



2023 Lent Book Study Discussion Guide

Diana Butler Bass, *Freeing Jesus: Rediscovering Jesus as Friend, Teacher, Savior, Lord, Way, and Presence*

In the season of Lent, we are called to journey with Jesus toward Jerusalem, the cross, and ultimately, the empty tomb. This is a time of self-awareness and repentance, a time to turn ourselves toward our Lord, not just for 40 days, but for a deeper relationship for our whole lives. The questions below are meant to inspire thought and conversation so that we might know our Lord better and follow our Lord more closely. They can be discussed in groups or could be starters for a journaling practice in this holy season.

Introduction/Framing Questions for the study:

1. Diana Butler Bass tells a number of personal stories about her own faith journey, from childhood to now. How have you most often thought of Jesus in your own life?
2. To whom do you address your personal prayers? What names or vocabulary do you use? Do you pray only to God? Do you address only your 'Lord?' Or do you ever think of other facets of your relationship with the Divine as you pray?
3. The book opens with a story about Diana Butler Bass wanting to "free" Jesus from a worship space that seemed to confine him. Have you ever had such an experience? Have you ever felt that some space or some person or some group was attempting to confine Jesus?
4. Has your relationship with Jesus changed through different seasons of your life?

Week 1 (Sunday morning, February 26 & Thursday noon, March 2): Chapter 6 ("Presence"):

1. In the gospels, the disciples are traveling with Jesus in his earthly ministry and path to the cross. They are physically present with him. Jesus is no longer on earth with a human body, so how do you experience the presence of Jesus in your life now?
2. Perhaps you seek Jesus in particular places, in scripture, or in specific relationships. As you move through Lent, what new practice could deepen your awareness of our Lord's presence?

3. When in your life have you been surprised by Jesus's presence or had an unexpected encounter with the Divine? Was it in one of your usual places?
4. How has this chapter shaped your view of a present Lord?

Week 2 (Sunday morning, March 5 & Thursday noon, March 9): Chapter 4 ("Lord"):

1. What images do you associate with the word 'Lord?' Does this name call to mind particular attributes, stories, or experiences?
2. In our tradition, we talk often about the lordship of Jesus Christ and Diana Butler Bass talks about lordship in this chapter. Did this chapter change any of your associations?
3. Does addressing Jesus as Lord change your sense of his presence (or distance) from you?
4. Diana Butler Bass shares a moment of epiphany she had as a young person when someone at her school said "Jesus can't just be your Savior; he must also be your Lord." She writes that she was "riveted by this idea—Lord, Master of All, a God who cared about justice and peace and things that happened here on earth." (p. 119). If you grew up in a tradition that talked about Jesus, how does this picture of lordship as distinct from savior align with what you were taught? How does it align with your understanding now?

Week 3 (Sunday morning, March 12 & Thursday noon, March 16): Chapter 2 ("Teacher"):

1. 'Teacher' is a familiar role for us. Many of us *are* teachers and *all* of us have had them at some point in our lives. But do you often think of Jesus as Teacher? Why or why not?
2. Teacher was a primary relationship between Jesus and others during his earthly ministry. He is addressed as Teacher (or rabbi or master) many time in the New Testament. Do you see yourself as a student of Jesus?
3. When you think of the teachers who have been most impactful in your life, how are they similar to or different from Jesus as a teacher?
4. What teachings of Jesus are most important to you? How do they impact your regular life?

Week 4 (Sunday morning, March 19 & Thursday noon, March 23): Chapter 1 ("Friend"):

1. Friendship is something most humans enjoy and even long for. Do you think of Jesus as a friend?
2. Jesus's first disciples were also his closest friends. How does that relationship shape your view on being both a friend and follower of Jesus?
3. What struck you about Diana Butler Bass's discussion of friendship in this chapter?

4. What attributes are most important to you in a friend? How does that list impact the way you want to live as a friend/follower of Jesus?

Week 5 (Sunday morning, March 26 & Thursday noon, March 30): Chapter 3 (“Savior”):

1. Our tradition understands salvation as God’s gift to us, freely given. It is not something we must strive after and also is not something we deserve. Because we are saved by no act of our own, we are free to live in peace and gratitude. Other traditions think and talk about salvation very differently. Does your own association with salvation feel good or bad? Like something you must earn or about which you feel worry or guilt? Or something comforting and rooted in grace?
2. Are you rooted in a faith practice that puts an emphasis on salvation?
3. How have the faith communities in your life understood salvation and Jesus’s role as Savior?
4. Diana Butler Bass writes about the roots of the word salvation on p. 76. How does her discussion of salvation as being made whole and well differ from how our culture treats salvation? How does this distinction impact you?

Week 6 (Sunday morning, April 2 & Thursday noon, April 6): Chapter 5 (“Way”):

1. This is perhaps one of the more challenging of Jesus’s identities. Jesus teaches that *he* is the way, the truth, and the life. What does Diana Butler Bass say about what this means?
2. Jesus was a journeying person, and we often use the image of a journey to talk about our experiences of faith. Is this a helpful metaphor as you think about your relationship with Jesus?
3. Diana Butler Bass writes about the temptation to make a “map” of right living or belief and challenges this goal as one that constrains Jesus (*see pp. 177-184*). Does her discussion resonate with your experience?
4. We think of the season of Lent as a journey within our larger journey of faith. Does remembering Jesus as the Way call you to adopt new faith practices after Lent?