

Weekly Bible Study group – October 14, 2009

This week's reading assignment: **John 1:19-2:24**

Reflection by Bob Zurinsky (bob@spu.edu)

Here's a disturbing thought that I think is important for us to grapple with as we study scripture together:

Sometimes when I listen to Christians talk about God, Jesus, the Bible, etc. I get the distinct impression that we have a tendency to make the Bible passages we are reading into something they're not. We sometimes come to the text with a pre-formed idea about what the text is saying, and then (naturally) everything we read is subtly shaped in our minds to be all about that pre-conceived idea that we started with. We assume that the author is answering the questions that we are asking. But what if, just maybe, the author is actually answering a set of questions that we never even dreamed of?

Case study: "**Messiah.**"

What does this word mean to you? When Andrew proclaims to his brother Simon that "We have found the Messiah!" – what is he saying? What was he looking for, and who did he think that Jesus was?

The Hebrew word *moshiach* is translated as either "Messiah" or "Christ" (those are the same word, in Hebrew and Greek, respectively). Literally, this means simply "anointed." In Jewish history and theology, the term *moshiach* referred to anyone that God had appointed as a leader of the people. Often we see David, king of Israel, called God's *moshiach*.

During the long years of exile and oppression of various kinds, the people of Israel longed for a new leader, a new Messiah, to emerge from the wreckage and lead the nation back to the glory of its former years. In some forms of Judaism, a belief and hope began to grow – a hope that one day God's Spirit would so completely fill one of their leaders that this man would have the strength and power to bring a whole new world order – a kingdom that would cover the world and finally bring peace to the Earth. This was the wild hope that their hearts clung to. This is what it meant for the people to wait with longing for God's anointed leader to arrive. This is what Andrew and John the Baptist believed was happening, right there in front of their eyes.

(So what do *you* mean when you say those powerful words – "Jesus Messiah"?)