



Study Guide 2: **STORY OF SCRIPTURE**

God's story in scripture is the story of crossing borders and breaking through boundaries in order to bring new life.

Introduction

- What kinds of borders or boundaries do you notice in the world around you? In the wider world? (ex: *social, physical, inherited, biological, acquired, shameful, honored, shared, unique, geographical, economic, etc.*)
- If you visualize borders or boundaries as a “line” that separates you from others, on which side of the “line” do you often find yourself for the borders/boundaries you listed? How do you perceive or interact with those you consider to be on the other side of the “line”?

Know the Story

Read Matthew 2:13-23. (*Matthew's story of Jesus as a child refugee and immigrant.*)

Jesus often crossed lines in his ministry. Even as a child, he was carried across borders. Jesus was uprooted from Bethlehem, and fled with his family to Egypt where they took shelter as refugees – leaving extended family, cousins, aunts, uncles, neighbors. Eventually, the family decided to leave Egypt and return home to Bethlehem—which Jesus probably had little memory of. But the political threat was still present, and Joseph feared for his family's safety. So they avoided Bethlehem—not even stopping to see their relatives there—and went north into Galilee. This was a sketchy part of the Roman Empire, more “wild west” than tranquil suburb. But the family settled there and began their lives again.

What would life have been like for Jesus as a refugee? What resources would he have had? Did he make friends? What language did he speak – his native tongue, or the local language?

What would it have been like for Jesus to return to Galilee? Did the other children make fun of Jesus, with his different “Egyptian” clothes and accent? Did they tease him because he didn't know how to play their games, or where to find the closest well for water, or how to avoid the gangs and thieves who also lived among the hills of Galilee? What borders did the holy family cross during their time in exile and return (*national, social, ethnic, political, urban and countryside*)?

Be the Story

Jesus regularly crossed social, ethnic and regional borders to practice his ministry of meeting, healing, and eating with others. Jesus' experience in crossing borders, migrating, and even living as a refugee early in his life (according to Matthew) shape his adult ministry as well. He is comfortable in many different contexts and situations—with scribes and teachers, Roman soldiers, government workers, women, beggars, the disabled and the mentally challenged. He doesn't distinguish between rich Temple officials or humble workers. Because he is willing to cross social, ethnic and political borders to encounter and serve people, he embodies God in the scriptures—crossing borders and boundaries to meet us where we are.

Just as God in Jesus willingly experienced upheaval and displacement, so we, too, might reach out to our neighbors who experience similar upheaval and displacement. To do so may require that we cross a border or social boundary and put ourselves at risk to walk with our neighbor. In other words, when we reach out to strangers and neighbors who have been refugees (literal or metaphorical), we are also reaching out to know God in them.

- What kinds of lines or borders are easy to cross? Why are they easier to cross?
- Which kinds of borders are harder to cross? Why are they harder?
- How do we cross lines and borders that are difficult or seem impossible to cross?
- Are there some borders or boundaries that should not be crossed? What are these and why?
- What borders and lines have you seen God cross in your life, or in your friends' lives?

Tell the Story

Sometimes differences divide people and create barriers. But other kinds of differences are just part of our everyday lives and we don't even notice them. When we become aware of the borders and barriers that keep us from people, often it just takes a little bit of work to cross those boundaries. Working to discover what we have in common with others can help us respect and negotiate those differences. It can also help us to learn more about ourselves by learning about each other.

- What are the lines or borders that exist in your community? Your family? Your congregation?
- What makes it difficult to cross those boundaries?
- How can you work to discover what you have in common with others in order to cross those boundaries?
- How can working to cross the boundaries that exist in our lives, community and world bring new life?

Closing Prayer

God of all creation, you have created the borders and boundaries of our natural world so that all of your creatures could live together in peace. We have crossed and blurred many of these boundaries, and we have created other political, social and religious boundaries that do not promote peace, but antagonize, divide and even set people against each other. Sometimes we put up borders and draw lines to keep ourselves safe. But there must be a better way. You are the God who came to live among us in Jesus. You crossed borders and boundaries to comfort, heal, encounter and simply to meet people in need. Give us the courage to willingly cross the social boundaries and borders that divide us from each other. Give us the strength to stand on the unpopular side of the line when you call us to take a stand with others for justice. Give us the compassion to reach across the lines that separate us to give and receive healing in your name. Amen.

(Adapted from the PD2015 Session, "Story of Scripture" by Julia Lambert Fogg, California Lutheran University. For complete curriculum, visit www.elcaymnet.org/PD2015.)

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