

Bible Study Outline
Wed, Aug 31 - Wed, Nov 16, 2022
(with worshiping info for the following Sunday)

Continuing to dig into the Beatitudes

'The Rabbit Hole Gang' is the name our Bible Study folks at Brentwood have given themselves. It comes from a reference in Elisabeth R. Jones' outline of the Jewish process for the study of the scriptures called *midrash* as she has improvised on it for Christian churches.¹ Each person's reading of the text is heard with respect and the Spirit is trusted to generate wisdom for flourishing through the conversation. We convene on the Wednesdays prior to the Sundays listed to consider the passages listed from 2pm – 3:30pm (Vancouver time) on Zoom at:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83314289111>



'Rabbit Hole' Gwendalaine – permission sought

¹ Her process is appended at the end of this outline.

Throughout most months in 2022, Brentwood will be doing a deep dive into the Beatitudes, the possibilities for living into the kingdom/kinship of God outlined by Jesus with his most intimate friends at the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount as recorded in Matthew's gospel. We will spend 4-5 weeks on each Beatitude, giving the Spirit a rare opportunity to embrace us with the ways of living together in justice and peace contained in those few words



'Sermon on the Mount' Miki De Goodaboom – used with permission

The Greek word used by Matthew to begin each beatitude is *makarioi* and connotes being blessed, happy, fortunate, fulfilled, healthy, aligned, and flourishing. It is a word with great emotional force because it refers to the supreme good of being in, being nourished by, and contributing to the kingdom/kinship of God. It is often, as in the Beatitudes, presented as God's great reversal of commonly-accepted human satisfactions that are grounded in false and fractured forms of happiness.

Just where the Spirit of the triune God will lead us in our explorations and ponderings in this coming year remains to be seen. I enter our conversations with curiosity about what I will learn and conviction that it will deepen my practice of the arts of ambassadorship for God's forgiving and reconciling life revealed most clearly in Jesus, the Christ. These words, remembered and recorded from his lips and considered by communities of his followers for generations, will provoke a transformation in our contributions to the care of God's creation.

Some Insights into the Beatitudes

Here, then, we have an introduction, signifying that Jesus began to explain to his disciples matters which were most useful for them and which were to be carefully remembered and obeyed. His aim is to show where true peace of mind lies, and what goals are especially worth pursuing. ... [Humans], therefore, who, on the one hand, feel [their] wretchedness and [are] distressed by it, and who, on the other, [are] able to discriminate, knowing where the true good lies, make blessedness [their]aim, as far as [they are] able. (John Calvin, Sermons on the Beatitudes)

As a preacher, Calvin is fully alert to the tension which exists between the now and the not yet, between the believers' present experience of suffering and their future exaltation in heaven. As Jacques Dupont has remarked, "The Beatitudes are simply another way of saying that 'the kingdom of God is here', that God's promises are on the point of being fulfilled, that the appointed beneficiaries of the messianic blessing at the end of time may now rejoice, for the time is accomplished.' Jesus is both the herald and the agent of the messianic blessing. All the Beatitudes are summed up in him. Meek, pure in heart, merciful, peaceable, persecuted without cause, he enacts his own message and thus becomes the very embodiment of righteousness. His vindication will be the vindication of all who believe in him. The Beatitudes thus send us back, not to an abstract list of moral perfections, but to the person of Jesus Christ, to whose image Christians are even now being conformed by his indwelling Spirit. Calvin's sermons on the Beatitudes are an appeal and an encouragement to Jesus' followers to be what they are already reckoned to be in him. (Robert White, 'Introduction' to John Calvin, Sermons on the Beatitudes)

We can read the Beatitudes as Jesus' summary of his autobiography; I think we need to do more. The disciples did not initially understand Jesus to be talking about himself; they understood him to be talking about the human condition. Jesus does not need to bless himself, but people who are lost and least, mourning and meek, need to be reassured that they are blessed. (Any-Jill Levine, Sermon on the Mount: A Beginner's Guide to the Kingdom of Heaven)

In fact, the history of the impact of the Sermon on the Mount can be largely described in terms of an attempt to domesticate everything in it that is shocking,

demanding, and uncompromising, and render it harmless. (Pinchas Lapide, The Sermon on the Mount: Utopia or Program for Action?)

*The Sermon on the Mount has been used for an astonishing variety of purposes. Constantine I (d.337), after the Christian takeover of the Roman Empire, saw it as Christ's "invitation to the practice of virtue." Gregory of Nyssa read it as a way to set forth a Neoplatonic theory of forms. Beginning with Chrysostom for Eastern monasticism and Augustine for Western monasticism, it was a description of the true "evangelical life" of the monks. On the basis of it, Luther preached the proper distinction between law and gospel, Tolstoy called the Russian Orthodox Church to judgment, and Gandhi challenged the authority of the British Empire. In the light of this history, it is difficult to imagine circumstances to which this resilient document could not speak. (Jaroslav Pelikan, 'Sermon on the Mount' in *The Melody of Theology: A Philosophic Dictionary*)*

What led me to focus on the beatitudes [on a pilgrimage to Iona] I no longer recall, only that it was the first time that it dawned on me that the beatitudes have a ladder-like structure, with poverty of spirit the essential starting point and with the cross at the top. These ten verses have never been far from my thoughts ever since.

... There are eight beatitudes, if we recognize the last two verses as one, as both describe the suffering often impose upon those who live the gospel: eight facets of discipleship. Yet, in another sense, there is only one beatitude, because all are aspects of life in communion with God. Each of the eight describes aspects on being in the kingdom of God.

*They are like rungs on a ladder, which Christ has arranged in an exact order. There is a pattern to his arrangement. Each step builds on the foundation of the previous step, and each is indispensable. (Jim Forest, *The Ladder of the Beatitudes*)*

The Beatitudes cannot be taken apart. They portray the heart of the people of the kingdom – a heart whose veins cannot be dissected and pulled to pieces. Because of this, the Beatitudes begin and end with the same promise of possessing the kingdom of heaven. Those who are blessed are characterized by their poverty and neediness, longing, hunger, and thirst. At the same time, they possess wealth in love, energy for peace, and victory over all resistance. Their nature is single-

heartedness, in which they see God. These are people of inner vision, who see the essential. (Eberhard Arnold, Salt and Light: Living the Sermon on the Mount)

... I will show how the notion of “house” serves as the underlying and primary “metaphor” in Matthew’s Gospel. However, Sharon Parks, a developmental psychologist and geographer of the faith journey, has shown that the notion of “house” is a core theme in the spiritual journey and the life of faith itself. ... She writes:

the primary task before us, both women and men, is not that of becoming a fulfilled self (or a fulfilled nation) but rather to become a faithful people, members of a whole human family, dwelling together in our small planet home, guests to each other in “the household of God.” If we are faithful stewards of our planet, our traditions, and our future, we need to restore the balance between transcendence and immanence in our common discourse, in our economic-political-theological vision, and in our spiritual practice. ... In other words, we will not find the wholeness we seek until the imagery of home, homesteading, dwelling, and abiding is restored to a place of centrality in the contemporary imagination. (Michael H. Crosby, Spirituality of the Beatitudes: Matthew’s Vision for the Church in an Unjust World)

Four Translations of the Beatitudes in Matthew’s Gospel

The ***New Revised Standard Version*** is the translation read most frequently in worshiping at Brentwood. It was prepared by a team of international New Testament scholars under the auspices of the National Council of Churches in the USA and published in 1989.

³ *Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

⁴ *Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.*

⁵ *Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.*

⁶ *Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.*

⁷ *Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.*

⁸ *Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.*

⁹ *Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.*

¹⁰ *“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

¹¹ *Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account.*

The ***First Nations Version*** is an Indigenous translation that describes itself as “a dynamic equivalence translation that captures the simplicity, clarity, and beauty of Native storytellers in English, while remaining faithful to the original language of the New Testament.” It was done by Terry M. Wildman of Rain Ministries with input from a translation council from 12 First Nations. It was published by InterVarsity Press in 2021.

Creator’s blessing rests on the poor, the ones with broken spirits. The good road from above is theirs to walk.

Creator’s blessing rests on the ones who walk a trail of tears, for he will wipe the tears from their eyes and comfort them.

Creator’s blessing rests on the ones who walk softly and in a humble manner. The earth, land, and sky will welcome them and always be their home.

Creator’s blessing rests on the ones who hunger and thirst for wrongs to be made right again. They will eat and drink until they are full.

Creator’s blessing rests on the ones who are merciful and kind to others. Their kindness will find its way back to them – full circle.

Creator’s blessing rest on the pure of heart. They are the ones who will see the Great Spirit.

Creator’s blessing rests on the ones who make peace. It will be said of them, ‘They are the children of the Great Spirit!’

Creator’s blessing rests on the ones who are hunted down and mistreated for doing what is right, for they are walking the good road from above.

The Message is a paraphrase of the Bible in contemporary English done by Eugene Peterson. It was published by NavPress in 2016.

You’re blessed when you’re at the end of your rope. With less of you there is more of God and his rule.

You’re blessed when you feel you’ve lost what is most dear to you. Only then can you be embraced by the One most dear to you.

You're blessed when you're content with just who you are – no more, no less. That's the moment you find yourself proud owners of everything that can't be bought.

You're bless when you've worked up a good appetite for God. He's food and drink in the best meal you'll ever eat.

You're blessed when you care. At the moment of being 'care-full,' you find yourself cared for.

You're blessed when you get your inside world – your mind and heart – put right. Then you can see God in the outside world.

You're blessed when you can show people how to cooperate instead of compete or fight. That's when you discover who you really are³, and your place in God's family.

You're blessed when your commitment to God provokes persecution. The persecution drives you even deeper into God's kingdom.

Neil Douglas-Klotz's *Prayers of the Cosmos*, published in 1990, includes an **Aramaic version** and translation of the Beatitudes. Set within Douglas-Klotz's argument that Aramaic is an Indigenous language focused on relationships rather than rationality, this version might raise some interesting new insights for us.

Tuned to the Source are those who live by breathing Unity; their "I can!" is included in God's.

Blessed are those in emotional turmoil; they shall be united inside by love.

Healthy are those who have softened what is rigid within; they shall receive physical vigor and strength from the universe.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for physical justice; they shall be surrounded by what is needed to sustain their bodies.

Blessed are those who, from their inner wombs, birth mercy; they shall feel its warm arms embrace them.

Aligned with the One are those whose lives radiate from a core of love; they shall see God everywhere.

Blessed are those who plant peace each season; they shall be named the children of God.

Blessings to those who are dislocated for the cause of justice; their new home is the province of the universe.

Renewal when you are reproached and driven away by the clamor of evil on all sides, for my sake. Then, do everything extreme, including letting your ego disappear, for this is the secret of claiming your expanded home in the universe.



'Jazz Feel' by Carolyn McDonald – used with permission

The Weekly Components for Worshiping/Learning with Brentwood through to the Reign of Christ Sunday

Those of us who gather at and disperse from Brentwood in its ecology of missioning will be focusing throughout 2022 on how the Spirit wants to inspire and instruct us about being ambassadors of our triune Creator's forgiving and reconciling love in Christ by concentrating on the Beatitudes as recorded in Matthew's gospel at the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount. As you will have gathered by the quotes above, this has been one of the most provocative collections of Jesus' teachings in the history of the church. Thank you for joining us on this phase of our journey of maturing in the Christian faith one conversation after another. We look forward to hearing you with respect, to engaging in dialogical discernment, and to nourishing each other to flourish in our triune Creator's mercy and grace everywhere God sends us.

You will find in this document the sermon titles, the scripture passages, the Word to Ponder, and the hymns for our Sunday morning worshiping. The messages from them will form the focus of our different gatherings throughout the week.



Suggestions for Using this Learning Resource

At Brentwood, we've been building up an ecosystem of church disciplines that We pray our triune Creator will use to nourish souls to flourish in the mercy and grace of Jesus Christ. That is how we believe lives are transformed to improve our capacities to partner with God in caring for God's creation.

As you will see in the weekly information, we have noted the passages from the scriptures, the word to ponder, and the hymn verses that we will consider in our Sunday morning worshiping.

We invite you to ponder all of these, as the Spirit leads you, during the week leading up to our Sunday morning worshiping together.

1. You can do that by joining our Rabbit Hole Gang conversation every Wednesday afternoon from 2:00-3:30pm on Zoom at:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83314289111>

2. You can decide to convene your own gathering to use this learning resource in a mode and at a time most convenient to those wanting to participate.
3. You can use this guide for your own daily or weekly devotional practices.

However you decide to engage with us on this learning journey, we welcome you into the conversations and trust they will bless your missioning as ambassadors of Christ's forgiving and reconciling love.

THE BEATITUDES – #7, 8, & 9 – Matthew 5:9-11

Sept 4 – Nourished by Peace

(Holy Communion through the Lord's Supper)

Scriptures Ps 1 from the Psalter with Refrain #1
Matthew 5:9

Word to Ponder = Peace

Hymns #528 – Jesus Calls Us
#736 – For the Healing of the Nations
#726 – May the God of Hope

Sept 11 – Making Peace

Scriptures Ps 14 from the Psalter with Refrain 2
Matthew 5:9

Word to Ponder = Peacemakers

Hymns #749 – Be still my soul
#735 – Donis nobis pacem
#740 – Make me a channel of your peace

Sept 18 (Ben MacRae preaching) - ???

Scriptures Ps 113 from the Psalter with Refrain #1
Matthew 5:9

Word to Ponder = ???

Hymns #748 – Lord of all hopefulness
#728 – The storm is strong
#727 – Let there be light

Sept 25 – The Commission to Bless

Scriptures Ps 146 from the Psalter with Refrain #1
Matthew 5:9

Word to Ponder = Commissioned

Hymns #778 – Lord, you give the great commission
#777 – Send me Lord
#590 – We have this ministry

**Oct 2 – Right Relationships throughout the Whole World
(Holy Communion through the Lord’s Supper)**

Scriptures Ps 137 from the Psalter with Refrain #1
Matthew 5:10

Word to Ponder = Righteousness

Hymns #524 – We come as guests invited
#731 – Shalom chaverim
#775 – Sent forth by your blessing

Oct 9 (Thanksgiving) – Thanks for the Kingdom

Scriptures Ps 111 from the Psalter with Refrain #1
Matthew 5:10

Word to Ponder = Kingdom

Hymns #803 – Come, ye thankful people, come
#802 – For the fruits of all creation
#805 – Give thanks, my soul, for harvest

Oct 16 – A Kept People

Scriptures Ps 121 from the Psalter with Refrain 2
Matthew 5:10

Phrase to Ponder = In God’s Keeping

Hymns #81 – Unto the hills around
#462 – All my hope on God is founded
#334 – God who gives to life its goodness

Oct 23 (Ben MacRae preaching) - ???

Scriptures Ps 65 from the Psalter with Refrain #1
Matthew 5:10

Word to Ponder = ???

Hymns #721 – Arise, your light is come
#720 – Our cities cry to you, O God
#708 – When Israel was in Egypt’s land

Oct 30 – Resilience Under Persecution

Scriptures Ps 32 from the Psalter with Refrain #1
Matthew 5:10

Word to Ponder = Persecution

Hymns #371 – Love divine, all loves excelling
#730 – O for a world where everyone
#717 – We cannot own the sunlit sky

Nov 6 – Dining with the Prophets

(Holy Communion through the Lord's Supper + All Saints)

Scriptures Ps 98 from the Psalter with Refrain #1
Matthew 5:11

Word to Ponder = Dining

Hymns #611 - For all the saints
#527 – Eat this bread
When the saints go marching in

Nov 13 – Heirs of the Prophets

Scriptures Ps 98 from the Psalter with Refrain #1
Matthew 5:11

Word to Ponder = Heritage

Hymns #624 – Blest are they
#478 – To Abraham and Sarah
#39 – God of mercy, God of grace

Nov 20 (Reign of Christ with Ben MacRae preaching) - ???

Scriptures Ps 46 from the Psalter with Refrain #1
Luke 23:33-43

Word to Ponder = ???

Hymns #267 – Rejoice, the Lord is King
#751 – Forgive our sins as we forgive
#275 – Jesus shall reign

Suggested Readings on the Beatitudes

The following short reading list contains some of the main books we will draw on in our consideration of the Beatitudes as a guide to understanding and practicing the inspiration and instruction of our triune Creator in nourishing us to flourish as a corps of ambassadors for forgiveness and reconciliation throughout the earth. We pray you will enjoy your conversations with these authors as well as with the rest of us.

Eberhard Arnold, *Salt and Light: Living the Sermon on the Mount*. Walden, NY: Plough Publishing House, 1967.

John Calvin, *Sermons on the Beatitudes*. Edinburgh, UK: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2006.

Michael H. Crosby, *Spirituality of the Beatitudes: Matthew's Vision for the Church in an Unjust World*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2005.

Ron Dart, *The Beatitudes: Where Mountain Meets Valley*. Freshwind Press, 2005.

Neil Douglas-Klotz, *Prayers of the Cosmos: Meditations on the Aramaic Words of Jesus*. San Francisco, CA: HarperSanFrancisco, 1990.

Rebeka Eklund, *The Beatitudes through the Ages*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2021.

Jim Forest, *The Ladder of the Beatitudes*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Press, 2012.

Emmet Fox, *The Sermon on the Mount: The Key to Success in Life*. San Francisco, CA: HarperSanFrancisco, 1934.

James Howell, *The Beatitudes for Today*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005.

Pinchas Lapide, *The Sermon on the Mount: Utopia or Program for Action?* Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Press, 1986.

Amy-Jill Levine, *The Sermon on the Mount: A Beginner's Guide to the Kingdom of Heaven*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2020.

Scot McKnight, *Sermon on the Mount*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2013.

Jaroslav Pelikan, *Divine Rhetoric: The Sermon on the Mount As Message and As Model in Augustine, Chrysostom, and Luther*. Yonkers, NY: SVS Press, 2000.

Steve Stewart, *The Beatitudes for a Time of Crisis*. Rio Rancho, NM: Impact Nations Publishing, 2020.

Appendix #1 – *Midrash* for Christian Bible Study

Midrash: A Way of “Turning” a Biblical Text

You know how when you turn a cut-diamond to catch the light, different facets of the same diamond refract the same light differently, so you see many colours of the spectrum? This metaphor may be what the second century Rabbi Ben Bag Bag had in mind when he encouraged people to take any Biblical text and

*Turn it, and turn it, for everything is in it.
Reflect and grow old and grey with it.*²

This way of turning sacred texts this way and that, so that God’s light catches the text in different ways, depending on changing contexts and circumstances, is as old as the Bible itself, where we find younger texts (for example Paul’s letters or the Gospels) which ‘turn’ an older text (e.g from the prophets or psalms), to show how they can be reinterpreted in light of new contexts for God’s people. The process of turning a text is known as “midrash” (from the Hebrew verb שָׂדַד *darash*, which means to search, probe, ponder, seek). While individuals can turn texts, the process is far livelier – and far more likely to transform the way we live our faith – when done in community.

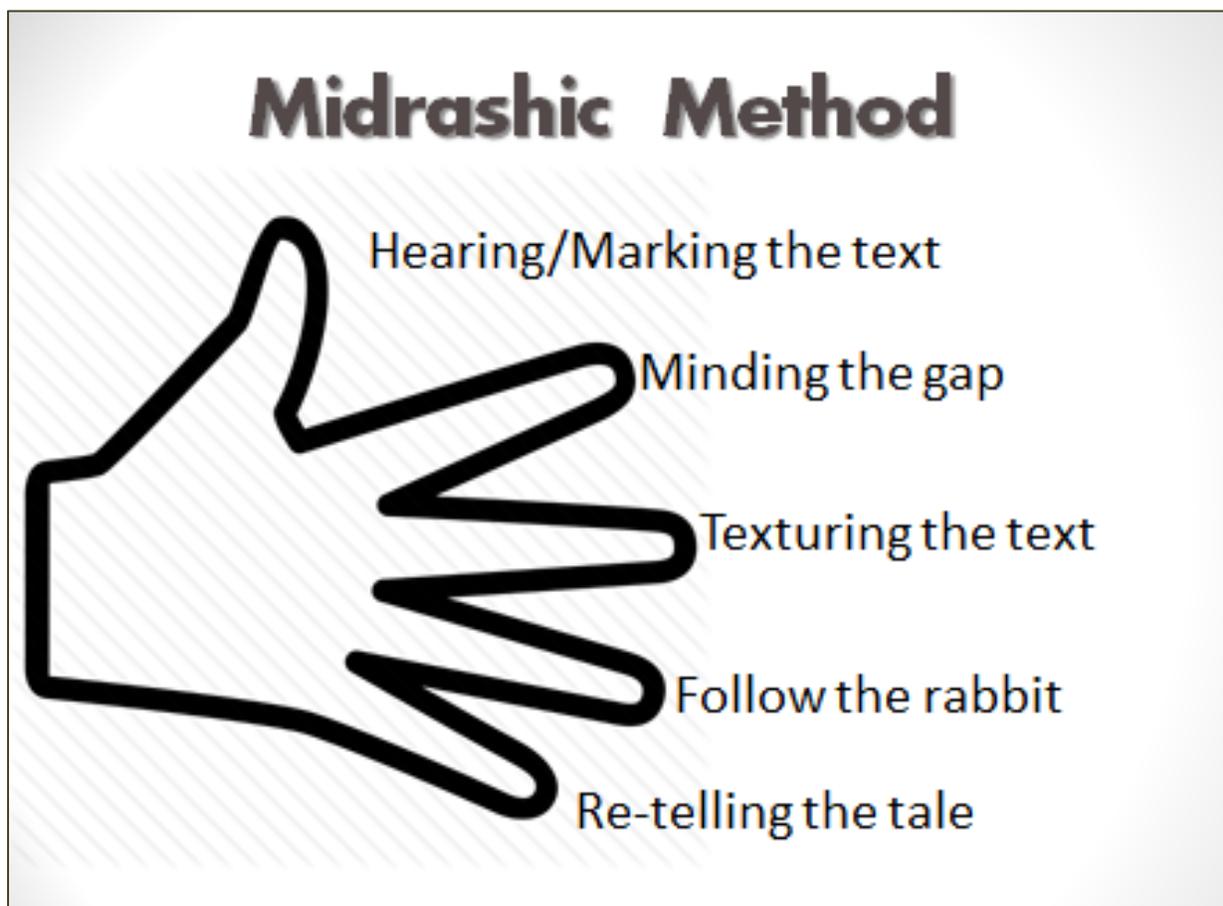
Midrash as an interpretive process is deeply rooted in the Jewish tradition and continues to this day. One contemporary Rabbi has described the process as “reading the Bible with question marks”, not just as an intellectual activity but as a “personal journey” in which we can “glimpse the light of old souls” who saw the Holy in the words of Scripture, but also “to find that light within our own souls” and lives.³

² *Pirkei Avot, Sayings of the Fathers 5:22* (Koren Publishers, Jerusalem, 2015)

³ Sandy Eisenberg Sasso, *Midrash: Reading the Bible with Question Marks*, (Paraclete Press, 2007, 2013),153.

Some Christians may worry that this is not “the way” to study a Biblical text; we’ve become used to thinking one text means one thing, as if it were some sort of mathematical equation. However, Jesus was a master “darshan” (one who turns a text), as you can see so many times when he turns an ancient text (like Deuteronomy 6) to bring new light to bear on its meaning, as it meets the present circumstance (See Matthew 22:34-40). In similar fashion we see Peter “midrashing” the prophet Joel to bring light to the resurrection, when he preaches to the crowd at Pentecost (Acts 2), and Paul sees Isaiah’s description of holy mystery as the best way to describe the apparent folly of faith in the crucified Lord of glory (1 Cor 2:9;16), Jesus Christ.

A Christian Midrashic Method



This simple way of using a "midrashic approach" to Bible study has been developed over the past eleven years in the Christian community of faith of Cedar Park United in Pointe Claire, QC. It's a five-finger process:

1. Reading/Marking the text

*Hear it first (listening is how most people have encountered Scripture)
Next, print off or mark up the text- with any of YOUR reactions, questions, shocks, surprises. Note repetitions, odd words, gaps (what's missing?)*

2. Minding the Gaps

*Share everyone's "gaps" (discovered while marking the text)
(DON'T answer the questions yet, let them fill the room!)
Identify the key or pressing ones. Be ready to use commentaries, online resources, and human wisdom.*

3. Texturing the Text (Putting the text into its biblical context.)

*Who wrote it, when, for whom? Who shared it? Who passed it on?
What layers are added now that the text has come to us?*

4. Follow the White Rabbit (a reference to Lewis Carrol's Adventures in Wonderland; Alice followed the rabbit, and entered a world both recognizable and strange). Some element(s) of a text just beg to be followed; go there! Look things up, and see how this particular point intersects with your own life.

5. Re-telling the Tale

*When Scripture re-writes us, we get to re-tell it!
How would you re-tell this text? (As artist, poet, pray-er, preacher, person of faith?) Share others' re-tellings of this text (e.g. Songs, art, or contemporary re-tellings, e.g. Godspell, etc.)*

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To find out more about using Midrashic Method in a Christian community, see:

https://digitalcommons.luthersem.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1029&context=dmin_theses

The Rev Dr Elisabeth R Jones studied and taught at Vancouver School of Theology, was Director of Studies at United Theological College in Montreal, and completed her Doctor of Ministry degree at Luther Seminary with a project on using midrash to help people engage the Scriptures in ways that transform their lives.