to you today as you look at this image?



Here is another image that does not show Jesus' face, yet the scene is instantly recognizable. The power of art comes from capturing a moment in time and telling a story without using any words.

On Friday we looked at an image of Mary of Bethany anointing Jesus' feet with oil and wiping them with her hair. This took place shortly before Jesus was crucified; yet the oil she used was symbolic of preparing his body for burial, a task there was no time for after his death due to the laws of the Sabbath.

Here we have a similar image, this time of Mary Magdalene, kneeling down and weeping at Jesus' feet after his death. Compare the two scenes by two different artists. What similarities do you notice? What new details stand out?



PALM SUNDAY



Entry into the City, 1990. Artist—John August Swanson. Used with permission.[41]

Matthew 21:1-11

When they had come near Jerusalem and had reached Bethphage, at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, saying to them, “Go into the village ahead of you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied and a colt with her; untie them and bring them to me. If anyone says anything to you, just say this, ‘The Lord needs them.’ And he will send them immediately.” This took place to fulfill what had been spoken through the prophet: “Tell the daughter of Zion, Look, your king is coming to you, humble and mounted on a donkey, and on a colt, the foal of a donkey.”

The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them; they brought the donkey and the colt and put their cloaks on them, and he sat on them. A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. The crowds that went ahead of him and that followed were shouting, "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest heaven!" When he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was in turmoil, asking, "Who is this?" The crowds were saying, "This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee."

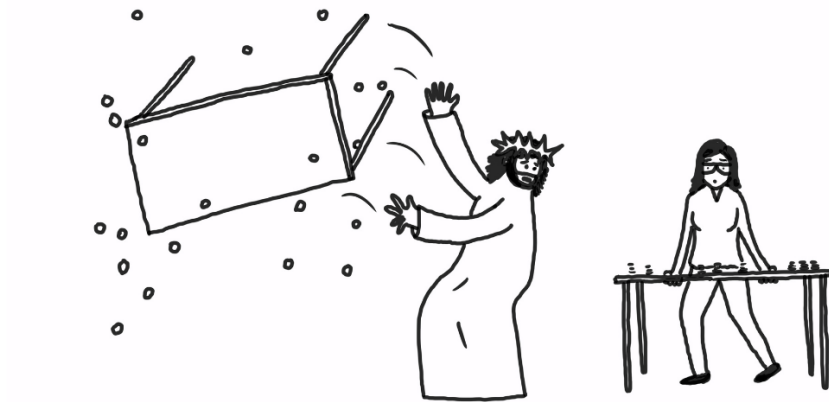
A note from the artist John August Swanson:

"This colorful rendering of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem displays a large crowd all intently focused on him. They wave flags and palms as they follow Jesus in hope of changing circumstances. Among the crowd are also soldiers prepared to intervene should the crowd get too rowdy. Jesus sits peacefully atop a donkey, resigned to his future suffering and death. The sky is stormy, foreshadowing the coming Passion of Christ. This beautiful painting inspires in the viewer a similar hope for social justice, love, and peace." [41]



- What is the first thing that catches your eye in this image? What details do you only notice upon further reflection?
- What is the strongest emotion being stirred within you as you see this image? Sit with that emotion for a few moments and try to discover what it is seeking to teach you.
- What is the artist seeking to portray? What is not being said?
- What is God revealing to you today as you look at this image?

MONDAY 4/3



"AND NOW YOU JUST FLIP IT LIKE THIS!"

Flip it Like This. Artist-NakedPastor aka David Hayward. Used with permission.

Mark 11:15-19

Then they came to Jerusalem. And he entered the temple and began to drive out those who were selling and those who were buying in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold doves, and he would not allow anyone to carry anything through the temple. He was teaching and saying, "Is it not written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations'? But you have made it a den of robbers."

And when the chief priests and the scribes heard it, they kept looking for a way to kill him, for they were afraid of him because the whole crowd was spellbound by his teaching. And when evening came, Jesus and his disciples went out of the city.



There aren't many times in scripture when we experience Jesus' anger. Just after he flips tables in the temple, Jesus goes out and curses a fig tree, causing it to wither and die. The tension was building as Jesus got closer and closer to death, but the emotions expressed in these stories would be better suited as righteous anger. The money changers were disrupting worship. The fig tree was not producing fruit (even though it was out of season). While his emotions often remained more steady, Jesus was always calling out people who were not treating others justly.

It is rare to find artwork of Jesus angry because of the discomfort it brings. Are there times when it is helpful to remember his righteous anger? When is it appropriate to get angry at injustice? What are healthy ways of expressing that anger?

TUESDAY 4/4



The Light of the World, 1853-1854. Artist-William Holman Hunt, 1827-1910. United Kingdom. Public Domain[42]



Once again, shadow and light come into play in both scripture and artwork. What role does light play in this image? Perhaps you've noticed in several images throughout this season where it appears that Jesus has red hair. It could be a trick from the glow of the lantern, or it could be symbolic of what was awaiting Jesus this week.

According to theologian Leonard Sweet, when Jesus is pictured with red hair, it is symbolic of the red heifer.[43] Numbers 19 describes the ceremony of the red heifer, a female cow with no defects, who is slaughtered and burned in a purification ritual in order to cleanse the unclean after coming into contact with a dead body. The symbolism of an unblemished animal used for sacrifice points toward Jesus' coming crucifixion, who was sacrificed in order to cleanse humanity of its sins. Churches no longer perform purification rituals through animal sacrifices after Jesus' crucifixion.



- What is the first thing that catches your eye in this image? What details do you only notice upon further reflection?
- What is the strongest emotion being stirred within you as you see this image? Sit with that emotion for a few moments and try to discover what it is seeking to teach you.
- What is the artist seeking to portray? What is not being said?
- What is God revealing to you today as you look at this image?

WEDNESDAY 4/5



The Lord's Supper, 1973. Artist–Jesus Mafa. Used with permission.[44]

- What is the first thing that catches your eye in this image? What details do you only notice upon further reflection?
- What is the strongest emotion being stirred within you as you see this image? Sit with that emotion for a few moments and try to discover what it is seeking to teach you.
- What is the artist seeking to portray? What is not being said?
- What is God revealing to you today as you look at this image?

John 13:21-32

After saying this Jesus was troubled in spirit and declared, “Very truly, I tell you, one of you will betray me.” The disciples looked at one another, uncertain of whom he was speaking. One of his disciples—the one whom Jesus loved—was reclining close to his heart; Simon Peter therefore motioned to him to ask Jesus of whom he was speaking. So while reclining next to Jesus, he asked him, “Lord, who is it?” Jesus answered, “It is the one to whom I give this piece of bread when I have dipped it in the dish.” So when he had dipped the piece of bread, he gave it to Judas son of Simon Iscariot. After he received the piece of bread, Satan entered into him. Jesus said to him, “Do quickly what you are going to do.” Now no one knew why he said this to him. Some thought that, because Judas had the common purse, Jesus was telling him, “Buy what we need for the festival,” or that he should give something to the poor. So, after receiving the piece of bread, he immediately went out. And it was night.



Which character in the image do you think is Judas? What is the reasoning behind your choice? One of the key takeaways from this scripture is remembering that even Judas was welcome at the table. Jesus knew what was about to take place; yet, he did not refuse to wash his feet, and he did not exclude him from the Passover meal. Jesus had an incredible ability to sit at the table with those with whom he disagreed. How might we do the same?

MAUNDY THURSDAY



Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane, 1430-1435. Artist-Giovanni, di Paolo, ap 1403-1482. Vatican City. Public Domain.[45]

- What is the first thing that catches your eye in this image? What details do you only notice upon further reflection?
- What is the strongest emotion being stirred within you as you see this image? Sit with that emotion for a few moments and try to discover what it is seeking to teach you.
- What is the artist seeking to portray? What is not being said?
- What is God revealing to you today as you look at this image?

Matthew 26: 36, 43, 45-50

Then Jesus went with them to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to his disciples, "Sit here while I go over there and pray." Again he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were heavy. The he came to the disciples and said to them, "Are you still sleeping and taking your rest? See, the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Get up, let us be going. See, my betrayer is at hand."

While he was still speaking, Judas, one of the twelve, arrived; with him was a large crowd with swords and clubs, from the chief priests and the elders of the people. Now the betrayer had given them a sign, saying, "The one I will kiss is the man; arrest him." At once he came up to Jesus and said, "Greetings, Rabbi!" and kissed him. Jesus said to him, "Friend, do what you are here to do." Then they came and laid hands on Jesus and arrested him.



Throughout Jesus' ministry, he gained quite the following. Crowds would flock to wherever he was teaching or healing. Yet the night Jesus was arrested, Judas had to identify Jesus with a kiss so that the guards would be certain of who to arrest. What does this say about Jesus' appearance in comparison to the disciples? Did this man of miracles blend in effortlessly with everyone else?

When we look at a piece of art, Jesus frequently looks like any other man. It is only with the title of the painting or the symbol of a halo that we know which person is supposed to be Jesus. How do we identify Jesus today? What signs point us in the right direction to know we are following the true Savior?

GOOD FRIDAY



What Our Lord Saw From the Cross, 1886-1894. Artist-James Tissot, 1836-1902. Public Domain.[46]

- What is the first thing that catches your eye in this image? What details do you only notice upon further reflection?
- What is the strongest emotion being stirred within you as you see this image? Sit with that emotion for a few moments and try to discover what it is seeking to teach you.
- What is the artist seeking to portray? What is not being said?
- What is God revealing to you today as you look at this image?

Psalm 22

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from helping me, from the words of my groaning? O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer; and by night but find no rest. Yet you are holy, enthroned on the praises of Israel. In you our ancestors trusted; they trusted, and you delivered them. To you they cried and were saved; in you they trusted and were not put to shame. But I am a worm and not human, scorned by others and despised by the people. All who see me mock me; they sneer at me; they shake their heads; “Commit your cause to the Lord; let him deliver—let him rescue the one in whom he delights!”

I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint; my heart is like wax; it is melted within my breast; my mouth is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to my jaws; you lay me in the dust of death. For dogs are all around me; a company of evildoers encircles me; they bound my hands and feet. I can count all my bones. They stare and gloat over me; they divide my clothes among themselves, and for my clothing they cast lots.



When Jesus cried out from the cross it was to quote this psalmist's words. "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Even though a crowd gathered below, there must have been no lonelier place than on that cross. Look at the faces in the crowd. Who do you notice is present? What different emotions can you pick out?

HOLY SATURDAY



Madonna della Pietà, Our Lady of Piety. Commonly known as The Pietà, 1498-1499. Michelangelo. Italy. Located at Saint Peter's Basilica, Vatican City. (CC)[47]

- What is the first thing that catches your eye in this image? What details do you only notice upon further reflection?
- What is the strongest emotion being stirred within you as you see this image? Sit with that emotion for a few moments and try to discover what it is seeking to teach you.
- What is the artist seeking to portray? What is not being said?
- What is God revealing to you today as you look at this image?



Mary sits grieving, holding the body of her son Jesus. Mary is portrayed as quite youthful to symbolize her status as the Virgin Mary. Since Jesus died just before the Sabbath, there was little time for grieving, as they had to move Jesus' body to the tomb before sunset. Yet here, carved in marble, is a moment held in time forever. Pietà means compassion or pity and perfectly describes the emotion expressed in Mary's face.



On this holy Saturday, let us not rush into the celebration of the resurrection to come. Let us not skip the parts of scripture that make us feel uncomfortable. Instead, let us honor Jesus and Mary and sit for a moment in our grief, remembering a mother's loss of her son, remembering the light that was taken from the world. Christ has died, but Christ will come again.

EASTER SUNDAY



Resurrection, 1951. Resurrection Chapel, Washington National Cathedral. Mosaic designed by Hildreth Meière. Commissioned by Philip Frohman. Venetian glass mosaic executed by Ravenna Mosaics. Photograph: Royalty Free.[48]

- What is the first thing that catches your eye in this image? What details do you only notice upon further reflection?
- What is the strongest emotion being stirred within you as you see this image? Sit with that emotion for a few moments and try to discover what it is seeking to teach you.
- What is the artist seeking to portray? What is not being said?
- What is God revealing to you today as you look at this image?



Who do we say that Jesus is? It once again comes down to a choice. Will we be the angel on the left, bowing down in worship at the victory of Jesus' life conquering death, or will we be the soldiers on the right, who have fallen asleep or become blinded to all of the glory that Jesus exudes?

This Lenten season we have explored the many different sides of Jesus. We have seen the importance of recognizing his heritage as a first century Palestinian Jew, and the need for historically accurate images that portray his humanity. We marveled at his divinity as we explored the otherworldly elements depicting his Christological nature. We were drawn to the relatable images that helped bring Jesus close as we were able to see ourselves in him, recognizing the crucial nature of representation for all who enter the church. We have unpacked the signs and symbols that point to the various characteristics of Jesus that make him the multi-dimensional Savior we hold so dear. Now it is our turn to go and share the good news that Christ is more than we could have ever imagined. He is human and divine. He is a peacemaker and righteously angry. He is filled with grace and holds us accountable. He is the answer and the questions. He is both/and. As our Lenten journey comes to close, who do we say that Jesus is? And how will we express the fullness of his image and share it with everyone we meet?

Happy Easter!



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Cover Art: Jesus Christ mosaic on an abandoned mausoleum in Western Bohemia, Czech Republic. Artist Unknown. Royalty Free. ID 49342730 © Wrangel | Dreamstime.com

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Appendix E.3: Bible Study

The Introduction to Visio Divina Bible Study is a five-week study. The introduction and first lesson are included in the Doctoral Project section. The remaining four lessons are included here.

WEEK 2: JESUS' IMAGE IN SCRIPTURE

Materials to Gather Before Class:

- Create a slideshow of any images you want to introduce. Include favorite images from participants if possible. If no one submits any, choose from some of the typical favorites at the end of this lesson.



Why Imagery Matters

1. Have you ever read a book and imagined what the characters looked like? Perhaps you created an image in your head? How easy or difficult was it?
2. How often do you imagine, despite the author's physical description, that the main character looks like you? Or does the description play an important role?
3. Have you ever watched a movie after reading the book? Did the actor's portrayal of the character live up to the image in your head? Did your image for that character change after watching the movie? Were you able to go back to your original image in your head after seeing a different portrayal on screen?
4. What does this say about how important imagery is in our lives?

What Scripture Says

- Isaiah 53— Jesus "had no form or majesty that we should look at him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him."
- Does Isaiah imply Jesus was ugly? What other characteristics stick out in this description?
- Psalm 45:2—Describes Jesus as "the most handsome of men; grace is poured upon your lips."
- How is this description different from the one in Isaiah?
- Matthew 17:1-2—Jesus' transfiguration.
- 1 Corinthians 11:14 and Leviticus 19:27—typical grooming tips from Jewish customs.
- Daniel 10:5-6—Daniel's vision of the son of God.
- Revelation 1:14-16—physical description—"His head and hair were white as white wool, white as snow; his eyes were like a flame of fire, his feet were like burnished bronze."
- Have you ever imagined Jesus with white hair?
- This is his image post resurrection—when many didn't recognize him. Do you think he looked differently after he was resurrected?

What Scripture Says

Consider other scriptures that occur post-resurrection where Jesus' closest followers do not recognize him.

- John 20:14—Mary sees Jesus and thinks he is the gardener.
- John 21:4—Jesus appears to the disciples while they are fishing, but they do not recognize him.
- Luke 24:13-32—Cleopas and his friend walk with Jesus back to Emmaus but do not recognize him until he breaks bread with them.

What does scripture say about the theological characteristics of Christ? Read through some of Jesus' "I Am" statements and discuss what they say about his character.

- Bread of Life—John 6:35
- Light of the World—John 8:12
- Gate/Door—John 10:9
- Good Shepherd—John 10:11
- Resurrection—John 11:25-26
- Way, Truth, and Life—John 14:6
- Vine—John 15:5

Additional scripture that describes the image of Christ. Which one is your favorite?

- Mother Hen—Luke 13:31-35
- Hebrews 1:3—Jesus is a reflection of God's glory, the exact imprint of God's very being.
- Colossians 1:15—Jesus is the image of the invisible God.

Introducing Visio Divina

To the Leader:

If you did not have time to introduce any images in Week 1 or explore any of the class's favorites, now is a great time to do it. If no one has brought in their favorite yet, I have included a few that have been frequently mentioned during my research as a way of getting you started. These may or may not speak to your context. See the bottom of p. 9 for discussion questions using Visio Divina.

Discuss:

Let's look at some of your favorite images. As we explore these images, let's remember that we may not like every image we explore, but we can still be respectful of what others enjoy.

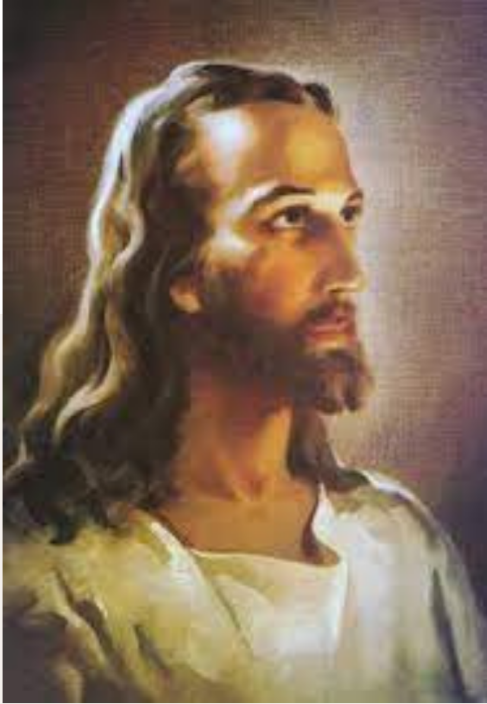
We will use the practice of Visio Divina. Is anyone familiar with Visio Divina?

Visio Divina is similar to the more common practice of Lectio Divina. Has anyone practiced Lectio Divina before?

Lectio Divina is Latin for "divine reading" and is a way of praying the scriptures and allowing the Holy Spirit to guide your prayer time as you look at a particular Bible story. The practice typically consists of choosing one passage of scripture and reading it through several times, perhaps in different versions, and allowing God to speak to you through the words and story. It may be a very familiar passage, but hopefully a new meaning may be revealed each time you read or hear it.

Visio Divina is Latin for "divine vision" and is a similar way of praying through images or icons. Each time you look at the image you may notice something new. Look first at the overall picture and note the emotions that hit you as you observe. If you notice a particular emotion, whether positive or negative, allow it to sit with you for a moment. Ask yourself what may be bringing forth that emotion. Then look more deeply at the smaller details and notice the colors, symbols, characters, and setting of the image. Can you distinguish a particular Bible story that is being portrayed? Ask yourself what the artist is seeking to portray and wonder about what is not being said. Spend some time reflecting on the image, and share your thoughts with others.

A Selection of Favorite Images



Warner Sallman's "Head of Christ" (left) and
"Christ at Heart's Door" (right)



Shroud of Turin

WEEK 3: JESUS AROUND THE WORLD

To Leader

For the biggest impact, make this class as customized as possible. If there are people in your class who grew up in another country, ask them what images they grew up with and what images are their favorites. If your participants have traveled outside the country, ask them what images they have noticed during their trips. Most of the images I shared during this class were from my personal travels, which allowed me to speak from my own experiences and set a tone of curiosity with the class. Seeing Jesus portrayed as Black, Asian, African, etc. can lead to some interesting conversations about how we make Jesus look like us so that he is more relatable.

The most important conversation to focus on is finding out why Jesus needs to look like us to be relatable. Why do we struggle to relate to a man from another country with olive skin, dark hair and eyes, and Jewish or Israeli features?

Materials to Gather Before Class:

- Slideshow of any images you want to introduce.
Include favorite images from participants if possible.
- Check out artists such as:
 - Woonbo Kim Ki-chang—Asian Jesus
 - Vincent Barzoni—Black Jesus
 - Chris O'Doherty (aka Reg Mombassa)—Australian Jesus
 - The Black Nazarene—Philippines
 - The Lord of Miracles—Purple Jesus—Peru

Jesus Around the World

Today we're going to look at images of Jesus from around the world. It is important to remember that any image of Jesus is only going to portray a portion of who he is and cannot fully illustrate the essence of his entire being. Think about a time you've looked at a photograph and thought "is that how I look?" Even a photograph, the most realistic portrayal of someone's image, is not always going to show the most accurate portrayal. It is only a snapshot of a moment. It is the same with art.

We may look at an image and think: "That's not MY Jesus." But let's consider if certain characteristics or symbols could speak to who Jesus is and was. Let's look for the parts of the image that speak to Christ instead of accepting or rejecting the whole image. Remember that all of these are imaginations of the artist.

For many Christians the goal is to make the gospel accessible. This often leads to accommodation. Volker Kuster writes about accommodation in his book "The Many Faces of Jesus Christ: Intercultural Christology." He defines accommodation as "assimilating the gospel to a particular culture" and it "was practiced long before the term existed...With the world mission which began in the wake of colonialism and imperialism in modern times, the gospel then came up against the global pluralism of cultures and religions. The efforts at assimilation which can be observed here are guided by the notion that the content and cultural form of the gospel are to be clearly separated."

Just as the text is translated into various languages, so it's more accessible to all people, our understanding of the gospel can be interpreted differently based on how we image Christ.

Think of movies that change names or ideas to fit a culture. In "Inside Out," baby Riley was disgusted by broccoli. In the Japanese version, they changed her disgusting food to green peppers. In the American version, the father was watching football. In most European versions, they changed his sport of choice to soccer. We will see similar things happening to images of Jesus from different cultures in the clothes, backgrounds, customs, etc.

Inside Out: Broccoli vs. Peppers



When we imagine Christ, our favorite images tend to have light skin, flowing hair, and a calm demeanor. Scripture tells us we are made in God's image, but do we also make Christ in our image? Is this dangerous or helpful?

Artists do the same with their creations. They use their understanding of the gospel and combine it with their personal taste and historical background to form their understanding of Jesus. Additionally, viewers use their own personal taste and background to interpret the image.

Explore some images of Jesus from around the world and practice Visio Divina on them.

The Philippines: The Feast of the Black Nazarene



The Feast of the Black Nazarene



Filipino culture is one that sees whiteness as beautiful. They spend money and time on skin whitening soaps and spas hoping to lighten their skin tone. In contrast, American culture focuses on darkening the skin with bronzers, tanning lotions and spas, spray tans, etc.

When I visited the Philippines, we experienced an event called The Feast of the Black Nazarene. Every January there is a huge festival where thousands of pilgrims travel to Manila to celebrate a wooden image of Christ carrying the cross. The story locals told us was that the statue was a gift from France that had been sailed overseas. When they brought the statue up from below deck, the wind and water had turned the face of Jesus black. The Filipinos saw it as a miracle because it was an image they could relate to. They felt it was a sign that Jesus had come to save them too, not just white people. It was an image that made Jesus more accessible to a community of people who had darker skin. Now every year in January, they have a parade in which they march the statue, barefoot, from sunup to sun down, in gratitude for Jesus presenting himself to them. Additional research makes it unclear whether this is really the origin of the Feast of the Black Nazarene, and if the statue really changed color, but it is the legend surrounding the festival as told by locals.

- What does this say about French culture who gave the gift?
- What does it say about Filipino culture who saw black Jesus as miracle?

Peru: Purple Jesus--The Lord of Miracles



When I visited Peru, we experienced the legend of the Lord of Miracles, known as Purple Jesus. The story locals told us is that in 1651 an African slave painted a mural of Jesus, Mary mother of Jesus, and Mary Magdalene on a wall in Lima. It is unclear what his name was, but some believe it is Benito or Pedro Dalcom. Four years later, a massive earthquake struck the city, causing massive destruction and killing thousands. The miracle was that the painting of Jesus, Mary, and Mary was completely unharmed. Shortly after this, people started using this image as a pilgrimage site to ask for miracles, and many healings took place after praying to this painting. The government became so frustrated with the crowds flocking to this area that they had to have it removed, but various hired workers were unable to do so due to strange circumstances. Eventually they stopped trying to destroy the image and started celebrating it as a miracle.

- How does this story speak to us today?
- What do you notice about this image of Jesus?

WEEK 4: IMAGING THE TRINITY

Materials to Gather Before Class

- Slideshow of any images you want to introduce. Include as many images of the Trinity as possible.
- If possible, watch "The Shack" ahead of time, or pull clips from the movie off of YouTube to show in class. The clip of Mack meeting the Trinity can be found here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=auUMwFjH3vs>



Discussing the Trinity

What is the Trinity? Is it in the Bible?

- The Trinity is the concept of God as three persons in one Godhead.
- The title "Trinity" is not in the Bible, but the concept of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is mentioned repeatedly.

Where in scripture is Jesus first mentioned?

- Most people will probably think Jesus' birth story is his first appearance in scripture, but he is present as part of the Trinity much earlier.
- John 1:1-5—The Word was in the beginning with God. We know that Jesus was the Word, the Logos, and was present with God in the beginning.
- John 1:6-9—The light that shines in the darkness points toward Jesus.
- John 1:14—The Word became flesh also points to Jesus. This tells us that Jesus was present in the beginning with God.
- Genesis 1:1—God was present in the beginning, and a wind swept over the face of the waters. Wind has often been used as a metaphor for the Holy Spirit.
- Genesis 1:3—God said/God spoke the Word, and it was to bring forth the Light. Jesus was present in the Word and the Light from the beginning of time. He hasn't yet taken human form, so his image appears differently.

Discussing the Trinity

If there is time, watch this video detailing the Hebrew language pointing out the presence of the Trinity in Genesis 1:1. You can stop after the first three minutes or continue with the entire video (9:22 total).

- <https://www.thelivingword.org.au/grand-design/session7.php>

What is your favorite personification of the Trinity? When you pray, whom do you picture, or whom do you address your prayers toward?

- Most people tend to favor either God the Father or Jesus, but the Holy Spirit was intended to be our advocate after Jesus ascended into heaven.
- Look at the story of Pentecost in Acts 2.

John Wesley supported the idea of the Trinity.

“John Wesley may have said he “dare not insist upon anyone’s using the word ‘Trinity’ since the term is not in the Bible itself, but he also believed that the divine reality to which the term points is, in fact, the truth about who God is.”

Look at some images of the Trinity being represented.

- Image of the Trinity symbol: <https://creation.com/jesus-christ-our-creator-a-biblical-defence-of-the-trinity>
- God the Father, Jesus the Son, and the Holy Spirit as a dove: <https://goodshepherdcampus.org/understanding-the-holy-trinity/>
- Symbolic images of the Trinity: <https://www.immanuelbirmingham.com/blog/trinity-g3mwm>
- The Trinity where they all appear as Jesus: <https://mycatholic.life/catholic-prayers/prayer-to-the-trinity/>

Discussing the Trinity

What symbols do you notice in these images?

- Dove—representing the Holy Spirit, similar to what appeared at Jesus' baptism in scripture.
- Lamb—Jesus is called the Lamb of God.
- Hand—the hand is often in the form of a blessing gesture.

What is your favorite image of the Trinity?

What symbols best portray the three-in-one concept of God?



Holy Trinity, Zoltán Joó

Holy Trinity with Mary Magdalene, John the Baptist and Tobias and the Angel,
Sandro Botticelli



The Shack

Introduce the concept of *The Shack* by William P. Young. If you're not familiar, be warned that there is a trigger warning involving the kidnapping and death of a child. Be mindful of your audience as you talk about the themes in this book and movie.

- Who has read or seen *The Shack*? This became quite a popular representation of the Trinity when it first came out and caused quite the controversy for the way it portrayed God. We follow a man named Mack and his loving family as they tragically lose their youngest child to a serial killer. His wife Nan is a very strong Christian but Mack is not, and they deal with their tragedy in various ways. Mack is invited to an old shack by a letter in the mail, and there he experiences a visit with God.
- Watch a clip of Mack meeting the Trinity:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=auUMwFjH3vs>

The Shack

What did you see or notice? What stood out to you?

- God is introduced as Elousia—"Elousia" (i.e., a combination of the Hebrew name for God the Creator, "El," and the Greek word "ousia" suggesting a Platonic meaning of "being" or "existence"). Among other characteristics, "Elousia" describes herself as, "the Creator God who is truly real and the ground of all being."
- Spirit is Sarayu—feminine version of sanscrit root "sar" to flow. In masculine it means "air, wind, that which is streaming."
- Why do you think these images were so controversial when this first came out?
- What do these images say about our understanding of the Trinity?
- How would the personifications of the Trinity appear to you? Would they be similar or different?



Mack meets Jesus, God, and the Holy Spirit in "The Shack"

WEEK 5: HUMOR AND SATIRE

Materials to Gather Before Class

- Slideshow of any images you want to introduce and ability to show videos if needed. Include as many cartoons, comics, satirical clips, etc. Links to suggestions are included.
- David Heyward—NakedPastor.com:
<https://nakedpastor.com/collections/cartoon>
- Everett Patterson—José y Maria:
<http://www.everettpatterson.com/?p=1835>
- BBC Clip—There is no White Jesus:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=APMu32sC2nM>



Humor and Satire

Today we're going to look at the humorous side of Christian imagery through cartoons, satire, and comedy.

- What are some examples of comedy or satire you have seen in Christian imagery?
- When is humor and satire helpful to use?
- When might it go too far?

"God is a comedian playing to an audience that is too afraid to laugh."

- This quote is often credited to French philosopher Voltaire, but it may also have been penned by American author H.L. Mencken.
- What do you think the author meant by this quote? Do you find it to be true?

Humor and Satire

Discuss the concept of applause during worship. Is it appropriate? Does it lack reverence?

- Some church traditions feel that applause after a song or sermon can make it feel like a performance and detracts from its intention as a means of worship. If we were to consider worship a performance, who would be the audience? The performers? The director?
- Many will assume that the congregation is the audience, the pastor and choir are the performers, and perhaps God is the director.
- According to Danish philosopher Kierkegaard, the congregation are the performers, the pastor and choir are the directors, and the whole church is playing to an audience of one: God.
- Too often we think of worship geared toward pleasing us, when we should think of it as our offering intending to please God.

Dr. Terry Lindvall—C.S. Lewis Endowed Chair in Communication and Christian Thought, Professor of Communication, Virginia Wesleyan University, author of “God Mocks: A History of Religious Satire from the Hebrew Prophets to Stephen Colbert.”

Dr. Lindvall shares 7 Principles of Satire and Christian Faith. I have narrowed it down to 4.

1. True satire requires both wit and moral purpose. Without wit, it is mere condemnation; without moral purpose, it is mere venting of the spleen or flaunting of sarcasm.
2. Religious satire is an effective form of indirect communication, except when it is misunderstood by its audiences. It provides sudden shifts in perspective that surprise and delight and “can” make the target laugh at his or her own self.
3. Religious satire is necessary and useful, but it may have unintended consequences.
4. Religious satire should function as a glass, a mirror, not only to society, but to its practitioners.

Do you agree or disagree with Dr. Lindvall’s principles?

Humor and Satire

Satire vs. Humor: What's the difference?

- Satire is intended to point out a critique of religion or religious leaders through humor, exaggeration, etc.
- A lot of religious satire comes from people who are atheist or agnostic and want to point out what's wrong with the church.

Why is this harmful?

- People who are unchurched may see it and not realize it is satire. They may take it as reality. I have rarely seen a good example of a pastor or a church service that was helpful in movies or TV. Most things that we know well are poorly done on TV. Most doctor shows are horribly inaccurate. Most examples of foster parenting are incredibly negative and harmful. Most cop shows or detective shows are more drama than reality. This is a reminder to take Christian satire with a grain of salt.

Why is this helpful?

- For Christians, it is helpful to know what the world sees. It is helpful to know where we might be missing the mark. Lots of times the worst examples are exaggerated from the truth. One of the best-known things about comedy is: it's funny because it's true. If we know our faults and see how the world views us, even if inaccurate or unfair, we know better how to relate to the world around us. We know better how to cater our messages so that unchurched people might feel welcome instead of inferior.



Humor and Satire

Humor in scripture:

- Psalm 2: “He who sits in the heavens laughs; the Lord has them in derision. Then he will speak to them in his wrath, and terrify them in his fury...”
- Does this mean God is laughing at us from heaven?
- Perhaps once we are as holy as God, we can mock like God.
- 1 Samuel 17:41-47: David and Goliath begin to hurl insults at one another as they prepare for battle. We like to believe in freedom of speech but there are always consequences to satire. They often lead to battle.
- Proverbs 17:22—“A cheerful heart is a good medicine; but a downcast spirit dries up the bones.”
- Psalm 162:2—“Then our mouth was filled with laughter and our tongue with shouts of joy; then it was said among the nations ‘The Lord has done great things for them.’”
- Jesus was mocked at his crucifixion by the guards and crowds. God allows Godself to be mocked.
- The spiritual gift of prophecy is the gift to call things the way they are. This is what satire often is: having the boldness to call things as they are seen, even when it is not a popular profession.
- (1330-1387) Chaucer and William Langland began to write satires that mocked wealthy nobility and wealthy clergy because the clergy did nothing to help the poor.



Humor and Satire

Humor in movies:

Monty Python's Life of Brian

- This movie was originally created as a slight against people following Jesus on blind faith, and not quite getting it right. They were following Jesus, or Brian, because it was popular not because it was having a significant impact on their lives.
- Does the Gospel have a real impact on our lives? Have we been transformed by following Christ? If not...why are we following?

Dogma

- Dogma shows the Catholic Church attempting to modernize their image of Jesus away from the depressing crucifix into something more relatable and introduces Buddy Christ.
- Clip on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6FigprdcBGA>
- What is accurate from this clip? What is perhaps exaggerated? Buddy Christ might be a little too far the other direction.

BBC clip—There is no White Jesus

- Clip on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=APMu32sC2nM>
- Why do we have such a hard time relating to people who are different from us? We might not believe they will understand us. We have been programmed.

Look at any additional cartoons or videos you have pulled and discuss what message they are trying to send and whether their level of satire is helpful or harmful.



Cover Image

Calming of the Storm, 1995. Artist--Peter Joenig.
Koenig, Peter. Calming of the Storm, from Art in the Christian Tradition, a project of the Vanderbilt Divinity Library, Nashville, TN. <https://diglib.library.vanderbilt.edu/act-imagelink.pl?RC=58522> [retrieved February 2, 2023]. Original source: Peter Winfried (Canisius) Koenig, <https://www.pwkoenig.co.uk/>.

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P. 6 Overview of Class

The Light and the Life, 2020. Artist--J. Kirk Richards.
J. Kirk Richards, The Light and the Life, 2020, Oil and acrylic on panel. J. Kirk Richards. Used with permission. The Book of Mormon Art Catalog, [<https://bookofmormonartcatalog.org/catalog/the-light-and-the-life/>].

P. 12 A Selection of Favorite Images

Shroud of Turin
https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Turin_shroud_positive_and_negative_displaying_original_color_information_708_x_465_pixels_94_KB.jpg

P. 14 Jesus Around the World

Volker Kuster. The Many Faces of Jesus Christ. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1999, p. 20-21.

P. 15 Inside Out

<https://www.businessinsider.com/why-inside-out-has-different-scenes-in-other-countries-2015-7>

P. 17 Purple Jesus

<https://www.churchpop.com/2016/04/18/the-lord-of-miracles/>

P. 20 John Wesley/The Trinity

<https://wordsofwesley.com/libtext.cfm?srm=556key=trinity&ll=33526&hl=33526#33526>

P. 21 Trinity

Trinity, 2016. Artist--Zoltán Joó

Joó, Zoltán. Holy Trinity, from Art in the Christian Tradition, a project of the Vanderbilt Divinity Library, Nashville, TN.

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P. 22 Trinity

Holy Trinity with Mary Magdalene, John the Baptist and Tobias and the Angel, ca. 1491-1493. Artist--Sandro Botticelli

Botticelli, Sandro, 1444 or 1445-1510. Holy Trinity with Mary Magdalene, John the Baptist and Tobias and the Angel, from Art in the Christian Tradition, a project of the Vanderbilt Divinity Library, Nashville, TN. <https://diglib.library.vanderbilt.edu/act-imagelink.pl?RC=55256> [retrieved November 7, 2022]. Original source:

http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Botticelli,_Pala_della_Convertite.jpg.

P. 22 The Shack

Young, William P. 2017. The Shack. London: Hodder Windblown.

Hazeldine, Stuart, dir. The Shack.. British Columbia, Canada: Summit Entertainment, 2017.

Appendix F—Milestone 6

Project Launch Plan

Documentation

Stained glass windows in current contextual setting showing Jesus as a white man.





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