



On Saturday 26 January twelve avid Good-Faith book readers met to discuss Marcus Borg's book "Meeting Jesus Again for the First Time." We all agreed, whether we were more or less familiar with Borg's ideas, we all had, indeed, seen Jesus afresh through the reading or rereading of this book!

The style of Borg's writing is scholarly, logical and assessible, which made it easy to read on one level; the difficult and challenging ideas made it less easy reading on quite another. There was much in the book to challenge any complacency that may have crept into our way of looking at our faith.

Borg discusses perceptions of Jesus under four categories: spiritual person, social prophet, wisdom teacher, and movement founder. His central point is that if we consider the character of Jesus looking back from our current perspective, we see Jesus in a particular way, depending upon what aspects of the 2000+ years of Christian history (since Jesus lived as a human on earth) we have been exposed to. If, however, we were to consider Jesus as his contemporaries would have seen him we would see Jesus without all that "baggage" and therefore in quite a different way. Borg uses the terms Post Easter Jesus and Pre-Easter Jesus respectively to label these two sets of images. The former being shaped around church tradition which came later than the Jesus of history.

So, for example, as Christians we are reasonably familiar with the idea of Jesus as "paying" for our sins on the cross so that we can be "saved", or of Jesus offering himself as a "sacrifice" in the manner of the priestly sacrifices of Jewish religious practice. Both of those ideas have their place in scripture to a greater or lesser extent, both have been helpful to people (those comfortable with transactional religion, or Jewish sacrificial codes, for example) AND problematic. There are other equally valid ways to understand Jesus.

So, with Borg, we looked at other approaches such as the idea of Jesus as "Sophia", Greek for wisdom. This idea comes up time and again in scripture – Jesus as a spiritual man of compassion was a particular favourite of John's gospel. Jesus showed us a way, a wisdom path, that leads to salvation from an inferior way. We also looked at the model of Jesus as leading us out of bondage into freedom, an idea that was widely understood in Jesus time, through the Jewish community's understand as themselves being led by God, through Moses, from bondage in Egypt to freedom in the Promised Land.

However, before we got too comfortable in our more "enlightened" understanding of Jesus, Borg reminded us about the pharisees and the dangers of being like them today. We talked about our own experiences of smugness, akin to that of the pharisees, about our beliefs and the sense that we might somehow know better than others

Along the way we discussed the following:

- how easy it is to get bogged down with doing the right thing and thereby forget to show the compassion that comes from listening to others "from the heart"
- remembering that words attributed to Jesus are not verbatim – they were so profound and helpful that they were repeatedly passed on until they were eventually written down
- our experience of death and how blessed it is to "mourn", if we can. In our culture we don't talk about death very much, least of all with our family.

- what it means to have a relationship with Jesus and how our views of God compare with those of the Old Testament
- how Jesus connection with the Spirit was at the source of everything he did, and Jesus wanted that to be the same for us.
- that we all have gifts, and all gifts are for the common good.