Tuesday, October 5th, 7:00 - 8:30 pm ET

Introductory Session

Please read both original and new Introductions and Forewords to the book.

Theme Statement:

76 years after the US used nuclear weapons against Japan, these weapons of mass destruction still pose an existential threat to human life and a grave challenge to all people of faith. These study circles will re-awaken us to the renewed danger of nuclear war and to the intersection of nuclear weapons with the climate crisis, racism and poverty and to embrace anew the commandment of Gospel nonviolence.

Breakout Session Questions:

1. Do you think nuclear weapons continue to pose an existential threat to human life? Why or why not?

2. What do you hope to accomplish by participating in this book study?
Tuesday, October 12, 7:00 - 8:30 pm ET

Session One: Who is Jesus?

This session corresponds with “Appendix 1: The Courage to Start.”

Focus Statement:

At the beginning of Mark's Gospel Jesus proclaims the essence of his mission: “This is the time of fulfilment! The reign of God is at hand. Reform your lives and believe in the Gospel.” (Mk, 1:15) Jesus' actions of living and proclaiming God's reign reveals his identity. He places divine authority above human authority. His acts of healing, his association with sinners and outcasts and forgiving their sins; his declaration that "the sabbath was made for (hu)man (s);" his acts of resistance and commitment to "bind the strong man," and abolish the scribal establishment, the imperial order and the reign of Satan, result in a plot by the Pharisees to destroy him, and ultimately, in collusion with Roman authorities, crucify him. Jesus would be executed because his radical nonviolent proclamation of the reign of God could not be tolerated by those in power. Like the first disciples we must make our confession of faith. Do you believe Jesus is the Incarnation of God, the Word made flesh, the Messiah, the son of God? What compelled you to first have the courage to start following Jesus and be concerned about the nuclear peril?

Breakout Session Questions:

1. Who is Jesus to you? A friend, a comforter, a challenging Word from God?

2. What has following the Gospel cost you?
Tuesday, October 19th, 7:00 - 8:30 PM ET

Session Two: The Journey of Discipleship

This session corresponds with “Appendix 2: History of the Nuclear Age and Present Nuclear Peril.”

Focus Statement:

For Jesus, the primary condition of discipleship is "to take up the cross and follow in my steps." (Mk. 8:34) For Mark, the journey of discipleship requires a conversion from blindness to sight. The evangelist’s account of Jesus’ journey to Jerusalem not only contains the basic instruction for true discipleship but also reveals the blindness and resistance of the disciples to the mission and cross of Jesus. Mark emphasizes the disciples’ spiritual blindness by enclosing the narrative of the three passion predictions with two stories of blind men being healed: the blind man at Bethsaida (8:22–26) and Bartimaeus (10:46–52). It is their faith in Jesus that enables his healing power to affect them. Their blindness and cure stand in relief to the symbolic blindness of the disciples, who reject the efficacy of the cross. In our age, we too struggle with the problem of often failing to grasp the significance of Jesus’ mission. The very existence of nuclear weapons is a profound manifestation of our own moral and spiritual blindness. Our intention to use these weapons of mass destruction fully contradicts Jesus’ teachings and his suffering and death on the cross. To confront this nuclear intention as people of faith is to expose, confess, and overcome this evil.

Breakout Session Questions:

1. What insights about violence, the nuclear sin, taking up the cross and Gospel nonviolence have you learned on your journey of discipleship?

2. How have those insights moved you to act?
Tuesday, October 26th, 7:00 - 8:30 PM ET

Session Three: To Trust in God’s Promise.

This session corresponds with “Appendix 3: Church and Other Statements on War, Peace and Nuclear Disarmament.”

Focus Statement:

Jesus’ nonviolent demonstration in the temple marks the high point of Jesus’ confrontation with the religious authorities of his day. The cleansing thus becomes a demand both for true worship and for justice—justice for the marginal, for the unchosen Gentiles, for the outcasts of Galilee, whose holy space is given over to the worldly interest of the privileged. The cleansing of the temple follows the call of divine obedience and becomes, at the same time, a radical call for human justice. In proclaiming God’s singular authority, Jesus challenges us to remove everything that stands in the way of the Kingdom. How can we reconcile our nuclear trust, our faith in the threat of total death, with our trust in a merciful God? Our dependence on the nuclear threat to maintain our "national security" represents in itself our most profound doubt in the power of God to heal and free us. The bomb becomes a substitute god, an idol to which godlike authority is assigned. We surround it with an atmosphere of mystery, reverence, and finality. We trust in these weapons to save us. Our nuclear trust is an abomination to the holy, an expression of our faithlessness as a people. “Nuclearism” -- the total dependence on nuclear weapons for our ultimate security as a nation-- has virtually become a national religion. It constitutes idolatry. This nuclear temple of our day begs for a courageous, cleansing Christ. Jesus comforts us with the simple words: “Fear is useless. What is needed is trust” (5:36). This admonition speaks to our blindness of heart and invites us to confess and renounce the nuclear intention and the systems of white supremacy, oppression and racism that the Bomb reinforces. Jesus assures us that God can be trusted and that “all things are possible” in a trusting relationship with God (10:27). In the shadow of the cross, Jesus teaches us the great commandment of love—a commandment that unites the divine trust and the human forgiveness that he imparts and invites.

Breakout Session Questions:

1. Most of us in this country live in comfort. Has following Jesus required you to step out of your comfort zone?

2. What motivates or inspires you to move out of your comfortable life? What church statement and acts of prophetic witness have moved you to act for a nonviolent disarmed world?
Tuesday, November 2nd, 7:00 - 8:30 PM ET

Session Four: To Risk Eucharistic Love

This session corresponds with “Appendix 4: Human, Economic and Environmental Costs of Nuclear Weapons.”

Focus Statement:

In the eucharistic bread and wine Jesus offers us his Body and Blood. The Eucharist is food that endures—a gift of love that continually renews our hearts. The Eucharist is a meal for sinners, not the self-righteous. When we recognize the predictions of betrayal and denial that surround this holy meal, we become aware of how immense and resilient is Jesus’ love. Amid his disciples’ failure of faith and resistance to the cross—then and now—Jesus extends with open hands this life-giving bread and saving cup. At the eucharistic meal, Jesus prepares himself as well as his disciples for the road to Calvary. The Last Supper reveals to us that Jesus is the deliverer of the new Passover. For Christians, to receive this new Passover meal is to accept the cross that is our means of liberation. Whenever we partake in the Eucharist, then, Jesus asks us if we can drink the cup of suffering that he drinks and journey with him to the cross. What does it mean to participate in the Eucharist with a nuclear intention in our hearts and our missiles aimed at our sisters and brothers? The threat of nuclear murder defiles the Eucharist. To build such weapons and to intend to use them is a sin against God and the human family. The worldwide proliferation of murderous weapons claims hosts of victims daily. They, the unfed, the diseased, the poor, the homeless, become the holy innocents, living sacrifices before the nuclear idol. What does it mean to accept the Eucharist while millions of sisters and brothers starve? Our allegiance to Jesus requires that we renounce our nuclear intention and remove the scandal of starvation from our world. The eucharistic love that Jesus shares with us implies a risk. The mandate of eucharistic love is to be united with Christ and with one another. Despite the modern circumstances of betrayal and denial we face, we hear Jesus calling us to be servants, members of his one body. When one person suffers, we all suffer. To be blessed, broken, and given for one another is to risk love at all costs. Jesus died as he lived. With his arms outstretched on the cross, totally disarmed, he embraces all humanity with his infinite, merciful love. Christ invites all of God’s people to choose the path of love and self-sacrifice, which is the way of nonviolence, the true means of peace and justice.

Breakout Session Questions:

1. Are you willing to move further beyond your comfort zone to end the nuclear threat?

2. Does Eucharistic love require you/us to confront the intertwined idols of nuclear weapons, racism and reliance on unsustainable lifestyles?
Tuesday, November 9th, 7:00 - 8:30 PM ET

Session Five: Responding As Church to the Nuclear Threat

This session corresponds with “Appendix 5: Responding as Church to Nuclear Weapons.” Following Reflections About “Responding As Church to the Nuclear Threat,” there will be a reading of the Gospel and Discussion Article from Session 5 and Closing Prayer.

Focus Statement:

Carrying perfumed oils, the faithful women make their way to the tomb of Jesus to serve him in death as they did in life. As they approach the tomb they worry: “Who will roll back the stone for us from the entrance of the tomb?” (16:3). Who, we ask, will roll back the stone today? Christ is continuously executed in the ultimate death intention, the willingness to use nuclear weapons. The earth itself is becoming Christ’s tomb. Who will roll away the stone of vengeance and empty the death threat of its power? The nuclear intention in our hearts and its infernal manifestations in our world are, it seems, too great to lift. The planetary tomb is becoming more tightly sealed; the cumulative history of human sinfulness increasingly conceals the power that could truly liberate us all. When the women look, they discover that the stone has been rolled back. The obstacle was in their mind, in their pessimistic expectation. They look to see a looming impediment, but instead they find something wholly different, the evidence of God’s reign at hand. The empty tomb is the symbol of the resurrection. Jesus’ self-emptying love in life and death blossoms in fruitfulness from the empty tomb. His risen life conquers the emptiness of death. To believe that the crucified Nazarene has been raised to life gives us resurrected hearts. Our fears and amazement slowly dissipate, giving way to the profound realization that Jesus is alive. He has forever overcome the cross and the forces of death! Jesus journeys ahead of us to Galilee and invites us to join him there. He promises us that if we embark on this pilgrimage of faith, we will see him. This promise gives us new hope. In this nuclear age, we can face the challenges before us and be sustained in times of trial. We can fearlessly risk proclaiming with our lives that the way of the cross is the means to true peace and new life. The challenge is to accept his invitation to discipleship and to journey with him wherever he calls us.

As the Doomsday Clock is now set at 100 seconds before midnight due to the nuclear threat and climate crisis, and as exorbitant nuclear and military expenditures are literally killing the poor by depriving them of the basic necessities of life, what actions can we in our faith communities and the wider church take now to help abolish nuclear weapons and bring about total nuclear disarmament?

Breakout Session Questions:

1. What have you or your local group done to work toward nuclear abolition?

2. What do you think you can do starting now?