

## **Fruitful Ways of Reading the Gospel of John**

Lenten Soup Supper Series at Christ Episcopal Church Eureka

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Traversing the River of John

Methods for Reading Scripture:

### **Historical-Critical Method**

Asks *Who was the actual author?*

*Who was the actual intended readership?*

*Who was the historical Jesus?*

Reveals Historical Tale

Ecclesiological Tale

J. Louis Martyn, *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel* (1968)

John 9:22 ἀποσυνάγωγος (aposunagogos)

*Birkat Ha-Minim* (Blessing of the Heretics)

### **Literary-Critical Method**

Asks *Who is the implied author?*

*Who is the implied reader?*

*Who is the Textual Jesus or the “Johannine Jesus”?*

Historical Jesus

Actual Jesus

Proclaimed Jesus

Reveals Cosmological Tale

-- *The Problem with the Johannine “Jews” in the Dominant Tales* --

- In historical tale, Jews condemn an innocent man
- In ecclesiological tale, Jews curse and expel Christians
- In cosmological tale, Jews commit deicide

### **Literary-Critical Method used with Mimetic Theory**

Reveals Anthropological Tale

3 Major Insights of Mimetic Theory (articulated by anthropologist René Girard)

- 1) Mimetic Desire
  - Desire is imitated
  - Leads to rivalry
- 2) Scapegoat Mechanism
  - Rivalry placated by scapegoat
  - Human compulsion to scapegoat and blame projected onto “God”
- 3) Revelation of Divine Non-Violence
  - Jewish and Christian Scriptures reveal violent “God” as false
  - True God is the God of victims

The anthropological tale of the Fourth Gospel is the story of a man who works to dismantle the scapegoat mechanism by revealing the true God as one who sympathizes with society’s victims and also works to expose false gods of religious and political violence. By offering himself as a wholly innocent victim to a politically violent social mechanism (crucifixion), he reveals the innocence of all society’s scapegoats and the culpability of victimizers.

Through his miraculous resurrection, he offers vindication to victims and forgiveness to victimizers, thus inviting them both out of a blame-bound existence and into an abundant and eternal life.

The anthropological tale is the tale we will use to interpret the symbols and metaphors in the Johannine Jesus’s response to the question of suffering in John 9 and 10.