



The Jesus Way

B Y B R A D J E R S A K

Last year, 2015, was CWR/PTM's "Year of the Bible." We featured articles and interviews about what the Bible is and how to interpret it through a grace-based, Christ-centered lens. While our editors and columnists contributed to the conversation, we were also treated to new perspectives on biblical inspiration, authority and interpretation from a variety of guest authors from whom we hope to hear more in coming years.

Now, the CWR editorial team has put thought and prayer into a fresh guiding theme

through the next two years. It's my privilege to introduce the *Jesus Way* as our focus for 2016-17.

I sense the *Jesus Way* becoming a healthy catchphrase among those who know that *living faith in the living Christ*—versus religious identification—will shine a guiding light on the path ahead.

Of course, anyone can use a catchphrase, gut it of significance, and mount it on a religious trophy wall. Indeed, spiritual taxidermy has often been the prevailing sin and mortal wound of Christendom.

Nevertheless, we hope that by continually refocusing on the person, the message and the life of Christ, we will become more alert and aware of new life in Christ as He lives it within us.

THE *JESUS WAY*—WHAT JESUS TAUGHT

The *Jesus Way* theme begins as we fix our attention on the captivating content of Jesus' teachings—what he taught and what he thought "following him" would look like in practice. The *Jesus Way* shows up in his "gospel of the kingdom," in the parables he composed and in his

great oratories from the “Sermon on the Mount” to the “Olivet Discourse.”

Biblicists (who ascribe all-sufficiency to the Bible) are frequently insistent on “the plain reading of the text.” Yet it’s fascinating how quickly a bullish biblicism dissolves when Jesus says, “Love your enemies” or “Do not judge.” Suddenly we pretend it’s very hard to know what his words mean. Some hide behind the difficulty of the original languages or supposed illusiveness of the historical context. Proof-texts of caveats and exceptions are drummed up. This resistance is an obvious defense mechanism of the flesh against the hard (but clear) teachings of Christ when confronted with his lordship.

The truth is that Christ’s words can be a tough pill to swallow—many who heard him trudged away sad or stomped away mad, knowing that he spoke words of life, but only in the wake of the death of self. Who could bear that? So we *undergo the Gospels—medicine for the heart, poison for the ego*—praying for empowering grace to take up our own cross and follow Jesus.

THE *JESUS WAY*—HOW JESUS MINISTERED

The *Jesus Way* also includes *how* Christ taught, *how* he ministered and *how* he treated others. *How* did Jesus minister to the vulnerable, the sinner, the sick and the poor? *How* did Jesus treat minorities, women and children? *How* did he heal the broken in body and soul; *how* did he set prisoners free from religious and demonic chains? And also—lest we sidestep the issue—*how* did Jesus address the religious establishment and temple authorities?

We can ask the Gospels, “When is it appropriate to show kindness and compassion?” Answer: *always*. But also, “When is it right to confront and rebuke?” On multiple occasions, Jesus’ words and tone have an edge. He could be terse with religious insiders.

But beware! We’re not Jesus. Our pious outbursts typically sound less like him and more like those trotting on religious

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high horses. When we think judging others is being “prophetic,” we’re just as likely becoming Pharisees.

Notice that when Jesus censures his opponents, his reproofs are tear-filled. He loves them. He wept over Jerusalem when prophesying her demise. He pled earnestly that she would repent before giving her over to the consequences of her actions. The self-destruction he foresees does not lead to gloating, but to grieving.

And note too that Jesus recognized when it was time to be silent. Like a sheep led to slaughter—Jesus didn’t demand the last word, unless perhaps it was “Father, forgive them.” I doubt that he gets embroiled in our silly Facebook culture-war dramas. I can’t imagine he was so free with reactive rants typical of our culture today.

At the end of the day, what does the *Jesus Way* show us? It shows us that that God is love. **If we know anything at all about Jesus, it is that he loved every single person**

who ever met him—and that included his “haters.”

THE *JESUS WAY*—JESUS’ FINAL PATH

Then, of course, after Christ performed his last healing and preached his final sermon, the *Jesus Way* culminates in the *Via Delarosa* (way of suffering)—Jesus’ final path or way or journey. We see him *go up* to Jerusalem, *go up* to Gethsemane,

go up to his trial and then, *go up* to the Cross—and beyond.

“Beyond,” for us, includes his descent into and conquest over hades (the grave). “Beyond” includes his triumphant (and actual) resurrection from the jaws of death. And “beyond” includes Christ’s ascension and enthronement as Lord of the cosmos!

The *Jesus Way* reveals to us the mystery and meaning of the Cross: that the righteousness or divine justice (same word in the NT) of God is fulfilled on the Cross through Christ’s self-giving, radically forgiving, co-suffering love.

The *Jesus Way* spells the death of death because, as St. Chrysostom once said:

“He that was taken by death has annihilated it!

He descended into Hades and took Hades captive!

He embittered it when it tasted His flesh! ...

It was embittered, for it was abolished!

It was embittered, for it was mocked!

It was embittered, for it was purged!



THE *JESUS WAY* IS MORE THAN A SET OF THEOLOGICAL BELIEFS WE TRY TO EMBRACE. IT IS, AFTER ALL, A WAY. BEFORE THE FIRST DISCIPLES WERE CALLED "CHRISTIANS," THEY WERE CALLED THE WAY—THOSE WHO TRAVELLED IN THE TRACKS OF THEIR DIVINE-HUMAN TRAILBLAZER.

It was embittered,

for it was despoiled!

It was embittered, for it was bound in chains!"

How do we know this? Because Jesus rose from the dead...for real! The disciples were not convinced by an empty tomb or inspired by a lasting legacy.

They were captivated by a risen Man! Nor does the resurrection start and end with an event in history; it means Christ was and is alive. Now. Today.

And so the *Jesus Way* not only proclaims the death and resurrection of Jesus back then; it announces, anticipates and experiences the presence of the living One today.

Wherever two or three of us gather, Christ is *still* in our midst. Living as if that's true (because it is true) is crucial to the *Jesus Way* and distinguishes it from all dead forms of religion.

THE *JESUS WAY*—THE REVELATION OF GOD

The wonder of the *Jesus Way* is that the entirety of Jesus' teaching corpus, his ministry portfolio and his saving work is far more the lifework of history's greatest guru, healer and savior. The *Jesus Way* is the definitive revelation of God himself.

When we say "Jesus is the living word of God," what do we mean? We mean that **Jesus is what God has to say about himself, in person no less!** As I've shown in *A More Christlike God*, Jesus alone shows us exactly what God is like. To see Jesus is to see the face of the eternal, invisible, almighty God! Or to say it in reverse, how does God reveal himself in time? He does it the *Jesus Way!* And such a surprising way for the divine to manifest—in the weakness of human flesh! Edward Shiloto once wrote:

*"The other gods were strong;
but Thou wast weak;
They rode, but Thou didst*

stumble to a throne;

But to our wounds only God's wounds can speak,

And not a god has wounds, but Thou alone."

THE *JESUS WAY*—FOLLOWERS ON THE *JESUS WAY*

While the *Jesus Way* is founded on the words and works and way of the Master himself, another component suggests itself. Out of that glorious life, we see how early Christians responded in faith and love to Jesus. The New Testament is the apostolic church's initial interpretation of what the *Jesus Way* looks like in the aftermath of the life of Christ. The fledgling Way was messy and at times bloody, for they were breaking new ground, but what remarkable lives these martyr-witnesses led!

The *Jesus Way* is more than a set of theological beliefs we try to embrace. It is, after all, a Way. Before the first disciples were called "Christians," they were called *the Way*—those who travelled in the tracks of their divine-human Trailblazer. A Christ-centered, grace-filled life demands far more than reciting a prayer, signing a doctrinal statement and taking a ritual bath. It means surrendering to the grace and care of the Waymaker as he directs our paths. It's our hope that through the coming years, the *Jesus Way* theme will encourage that surrender in all of us. □

GOLD MEDAL WINNER!

A More Christlike God, written by Editor-in-Chief Brad Jersak. Winner of the Enduring Light Christian Thought Gold Medal in the 2016 Illumination Book Awards. This groundbreaking book from CWRpress takes readers beyond the ugly parodies of Christianity into the beautiful gospel of a more Christlike God. **To order go to: www.ptm.org/christlike**



Welcome to CWRm

Beginning with this issue we welcome two new columnists: Cindy Brandt with her column, "Outside In" (page 28) and Zack Hunt with his column, "Costly Grace" (page 19). Find out more about Cindy and Zack in the "Newsmakers of 2015" report on page 27.