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## **Growth Questions**

*When you think about the anxiety involved in decisive moments of your life (what we referred to in the teachings as “crossings”), how might ‘staying put’ help to ease the present tension? What might it cost you, in the long run?*

*What tired, old strategies for making life work do you find yourself attempting to reinvigorate? What about your life might need to die in order to experience something new?*

*Why do you think we are not prone to surrender to the ways of Jesus (re-think all of life) until we are ‘exhausted’ and have ‘exhausted all of our resources’?*

*What is it that you keep grasping for, on the surface, to stay afloat? What are you holding onto for dear life?*

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## **Teaching Notes**

The Story of God consistently keeps present to us three notions which prevent us from being totally overwhelmed with our present reality

1. A Messianic vision (ours is a salvation/rescue story) which suggests God’s stubborn refusal to abandon the world as a failed project and resolve to restore the world to its former glory
2. Humanity’s capacity for repentance: the gift that God gives us which allows us to admit our brokenness
3. The possibility of actually living into a different story: the courage to experience a life of goodness and beauty and order, rather than evil, ruin and dysfunctionality. The bible refers to this posture as “faith”. Faith is not simply a list of God-facts to which you must concede, but a life of learning to trust the ways of Jesus.

Remember being exposed to the most annoying sound you've ever heard (comparable only to the fax signal), followed by this chilling declaration. ***"We interrupt this broadcast..."***

Immediately, our television screen was filled with these *"rainbow-like vertical columns"* and our hearts were overcome with anxiety as to the nature of the announcement about to be made. At the very least, it signaled that what was about to follow was significant enough to interrupt this episode of *"Green Acres"* and, perhaps, significant enough to interrupt your life.

This was particularly chilling if you were growing up with the back-story of the "Cold War Era" and happened to live four miles from Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, which at the time, was home to the Strategic Air Command. Such announcements grabbed our attention and postured us to respond accordingly.

Now, imagine, if you will, that you are a Jew living in the first century whose entire life and worldview has been informed and formed by the "God-story" found in the Hebrew Scriptures and you were to hear that a guy was dressed in camel's-hair with tiny remnants of locust stuck in his beard, you would not assume that you had wandered into a filming of ***"Bizarre Foods"***, but you would have connected him to another prominent figure in the story, Elijah.

In all four of the Gospels, there is prominence given to the character of **John the Baptizer**. *"Anyone want to guess how he got that moniker?"*

John was living into a Story that had been unfolding for centuries. It was the story of a people who:

1. Believed themselves to be the unique (chosen) people of the One True Creator-God.
2. Recognized that their identity as God's children ('son', particularly in Exodus) was connected to their purpose of living as his representatives in the world, showing people who God is and embodying an alternate way of living... of being human.
3. Believed that all of life was heading toward a purposed-end: **"shalom"** [everything functioning well, everything relating well, nothing missing, nothing broken... peace]. This was "good news" (gospel: Isaiah 40:9)

The Story is never timid about humanity's infidelity and failure to appropriately live into the Story. What would become apparent is that the people, chosen to be the messengers of restoration, would themselves be in need of rescuing [Isaiah 40:3-5, 9].

*"Listen! It's the voice of someone shouting, Clear the way through the wilderness for the LORD! Make a straight highway through the wasteland for our God! Fill in the valleys, and level out the mountains and hills. Then, the glory of the LORD will be revealed and all the people will see it together. Shout and do not be afraid. Your God is coming!"*

So, their story included talk of a "messenger from God" who would prepare them for the arrival of Messiah. Isaiah speaks of a "straight highway", a means of welcoming God and clearing any obstacles to the new life to which he came to provide. That messenger was to be "Elijah" or one who fulfilled Elijah's role [2 Kings 1:7-8, Malachi 4:5].

### **Fast-forward to John:**

John is depicted as "in the desert" (place of wandering). His clear message: "repent"--- re-think all of life in light of the new exodus he is bringing. He is at the "Jordan River" (site of the Divine Crossing)

By bringing together these images and themes, Mark intends for people to make some connections: ***"This is that! This is what we've been waiting for!"***

### **Romans 6:3-11 New Living Translation (NLT)**

3 Or have you forgotten that when we were joined with Christ Jesus in baptism, we joined him in his death? 4 For we died and were buried with Christ by baptism. And just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glorious power of the Father, now we also may live new lives.

5 Since we have been united with him in his death, we will also be raised to life as he was. 6 We know that our old sinful selves were crucified with Christ so that sin might lose its power in our lives. We are no longer slaves to sin. 7 For when we died with Christ we were set free from the power of sin. 8 And since we died with Christ, we know we will also live with him. 9 We are sure of this because Christ was raised from the dead, and he will never die again. Death no longer has any power over him. 10 When he died, he died once to break the power of sin. But now that he lives, he lives for the glory of God. 11 So you also should consider yourselves to be dead to the power of sin and alive to God through Christ Jesus.

## **Baptism...**

- ... locates us in the Story.**
- ... identifies us with Jesus.**
- ... marks a decisive passage.**
- ... creates a renewed momentum for life.**
- ... establishes us in a transformative community.**

Paul said in 1 Corinthians 10:2 that just as people were “*baptized into Moses*” by crossing the Red Sea, now people were being “*baptized into the name of Jesus*” (‘into the name’: the person being baptized is “bound to” the one in whose name they are being baptized: we belong to him; we belong with him). It is a covenant concept where promises are made which strengthen the nature of the relationship.

Baptism identifies us with Jesus, but, it’s never simply about our own personal piety. It is about who we are becoming as a people who are committed to “doing life together”.

### **Acts 20:21 New Living Translation (NLT)**

I have had one message for Jews and Greeks alike—the necessity of repenting from sin and turning to God, and of having faith in our Lord Jesus.

**When the disillusionment of our pursuits has run its course (when we are “exhausted” and have “exhausted all of our resources”), it presents us with a ‘water’s edge’ moment. A decisive moment.**

The imagery was clear: to refuse to “repent” (re-think, re-order, re-align your life) meant to refuse to cross; to remain committed to your own self-directed, self-sufficient way of life. To continue to ‘wander’.

**There is a fundamental biblical principle that says, “Death is always a prelude to resurrection”.**

**It’s important that we ‘go under’; that we are immersed. Otherwise, we keep trying to swim back to the safety of the shore.**

- Into the waters of identification [with Jesus].
- Submersed in the waters for mortification [death to our self-indulgent way of life].
- Up from the waters in resurrection [to the new life on the other side of death].
- Out of the waters for collaboration [in God’s lovingly-restorative mission to the world].