



A divinely diverse discussion

Canton study group explores ‘Why Jesus Matters’

After discontinuing weekly Sunday school classes several years ago, the Canton (Ill.) Church of the Brethren’s shared ministry team—guided by results from a congregational survey—chose to offer focused study sessions three to four times a year. Occasionally, the focus of a session inspires the subject matter of a subsequent session, which was the case earlier this year.

Pastor Kevin Kessler led the first study group of 2024. He was given wide leeway in choosing a topic, and, based on the series of worship services he was leading on “Journeying with Jesus,” he decided to extend that theme into the study group. While perusing material to use, Kessler came across a Marcus Borg video titled “Why Jesus Matters.” Borg noted the title could be thought of in two ways: as a question or as a statement. The approach for study, then, offered participants the opportunity to either respond to the question or share insights about the statement.

Following worship on April 28, a group of 13 adults met for discussion. The video was shared in advance, along with a study guide, as preparation for meeting together. Conversation was lively and engaging!

Borg considers *memories*, *conversions*, and *convictions* as key aspects in moving to an understanding of why Jesus matters. Conversation centered around early memories of Jesus and how those memories shaped convictions in ways that led to conversions.

Those memories revealed that we have varied approaches to our convictions about Jesus. Furthermore, we learned that conversions have varied meanings, as well. Perhaps conversion is a 180-degree turn from a previous way of being, but it can also include incremental life adjustments that inspire and compel us to follow the teaching of Jesus more faithfully and fruitfully. The macro and micro adjustments of life, we learned, lead to new memories that in turn compel us to additional convictions and conversions.

Our conversation confirmed that we are an eclectic congregation with a diverse range of views. Such diversity could lead to division. But for us, diversity liberates us to learn from one another and experience insights that are flavors we’ve not experienced before, thus opening the door for acquiring new convictions, new memories, and stronger and deeper conversions.


This study group experience energized us to keep exploring together. One of the participants suggested that we meet again in about month to expand our focus on Jesus. The assignment for the next study group was to read the four Gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Each participant would choose to read one of the Gospels and share insights at the next group gathering.

Interestingly, when we met a month later, we discovered that we didn’t all make the same choice. All four Gospels

had been read. Mark was the most popular (read by several participants), not because it was the shortest, but because it is considered the first to be written and used as source material for writing the others.

As can happen when reading scripture, we gleaned new understandings from ancient and familiar texts. Again, the diversity among us became evident from our varied responses to similar passages—not unlike the Gospel writers who shared stories of Jesus that varied in detail from writer to writer. And, yet, the Gospel accounts blend into a unit of discourse that points toward an important leader and teacher, Jesus, who brings a central message of loving God with our whole being and loving our neighbors as we love ourselves.

Meeting only occasionally for study might seem like a recipe for developing a habit of not meeting at all. We discovered, though, that because of engaging deeply when we do meet, we yearned for opportunities to gather again.

This fall we are continuing with the Jesus theme by concentrating on the Sermon on the Mount. We’re sure we’ll have a plethora of ideas and thoughts on this important teaching moment by Jesus. It is this diversity that compellingly draws us together again. We’ll be more than we presently are, with new thoughts and understanding among us. New memories. Clearer convictions. Captivating conversions. 

Contributed by the shared ministry team of Canton (Ill.) Church of the Brethren.