

The Good Samaritan United Methodist Church

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Church Office Hours:

Monday - Friday
9:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.

English Worship Service	9:00 a.m.
Children Sunday School	9:30 a.m.
Youth Sunday School	9:30 a.m.
Mandarin Worship Service	10:30 a.m.
Youth Group Fellowship	5:30 p.m.

Senior Pastor: Pastor Rajiv Pathik
Director of Chinese Ministry: Helen Kung
Director of Music: Barbara Christmann
Preschool Interim Director: Loretta Wong
Church Office Manager: Ivana Heang

Good Samaritan Vision Statement:

Our vision is to proclaim the Gospel and grow Jesus' disciples in a multicultural community by emphasizing families, youth, and mission.

Areas of Focus:

- Expand children's ministry and tie preschool to church children's program.
- Nurture families and individuals spiritually and emotionally;
- Celebrate diversity and be inclusive valuing all of God's people and their gifts;
- Attract young families, and especially our neighbors, to English and Mandarin language worship services.
- Partner with community in mission and service.

34th Anniversary Edition

2020

Lenten Devotional Booklet Gospel of Luke



The Good Samaritan UMC

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Wednesday February 26, 2020

Luke 1:1-38

Helen Kung

I love this scripture selection during the Christmas season, but these stories also inspire us during the Lenten Easter Season.

First, I am inspired by the parallel stories of an angel delivering the news of improbable pregnancies, two faithful people getting a shock of their lives and their reaction to such news. Zechariah was well respected, a righteous person from a priestly clan. He was married to an equally righteous woman, Elizabeth, who belonged to the same line as Aaron. Although they live with prestige and live comfortably, they are both humiliated for being barren at an old age. Even though this is about a thousand years after Hannah, I imagine both women felt similar shame in a society that valued women for their sons. On the other hand, Elizabeth's cousin Mary was a young teenager, and would not dare to imagine the possibility of surviving the punishment for an unwed pregnancy in her society.

So, the old man talked back about the impossibility of becoming pregnant at such an old age. And the angel silenced him until God's will has been done. And the young girl asked, "how can this be?" before saying "I am the Lord's servant. Let it be with me just as you have said." What act of faith. Not only a faith to believe this could happen, but a faith that with God I can endure the difficulties if this is God's will.

Brothers and sisters, do we have the faith to hear impossible news- that with God it can happen? But also, the faith to believe that God will walk with us through any impossibility.

Prayer: Dear God, Loving Jesus, Holy Spirit: Please help us. When you are near grant us faith so that we are not afraid. Grant us faith to accept your calls. Grant us faith that whatever difficulties we may face, you will be with us forever. Amen.

Thursday February 27, 2020

Luke 1:39-80

Matt Murphy

In these verses, Mary visits her cousin Elizabeth, who is pregnant, and the baby "leaps for joy" in her womb. Elizabeth feels such joy that she shouts out to Mary "Blessed are you among women!" And Mary, overcome with joy, sings a song to express her emotion. Later, when John the Baptist is born to Elizabeth, her husband Zechariah, sang a song of joy to God.

When we experience God, it is often a feeling and not an understanding. We might study the Bible and have knowledge about God. We can use this knowledge to make decisions about right and wrong by thinking logically and using reason. Using reasoning to make moral decisions is a good thing to do. But, our strongest connections to God and to others is not reason but is our feelings.

In this chapter, Mary, Elizabeth, and Zechariah have strong feelings. They sang about their feeling and they prophesied and they felt a great joy. But, also, their feeling lead them to commit themselves to a purpose. Mary and Elizabeth knew that there would be difficult times for the children that they were carrying. They knew that their joy wouldn't be there all the time. But, their feelings drew them to God's plan and lead them to believe.

Our feelings are not small things. They are not just transient emotional experiences without a purpose. Our feelings can lead us to make a commitment. Our feelings can lead us to explore and learn. Our feelings can connect us to each other.

Prayer: Lord, we thank you for our feelings. Help us to appreciate the value they have in our personal relationships, our relationship with you, and with our neighbors around the world. Keep us in touch with them and aware of their influence on our daily lives.

Friday February 28, 2020

Luke 2: 8-9, 20

Lever Wang

The shepherds glorifying and praising God

I was always wondering why shepherds were picked by the angel to witness Jesus's birth. The shepherds probably were the lowest of the low class in the societal hierarchy at that time. They were wandering around at night aimlessly to track their animals, Then suddenly angels appeared in front of them to give them the good news. Yes, they were terrified to see the angel. But they soon realized this was their destiny to witness the birth of their future king.

To me, those shepherds may not even be Jews themselves. For many hundreds or even thousands of years, Bedouin people had been the nomad people in that region, shepherding for different local peoples. Even today, we can find Bedouin people in Sinai peninsula, Jordan, Israel, Egypt, etc. They may not always be Muslims either, many of them are Christian or in Egypt, Coptic Christians. I met one last month when I was sightseeing in Luxor. He was the driver of our bus. I told him that I heard from the tour guide that he is Bedouin Coptic Christian. He said yes right away, and showed me a little cross (about half inch wide) on his wrist. He also loudly proclaimed "I love Jesus!". Those Christians have been for many hundreds, or even thousands of years, under the control of the Muslim majority (in Egypt less than 12% of people are Coptic Christian) But they still tattooed their wrists to show they are Christians, and proclaim they love Jesus and call us their brothers and sisters in Christ!

Same as in China today. During the cultural revolution, people were not allowed to worship any religion, either Eastern or Western. But now, in every rural village I visited in the last 20 years, many homes have signs saying "Jesus lives in this house". Of course, under the communist regime, church buildings are very rare. But I know many people gathering in individual homes to worship the only God and consider Jesus as their one and only savior.

All these remind me a verse I read recently on the Inspirational app, Galatians 3:28

"There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female, for you are one in Christ Jesus". So these frightened shepherds, nomad Bedouins, underprivileged Coptic Christians, Chinese home worshipers, and many others, we are all one in Christ Jesus!

Prayer: Thank you Lord for including all of us in your Kingdom regardless of our differences. Your grace has blessed me, my friends, my church, and millions around the world. Amen

Sunday February 29, 2020

Luke 3:21 – 4:13

Mohan A. Raj

The baptism of Jesus shows his identification with sinful man. Luke's genealogy takes Jesus life back to Adam emphasizing that Jesus belongs to all of mankind, not only to Jewish people. As Jesus prays during the baptism, the Holy Spirit came in the form of a dove. The voice of God the Father is heard and the beloved Son is baptized. Jesus begins His earthly ministry with the blessing of the Father and the enabling power of the Holy Spirit.

Filled with Holy Spirit, Jesus is then sent to wilderness where He is tempted for forty days with no food. After identifying with sinners in baptism, he then identifies with them in temptation. He ate nothing and he is hungry and the Satan tempts Him to turn a stone into bread. Jesus reminds the Satan that every word of God is more important than the bread we eat. The second temptation came from Satan in the form exchange for all the Kingdoms of the world with the worship of the Satan. Jesus overcomes this temptation by answering that you should worship the Lord your God and only Him you shall serve. The third temptation came in the form of requesting God to save Jesus if He jumps from the pinnacle of the temple. Jesus says that you shall not test the Lord your God. When Satan is unsuccessful he departs from Jesus.

Satan is testing Jesus with the words of the Bible taking them out of context. Similarly, we are constantly tempted with issues facing us; how we treat certain segments of our population such as undocumented, refugees, the poor, homeless and minorities. Instead of treating them with empathy and love and solving the issues, we can be tempted to treat them unfairly. We need God's grace to solve society's ills.

Prayer: O Gracious God, help us to resist world's temptations so that we can relate in love. Help us to view the less fortunate folks as created by God in His own image so that we can find solutions to the problems facing us. God of love, help us to love you as you ask and have shown, in the person of Jesus Christ. Amen.

Sunday March 1, 2020

Luke 4:14-44

Lauren Michelle Stevens

In Luke 4, right before verses 42-44, there is a time of much healing. Jesus has been in cities around Galilee, teaching and healing people right before their eyes. And then he goes off into a deserted place to be alone. But the crowds follow him, hoping to make him stay with them so that he can continue to help and heal their loved ones. And then in verse 43 he says, "I must proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God to the other cities also; for I was sent for this purpose."

What does he mean by that? Is the healing and transformative work in Galilee not a good enough reason for him to stay? Of course it is. Except that Jesus' purpose is not limited to Galilee, or any one place or people. Jesus was sent for the purpose of proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God to ALL of Creation.

We find ourselves in a similar situation today. You see, those of us in the church want Jesus to come into the church and heal all that is broken within us. And trust me, there is a lot that is broken. We want to hear the good news of the kingdom of God and see it right before our eyes. Is that not what the coming Easter time is all about? Before we know it we will be celebrating the resurrection of Jesus, a miracle of healing above and beyond all else.

And yet, instead of keeping that to ourselves, Jesus' words from thousands of years ago speak to us again today. In this time of repentance and healing, as we prepare ourselves for the celebration of the resurrection, let us also prepare ourselves to proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God to those around us, so that the purpose of Jesus can continue to be resurrected in all of us.

Prayer: Heavenly spirit, creator of all, we give you thanks for your humanity, that you saw our need for healing so many years ago and met us where we were. We also give thanks for your divinity, that you saw a greater purpose, something bigger than we ever were or ever will be, something that involved all of Creation. In this Lenten season let us seek to repent of our sins and find healing. But rather than stop there, God we ask for you to stir in our hearts a desire to live out your purpose of proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God to all of Creation, that we may serve and love as you once did, and thus provide your healing spirit to others. Amen.

Monday, March 2, 2020

Luke 5: 1-11

Reed Forney

Jesus goes fishing

I don't consider myself a fisherman. I have been fishing many times in my life and always enjoyed my time with friends and nature. I have even caught a few fish in my days. I also do not consider myself a fisher of men. I am willing to openly share my beliefs when asked and even share the blessings that I have been given and what Jesus has done in my life. But to go out and actively recruit followers and try to reel them in is not really my thing. Should it be? Absolutely!

Dollie and I were in church on this past Sunday and our pastor talked about this passage and how the "gospels were meant to be shared". How we should cast our nets out and let the world know what Jesus has to offer. The more we practice following the words of Jesus, the more we will become fisher of men. There is good news out there and I feel blessed to know Jesus and I hope that everyone can have the peace and blessings that I have experienced in my life. Following the teachings of Jesus gives me a perspective of how to look at and enjoy life. Being content and looking closely at all the blessing around us every minute of every day. I am also very grateful for my friends, especially the Good Samaritan family, that have shared their faith and experience in Christ openly with me.

Are we ready to give up things in our day to day life and follow God's word? Can we make it a priority to live by the teachings of Jesus? We have seen that true disciples love to hear God's Word taught, they obey Jesus even when it doesn't make sense, they are aware of their own sinfulness, and they become fishers of men. We need to grow deeper in our relationship with God to move on to spread the good news to others.

These are not easy tasks. But we need to remember that Jesus is all about helping others less fortunate than us. We should be spreading the word that has helped us live and enjoy an abundant life to others so that they may experience that same joy and fulfillment.

Prayer: Thank you, God, for all the blessings we have in our lives. Please stick with us as we learn to trust in your word and try to help each other grow in Christ.

Amen

Tuesday March 3, 2020
Luke 5:12-32

Mimi Underwood

There are 3 stories in this selection of scripture.

Jesus cures a Man with Leprosy

In this story a man afflicted with leprosy approaches Jesus and falls to the ground asking to be healed. Jesus reaches out and touches him and he is instantly healed. Then Jesus instructs him to go quietly to the priests and give the offering commanded by Moses. Jesus tells the man, "Your cleansed and obedient life, not your words, will bear witness to what I have done".

This story reminds me that it is the way we live our life, not what we say, that God cares most about. Then the scripture goes on to say that Jesus often needed to retreat from the crowds for respite and prayer, which is another reminder that God wants us to take care of ourselves --physically and spiritually.

Jesus Heals a Paralyzed Man

In this story a paralyzed man was brought to Jesus on a mat. When they could not reach Jesus in the house, they climbed on the roof and lowered the man down to Jesus and Jesus healed him and says that his sins are forgiven.

I am always struck by the pure love shown by the friends who exerted the effort to hoist the man onto the roof and then lower him to Jesus. I can't help but think that this expression of love by the friends must have pleased Jesus. But that pleasant feeling was fleeting for Jesus because of the questioning looks from the Pharisees and teachers who were wondering why Jesus thought he could forgive sins. Jesus tells them that he has the power to heal from God and all who saw were amazed.

The Pharisees and teachers saw this and must have been amazed, at least initially. Since these are presumably the same people who later have Jesus crucified, I can only assume that they were fearful that their position in society was threatened by Jesus, otherwise I would have expected them to have become followers as well. It seems so clear reading the story how wrong they were --these were the religious scholars of the time and they got it wrong, very, very wrong. This makes me question what I am getting wrong in my spiritual journey.

Jesus calls Levi and eats with Sinners

Jesus again rattles the Pharisees and teachers by eating with a tax collector and sinners. When questioned by these "scholars" Jesus said, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."

Once again the righteous get it so wrong. We as a church and as Christians do many wonderful things, but we also get many things wrong and miss so many opportunities to be drawn closer to Jesus.

Prayer: Creator God, help to open each of us to your will. Please help us to not be like the Pharisees who thought they understood your will -- your mysterious will. Keep us open, loving and kind to ourselves and to others. Amen

Wednesday March 4, 2020
Luke 5:33-6:11

Paul Boehm

When I was young, I remember thinking how lucky I was, being young, and now that I'm old, I value youth for their vitality and excitement. However, as Jesus says in verse 5:39, "**The old is good.**" Amen!

It seems to me that the theme of our reading today resolves around **rules** and **faith**. The Pharisees in the age of Jesus emphasized **rules**: "harvesting on the Sabbath is not permitted;" "healing is not permitted on the Sabbath" and fasting and praying is righteous and should be done regularly. Jesus clarified that the rules or rites were guidelines, not primordial, foundational and hardened dictates. I believe that Jesus was not saying, "dispense with rules," but rather, *make use of rules to gain faith*. The practice of not working on the Sabbath reflects a trusted physiological practice of rest and recuperation. Not working on the Sabbath is generally a healthy practice. However, the fact that Jesus lived among the disciples meant that these practices must vary. If Jesus is the son of God, why wouldn't praise and honor and celebration be bestowed on Him? Rule-minded Pharisees sought to trap and criticize Jesus. They were definitely *not* examples for us today.

Spiritual Maps

An explorer trusts a map but knows that the map does not represent the journey, but that it is a tool for exploring and surviving in unknown parts. So the practice of spiritual rules/rites is a tool to survive in our world today. Each day brings with it a discovery, a potential for grace, for meeting a person with whom we may find harmony. With the map, we may avoid pitfalls and tribulations. But a map is subject to aging. Volcanoes, earthquakes, erosion and other things can change our landscape, and as we know, streets, houses and buildings change. Can you imagine using a map of Cupertino in 1920 to navigate today? Praise be to God, we not only have rules and rites, but we have a relationship with our Lord Jesus to show us the way. Worshiping on Sunday, taking communion, and practicing baptism are all worthy rites. Remembering our Lord in all things, not only in our rites, will develop our faith. Our relationship with Jesus is the journey. Jesus grants us salvation.

Prayer: *Dear Lord Jesus, teach us when to follow rules, when to fast, when to pray, and when to act out to heal, either in working for social justice, or in being a friend to someone in need. Lord, that your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Amen*

Thursday March 5, 2020

Luke 6:12-26

John Cordes

Reading these verses automatically sent me looking for the full list of beatitudes which are in Matthew 5. The beatitudes are one of the most uplifting sections of the new testament for me because in them Jesus is promising rewards in heaven for those who have suffered here on earth. In thinking about what to share about these verses I listened to different versions of the "blessed are" songs on YouTube. Listening to those songs is a wonderful to get inspired and feel recharged. I encourage you to give them a listen. I also checked various poems which are based on the beatitudes. Here is one I chose to share.

Blessed are the poor in spirit.
Theirs is God's kingdom.
Many blessings from God...
They shall receive them!

Blessed are they who mourn.
They shall be comforted.
In the loving arms of Jesus,
they shall be well rested!

Blessed are the meek.
They shall inherit the earth.
And shall receive from Jesus.
A "brand new birth!"

Blessed are they who hunger for
righteousness. They shall be filled.
A desire to know more of God...
has been instilled!

Blessed are the merciful. God's mercy
they shall obtain.
As they're an expression of Jesus'
wonderful name!

Blessed are they with a pure heart. They shall see God!
Though many in this world, may think they're "odd."

Blessed are those who are persecuted
for God's kingdom.
They share their testimony for Christ,
to those who receive them!

Blessed are you when others persecute you
and accuse you falsely.
Rejoice in the power of God!
He loves you most assuredly!

Rejoice that heaven shall one day
be your reward!
So YOU can rule and reign
with Jesus our lord!

Blessed are we who serve Christ...
The anointed one!
Blessed are God the father.
The Holy Spirit. And the Son!
By Jim Pemberton 10/31/10

There are many others poems of course. It is wonderful all the ways people have been inspired to reflect on the promises from God. It is interesting how the shorter list of 'blessed are' verses here in Luke are followed up by 'Woe be' verses. There are similar life instructions in Matthew after the beatitudes. After Luke 6:26, Jesus continues to instruct us how to behave in this life. Luke 6:27 "But to you who are listening I say: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you,"

Prayer: May God inspire you and give you strength to live by His instructions. Amen.

Friday March 6, 2020

Luke 6:27-49

Ivana V. Heang

In Christ Alone

Jesus teaches that in contrast to the world reciprocating with hate to those who hate them, we as Christians is to bless and not curse, to pray for those who abuse us. There could be misunderstandings concerning what Jesus is saying, but we must seek the “Spirit” of Jesus’ instructions.

Jesus begins with showing how weak, sinful, and incapable we are to do this without him. Jesus demands absolute and perfect love from his followers! You can imagine the twelve apostles who have been called specifically by Jesus, and who have left everything they have ever known to follow him thinking, “What have we gotten ourselves into?” Perhaps we also think this sometimes as Christians. I am not sure who started the rumor that Christian life is easy! In fact, it is downright impossible to live and do without the grace of God in Christ!

None of us can love as Jesus calls us to without understanding what he has done for us and what he is doing in us by his spirit (His continued love and mercy for us). The Christian faith exists still today, not because of history, but because of the faith in the resurrection. No other faiths have there been a resurrection of their Savior.

Going back to these scriptures, do you live positively “doing good”, or do you just merely avoid your enemies and conflict altogether? Jesus says this positively in such a way that makes us realize that if love is the motivation to “do to others what we would have them do to us” then we need his grace and strength to do so, and we are easily discouraged because we realize we often do not. Our hope is in the righteousness that God supplies to us in Christ alone. Which reminds me of a song “In Christ Alone” found in the Worship & Song book. The beginning goes: “In Christ alone my hope is found, he is my light, my strength, my song. This cornerstone, this solid ground, firm through the fiercest drought and storm. What heights of love, what depths of peace, when fears are stilled, when strivings cease! My comforter, my all in all, here in the love of Christ I stand.” Everything is through Christ, as this song reminds us.

To lend and expect nothing in return is something that we can only do because of the work of Christ within us. Jesus says that to be able to love the unloving, and lend to those who cannot necessarily pay you back shows you to be children of the Most High. We are to reflect God’s glory, because God is kind to the ungrateful and evil and God is merciful, so we should be merciful.

If we do not show forth love, how can we guide others to the only hope found in Christ? If we cannot see our own sins clearly, then how can we help others see their sins clearly? In Christ, we realize how sinful we are and must still find our hope in him. Partaking in the Lord’s Supper is one example. It reminds us that He who had no sin, became sin for us so that we might have a righteousness that was not of our own, but found in Christ alone.

Prayer: Loving and wonderful savior, *grant us the strength and wisdom to live our lives according to thy will, that we might be true servants of thy kingdom as well as loving neighbors to others.*

Saturday March 7, 2020

Luke 7:1-17

Dick Kaiser

Luke 7 begins with two stories that demonstrate the power of faith. The first deals with the Roan Centurion whose favorite slave has become seriously ill. The Jewish community leaders pleaded on the Centurion’s behalf because even though he was a Roman and a Gentile. The Centurion at first requests that Jesus come and treat the slave, but then decides not to impose upon Jesus to that degree, but sends another messenger to ask Jesus to “just say the word” and his slave would be healed. Jesus is amazed at the strong faith of the Centurion that the deed could be accomplished so easily, and does indeed “say the word.” It should be noted that the same story appears in Matthew with the difference that the Centurion actually speaks with Jesus himself (Matt 8:5-13). Either way, the Centurion, who was seen by the Jews as a good man, exhibits a strong faith in the power of Jesus to save his friend.

In the second story, Jesus went to a town called Nain with a large crowd including his disciples. As they approached the gate, they met another crowd exiting the town. This crowd included a dead person being carried out – the only son of a widow, followed by a large crowd of townspeople. Jesus took all this in and said to the woman, “Don’t cry.” Then he went to the open coffin and said; “Young man, I say to you, get up.” The dead man sat up and began to talk, and Jesus gave him back to his mother.

The people were filled with awe, and praised God. The news but Jesus spread throughout the countryside. This second story was the first of three instances of Jesus raising someone from the dead, the others being Jairus’s daughter (8:40-56), and Lazarus (John 11:38-44) The two stories illustrate the importance of our own faith in our relationships with Jesus. A strong faith would appear to be an important ingredient in a successful life.

Prayer: *Lord, grant us the strength of character to maintain our faith in you in spite of doubters and critics. Help us to understand that whatever we do, whatever happens, you are there to get us through to a life of peace with you, if only we can maintain a solid faith. AMEN*

Sunday March 8, 2020

Luke 7: 18-50

Cate Lycurgus

These days without my dad, I do not know how to be. How to make oatmeal, how to stomach the news, how to sit down to write once again. It's uncharted territory and so I try to listen to the advice many folks have offered: take time out to process, stay busy, take trips, volunteer/work more, surround yourself with friends, spend time on your own, move out, stay with your mom... The advice directly contradicts, and I've realized what allows people to heal can look entirely different. Most often I find myself wanting to please others and mourn in the expected way rather than actually figuring out what might help me be okay.

In reading today's scripture, I'm struck by the moment Jesus, referring to John the Baptist, asks the crowd "what kind of man did you expect to see?" Christ leaves no doubt about John's role as a prophet, but this idea of expectations and questioning them, lies at the center of his message here. To 'expect' is to look out and see, quite literally the Latin *ex-* and *spectare, spectacle*, to look. And there's also the implication with expecting, that we know who or for what we must look. More and more though, I do not know. I cannot tell what is devastation, what is loss or possibility, what simple or so very complex.

Listening to the ocean tonight, I realize I know little of how the tides creep and recede with gravity, how its creatures feed from sun and regulate their pH with their breathing, and how they keep whole kingdoms alive. I do not know why some people pay dearly for their mistakes, and others get by unscathed. I don't know why we live or die, how many days I might have left for what I am called to do. And yet, I am so blessed. I know the waves' pulse and roar, I live in a land of water and light. I was my daddy's child.

Later in the scripture when the woman comes and dumps perfume on Jesus' feet and rubs her hair all over them, it seems ridiculous but—really? Given what I know (nothing) and what I am (blessed beyond belief) how could one do otherwise? Immediately the Pharisees have valid points—that the perfume is a wild luxury, that this woman has sinned—but the most important point, the one they couldn't see, was her love. She couldn't *not* lavish her gratitude on Christ. If pouring perfume on his feet was a sin, and if *sin* is separation from God, wouldn't staying at a distance also be sin? This brings me to verses 33-35; Jesus describes the classic no-win situation, no way to be holy.

Which I think might be part of the point in chapter seven: that there is no way to be. What looks like grieving to one person might look like mirth to another. What seems an inordinate mourning might be necessary fallow. What looks like selfishness could be service, or like sacrifice, self-service. We

do not know, we cannot tell, and so how can we expect? And beyond expectation, judge? This Lent I am loudly proclaiming my un-knowing and expecting nothing, except that God knows. That he knows our deficiencies, knows what we need—and what we need to focus on is throwing our heart at his feet.

Prayer: Dear Lord, I do not know the reasons of this world and the way you work in it. Sometimes I do not even know my own heart, or feel you working within. Even when I can't, please help me remain open to the multitude of ways your spirit moves and to expect nothing but your goodness, to rely on nothing but your love. I know I am not worthy to bend at your feet, but pray that I place myself there, daily. In Jesus' name Amen.

Monday March 9, 2020

Luke 8:1-15

Pat Babiasz

The Parable of the Sower: The reading for today is found in 3 gospels: Mathew 13:1-23, Mark 4:1-20, and Luke 8:1-15

All three mention the twelve disciples. Only Luke includes Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and Susanna by name as helping to support Jesus and the twelve disciples out of their own means.

It was an accepted practice in the early church for people to share their wealth in a common account to be used for the good of all. However, Luke mentions women specifically in this story. It is references like this that give women today the justification for pursuing major roles in our faith communities, not just behind the scene assignments. Women did have significant influence in the early church though not often acknowledged.

We usually pay the most attention to the 4 types of soil. We like to think we are like the good soil—capable of understanding and absorbing God’s will for us. However it is called *The Parable of the Sower* not *The Parable of the Soil*. In this sense: We are the sower.

The sower distributes the seed on all types of soil. He uses the most effortless way though not necessarily the most productive way to sow; thus giving the possibility to the seeds in less than ideal soil to grow.

God gives all the chance to respond to his word. We are to do the same—sharing our faith daily in all circumstances. We are to reach out to all, not just to those we consider to be the most likely to respond positively.

My Faith Step: Do one thing today, no matter how small, to show your faith to someone out of your comfort zone.

Prayer: Lord, help me to find the good soil to sow my seed to that I may thereby contribute to the advancement of your kingdom. Amen

Tuesday March 10, 2020

Luke 8:19-39

Edith Sutterlin

I imagine myself seeing Jesus through disciples’ eyes, time-traveling to become an eyewitness follower.

His mother and brothers try to visit. Instead of going out to greet them immediately or letting them to the front of the crowd, Jesus continues teaching, “My mother and brothers are those who hear God’s word and put it into practice.” I’m surprised, but proudly assume Jesus is not bound by what others expect and thinks of us as “family.”

Another ordinary day starts out crossing a lake by boat, letting Jesus rest as we travel, but a storm gets fierce. I trust the fishermen, but when it gets rough, even they say we might capsize. We wake Jesus to warn him, “We’re about to drown!” We are surprised and fearful when he does not react with alarm, but actually overcomes the raging winds and waters with the power of his voice. I humbly wonder, “What in the world just happened?”

We safely reach shore, still reeling from the shock, ready to call it a day, needing down time (as we do when feeling overwhelmed even under less dramatic experiences). But as soon as we step out of the boat, a raving lunatic confronts Jesus loudly. Having seen Jesus make lame people walk and blind people see, I assume Jesus could lay his hands on the man’s head, calm him, and restore his sanity. But instead of a miracle to neatly resolve this annoying interruption, Jesus responds more forcefully, again channeling God’s dramatic power and authority over all nature. Incredibly, Jesus sends the demons plaguing the wild man into a herd of pigs. They rush into that sea we just escaped and drown, terrifying not only their stunned swineherds but also the townspeople as soon as they hear! I’m not surprised folks ask us to leave. We’re still absorbing newly changed plans when the cured man now begs to come with us! I’m not surprised he wants to leave the place he grew up where people “knew him when.” I expect Jesus to say, “The more, the merrier,” but Jesus confounds us, telling the man, “Return home and tell how much God has done for you!”

If we imagine seeing Jesus through disciples’ eyes, which stories shape our images of Jesus? Do we see a baby adored by all who grew into a superhero who befriends children, provides free lunches, and walks on water? Or do we stand trembling, with mixed awe and fear, wondering how a wandering carpenter-turned-rabbi could channel God’s power to dominate the raging winds and water, then swiftly and thoroughly eradicate another man’s inner demons? Or both?

How do we even begin to follow Jesus?

Prayer: Dear God, We honor you as the Heavenly Creator of the Universe who yet knows the number of hairs on our heads. Help us to open ourselves to experience you in myriad unexpected ways. Help us to find courage to act as Jesus instructed us to when we encounter the hungry, poor, mourning, sick, or tormented people in our lives and threatening storms in our world. Help us to trust Jesus’ promise of your forgiveness and Grace as we try. In Jesus name, we pray. Amen.

Wednesday March 11, 2020

Luke 8:40-54

Philip Bohannon

It can certainly be hopeful to hear of Jarius's beloved child raised to life by Jesus, but in a world of very real tragedies, it can also be hard. If the wrong this family is experiencing can be so "easily" righted, what about the thousands, the millions of other wrongs? Thinking this way, it would be easy for me to bounce right off this scripture and not get anything from it. Fortunately the scripture itself helps me find my way with the story of a "preliminary" healing that happens on the way to Jarius's house.

The first part of the story tells of Jesus stopping on the way to Jarius's house because, in a crowd, someone in need of healing has touched him and "power has gone out of him", and he wants to know who it is. Two points strike me -- one, Jesus wants to form a relationship. But two, and a striking point to me, is that Jesus is genuinely surprised - he doesn't know who touched him! How is this possible? How could someone who walks on water, banishes demons and soon will raise a girl from the dead be surprised? How could he not know something as simple as who touched him?

For me, these limitations in the first story form a frame for the second. Jesus is doing what seems impossible *to us*, calming storms, evicting demons and bringing a child back to life, but these things *do not* seem impossible to him. Maybe they actually seem practical. Other things, like knowing who touched you or (apparently) being nice to your family, don't seem so possible today. Seen this way, this passage helps me know Jesus as a fully human person who is equally fully living into what is possible with God. What is possible without fear and with tremendous love for those who suffer, even those who suffer to the point of death.

Prayer: Dear God, so often we want a quick fix! I want Jesus to swoop in and fix the broken situations for us like he did for Jarius's family! Help me calm down and connect to you. Help me see what the world can be with a little less fear, and with more love for those who suffer. I pray this in your Son's name, Amen.

Thursday March 12, 2020

Luke 9:1-17

Carl Cottrell

As Jesus foresees his final days, he extends his ministry of preaching the gospel and healing the sick. He commissions his 12 disciples by giving them power and authority over demons and the ability to cure diseases. Then he sends them out to proclaim the Kingdom of God and to heal. He tells them to "take nothing for your journey-no staff, no bag, no bread, no money". This forces the 12 to rely completely on God for their ministry. So they did travel through the countryside and villages, preaching the gospel and healing people and they were provided food and shelter as they went..

Now, through this action, Jesus had greatly expanded his ministry of gospel and crowds began to gather and his fame began to spread so that even King Herod heard of it and wanted to see Jesus. This led to the story we know so well of the feeding of the five thousand with five loaves and two fish.

In this event, about five thousand people had gathered to hear Jesus and to be healed by him. The day was ending and the disciples asked Jesus to send the crowd away lest the disciples had to buy enough food to feed the crowd. Instead, Jesus tells the disciples to have the people sit down in groups of about fifty. Then he takes the five loaves and two fishes, looks to heaven and blessed and broke the bread and fishes into pieces and gave them to the disciples to place before the crowd. All who were present ate their fill. Then the left overs were gathered up and filled twelve baskets!

This miracle of Jesus is the only story that appears in all four gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. It was the event that caused many people to proclaim Jesus as the true prophet of God. The event also drew the attention of Herod as well as the local Pharisees and priests in the temple. Jesus spreading fame led directly to his arrest, trial and death on the cross, just as he had told his disciples would happen.

Prayer: Let us pray today that all of us remember and practice the Word as the gospels teach us, so that we may enjoy eternal life. AMEN

Friday March 13, 2020

Luke 9: 18 – 50

Ginny Lycurgus

The scripture for today tells amazing stories about Jesus: his transfiguration and God's voice claiming Jesus as his son; Jesus displaying God's power by casting out evil spirits in a small boy; Jesus preparing the disciples for his betrayal, death, and resurrection; and Jesus admonishing the disciples that the least of us will be first in his kingdom. We see Jesus as God's own son, filled with God's power and also God's compassion. We see him as a teacher, explaining God's radical kingdom that upends our notions of justice and mercy.

What strikes me the most though are the reactions of the disciples. Peter shows a flash of keen insight when he recognizes Jesus as the Messiah, the son of the living God. He quickly loses his insight and blurts out his idea of building memorials for Moses, Elijah, and Jesus. Peter is filled with terror at God's voice, even though he has been living with God's own son. The disciples, who have witnessed countless miracles, are unable to heal a child. They cannot understand Jesus' teachings, and argue about which of them is the greatest.

They seem a fairly hopeless lot and it is easy to judge them, but in my heart I know I could have been one of the disciples too. There are moments, usually on a walk with my dog, when I am overcome with awe at God's creation. These times are followed by moments when I doubt God hears me. Some days I glow with his spirit, and other days I surely must make God cry. I vacillate between putting my complete trust in the master Jesus and wanting to have life according to my wants.

In verse 23, Jesus says, "If any of you wants to be my follower, you must turn from your selfish ways, take up your cross daily, and follow me." The key word here is daily. It is not enough to have a moment of inspiration and give my life and the lives of those I love over to God; instead, I have to give them over every day. I have to do it on my early morning walks when even the birds declare God's glory. I have to do it when I can see a purpose in my work. I also have to pick up the cross in the drudgery and exhaustion of taxing days. I have to do it when my Peter lies gravely ill in the hospital, and

when he is no longer with me. The good news is that Jesus never gave up on his disciples, even when he knew they would betray, abandon, and deny him. I stand on the promise that he never gives up on you and me either.

Prayer: Gracious and loving God, I thank you for your immense love and for your patience with me. You have given me every breath I take, and filled my life with blessing after blessing. Please help me with the hard days and quiet nights when my faith wavers. Remind me that you have been here with me in the past, and will not leave me. Remind me that you hold my future in your awesome hands. Amen.

Saturday March 14, 2020
Luke 9:51-62

Lydia Shipman

In the **Samaritan Opposition**, the people of Samaria refuse to allow Jesus and his disciples to travel through Samaria on their way to Jerusalem. James and John asked Jesus if they should be punished for not allowing their passage. Jesus sharply disapproved of this idea. This passage reminds me of the patience and grace of Jesus Christ. As humans, we are quick to seek revenge on those who treat us poorly. Jesus is not. He does not reprimand the people of Samaria or send holy fire on them as his disciples wanted. He simply turns away and moves on. This is a subtle, yet important lesson within this passage. We should be patient with those who hurt us or cause us trouble, and focus on what God is calling us to do instead of becoming sidetracked with revenge.

In the **Cost of Following Jesus**, He is warning his disciples about the difficulties that will face them after his death. Jesus tells them that they will be nomads. Their path will not be perfectly clear but they have to keep their eyes looking forward, not toward the past, so that they can be successful in spreading God's news. This is also a warning to us about how our lives will be as followers of Jesus. I believe we have all felt lost in our lives, forced to be patient and wait for what we are called to do next.

We've all traveled to unknown places and been put into situations that make us uncomfortable and perhaps even afraid. I believe God calls us to these places, not in order to make us uncomfortable or scared, but because there is a need. He knows that we can be helpful, that we can shine His light in these places and situations. We don't know where God will take us and that is frightening. However, it is also beautiful, because unknown as our path may be, God is showing us new things every day, inviting us into new communities and giving us new experiences we would never have without Him.

Prayer: Lord, Thank you for the life of Jesus Christ. Thank you for sending him to Earth so that we can learn more about You and Your love for us. We are so quick to judge, to seek revenge and to hurt those who have hurt us. Please remind us to be more like Christ, to turn our eyes toward You and what You have called us to do. We seek to be more like Christ and to be his followers. We know that this means that we will be nomads and we will not know what is to come next. Help us to be patient and keep our eyes focused on you so that we do not stray from Your path. Give us courage in new experiences and in new places. And give us your love so that we can share it with others.

Sunday March 15, 2020
Luke 10: 1-24

Hubert Pan

Spreading the gospel is the basic duty of Christians. The will of God must be widely proclaimed throughout the earth, and He gave His only Son Jesus to the world to save the world from sin.

God's good intentions produced mixed results. Those who understand listen to persuasion and accept Jesus as Savior, but the ones in the dark turn away and lose the opportunity for atonement.

There must be workers to harvest the crops, and there are many crops to be harvested in the vast fields. We Christians are the workers called to do the work. We must preach the gospel and harvest mature grain. That is, bringing those who don't yet believe into the fold of followers. This work will be documented, and there will be rewards in heaven.

Everyone who trusts in Jesus will be blessed. For they can see what others have not seen, and hear what others have not heard. We came to the church for this, didn't we? We should make every effort to spread the gospel to our friends, relatives, and neighbors, so that God's good will is transmitted to every corner. This is the basic duty of Christians.

Although I have been a Christian for a long time, I have not asked of myself as much as I should have. I have just naively thought that if my faith is firm, and I walk close to God, that's all God requires of me. I have forgotten that there are still important tasks that must be undertaken to preach the gospel, so that more sinners can be saved. I have a long road and important tasks to do.

Prayer: Lord, please give me the ability and courage to explain my faith to others that they too might come to know Jesus and His teachings.

Monday March 16, 2020
Luke 10:25-42

Qing Wan

There are two stories in this passage,

1. Who is your neighbor?

A lawyer came up to test Jesus and said, "Master, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" He also knows the answer: " Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind"; and, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' Jesus said, "You have answered correctly. Do this and you will have eternal life."

Jesus teaches us with the compassion of the Samaritans. When we see someone in need, don't walk around them or give the chance to others, but do our best to help those around you, regardless of race or identity. That is how he is our neighbor. I have been a member of this American church, the Love Thy Neighbor Church, for many years. It is the home God has prepared for me. I have been receiving a lot of help from God, pastors, and brothers and sisters. They have shown me the love of good neighbors, and I look forward to being a good neighbor to others.

2. Martha is busy with things but Mary chose the best blessing.

When we come to the church on Sunday, we must calm down, listen to God's Word, get close to God, and know what God wants us to do. Serving the Lord is a blessing from the heart. No matter what ministry we do, especially when we are busy, don't lose the peace. God is with us and we should feel the joy in serving. Chaos will cause conflict and make good things bad. With God's presence and working joyously, this is our choice: a blessing that cannot be taken from us. A blessing of serving the Lord.

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father: We ask You to help us. When we say we love you, let us love also those who need help. Don't criticize others in our words but say words of praise. That is how we love You, our God. You have granted us your reward in our blessings. Thank the Lord. This we pray in the name of the Lord Jesus. Amen!

Tuesday March 17, 2020
Luke 11:1-28

Todd Baggett

When asked how to pray, Jesus teaches his disciples the Lord's Prayer. Jesus goes on to teach them about the perseverance in our prayers, telling the disciples with persistence in our prayer God will answer and give us what we need.

Jesus tells them, "Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened." For me this is an important promise to remember. God hears our every prayer, he knows our heart, he knows our desires, but most important he knows our potential. The key here is that not every prayer is answered in the way we expect. I've come to believe that God knows when sometimes what we are praying for is not the best thing for us and will instead bring us something else better.

As a young man about to graduate from college I wondered what I would do in life and how I would know which of the many potential paths I should follow. As I reflect now, I realize that my fears, uncertainties and doubts came from thinking about doing it under my own will and my power. I realize now that all I really needed was faith! God led me down the path that got me where I am today. At every crossroad I just needed to ask God to show me the way. When I was confused or unsure I learned to pray, "God I am not sure which way to go here, so I'm going to just put one step in front of the other and trust that you will show me the way." When God puts a dream in our hearts, he always gives us the tools to fulfill that dream.

I believe God has purpose for all our lives, there are gifts he has chosen to bring to the world through each of us. We don't need to find these things, he makes them known to us. In fact, when I don't act when the message comes, the message repeats in different ways, under different circumstances, until I get it and move into action. When I am on that path, though the world around me may be chaotic, I am at peace.

Prayer: God, thank you for guiding my steps and putting me on the path to do your work and for bringing some of your gifts into this world through me. Thank you for being the God of Yes! The God of Not Yet, when my timing is off. The God of something better, when the highest good for all concerned is more than I imagined. Thank you, God, for opening the door to my dreams and leading me to my highest purpose!

Wednesday, March 18, 2020

Luke 11:29-54

Dick Kaiser

Jesus begins in verse 29 by saying, "How evil are the people of this day! They ask for a miracle, but none will be given them except the miracle of Jonah." in the same way that Jonah was a sign for the people of Nineveh, so the son of man will be a sign for the people of this day. Luke compares Jesus to Jonah and Solomon, saying that there is something there greater than them, meaning Jesus.

This chapter also refers to the Light of the Body, saying that no one should hide their light from others, but should keep it in the open. "If the whole body is full of light, with no part of it in darkness, it will be bright all over, as when a lamp shines on you with its brightness."

Jesus ate lunch with a Pharisee after speaking to the people, and didn't wash his hands before eating. The Pharisee expressed surprise, but Jesus said to him, "You Pharisees clean the outside of our cup and plat, but inside you are full of violence and evil. Fools! Did not God, who made the outside, also make the inside? Give what is in your cups and plates to the poor and everything will be ritually clean for you." Jesus also criticized the Pharisees for giving their tithes of spices and other things, but neglecting justice and love for God; and for loving the reserved seats in the synagogue and the respect of the people, saying they were like unmarked graves which people walk on without knowing it.

A teacher of the Law complained that Jesus was insulting them too, but Jesus went on to criticize them directly, saying, "You put onto peoples backs loads which are hard to carry, but you will not stretch out a finger to help them carry those loads. You make fine tombs for the prophets, the very prophets your ancestors murdered. " How terrible for you teachers of the Law! You have kept the key that opens the door to the house of knowledge; you yourselves will not go in, and you stop those who are trying to go in!

Prayer: Blessed Jesus, we ask your help in using our gifts and graces to further your kingdom and ease the burdens of the people. Help us to be ever conscious not only of what actions make our own lives easier, but also do the same for our neighbors, whom we should love.

Thursday March 19, 2020

Luke 12:15-21

Sandra Daniels

The Parable of the Rich Fool

In the opening of the parable we are told: "*Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions.*" Then we are told about the parable of a man who had an abundant harvest and chose to keep it all for himself and was planning to live a long life on all that he gathered. God surprised this man by saying to him, "You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you..."

One of the greatest sins we commit as humans is when we forget we are made to be in community with one another. Our abundance: food, money, talent, time... are to be shared with one another to build each other up and support one another. When we forget who we are and whose we are; God finds a way to bring us back.

Being in community is hard and challenging because we are all different from each other and we want everyone to be the same. People get placed in boxes, someone with perceived power tries to control, and other's live in fear of differences. It's easy to forget our Creator and God's mandate for creation. Humans were created and loved by the Creator and we were told, "We are good." Our survival is based on our ability to care for each other in spite of our differences. The abundance we have is from God. God's only request is that we share with each other and love one another.

Prayer: Creator God, we struggle to be your servants and ask that you keep us mindful of your love and grace so we can share with each other. Loving God keep me from covetousness, carnal behaviour, help me to live my life in spirit and truth, so that by dying to self, I live for Christ, and thus live my life of the saving of the soul... my soul-life which will produce a great reward, in heaven. AMEN

Friday, March 20, 2020

Luke 12:22-40

Patty Groves

“Don’t Worry, Be Happy” was a popular song in the 80’s, good idea but quite inadequate to calm anyone’s anxiety compared to what Jesus had to say about worry in Luke 12:22-31. Jesus talked to his disciples about reasons to banish worry and approach life with a positive attitude. He said, “For life is more than food and the body more than clothes” (v.23). The disciples were poor folks, how can they not worry about food, clothing, shelter and their general well-being? Jesus told them, God fed the ravens which were considered to be unclean, and “how much more valuable you are than birds!” (v.24). Trust in God and keep our eyes focused on God’s kingdom, have faith that He cares for all his creations, and most of all, He cares for us, His very beloved children.

Jesus said, “Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to your life?” (v. 25). “Since you cannot do this very little thing, why do you worry about the rest?” (v. 26). How we all would like an hour be added to our lives in situations such as meeting a deadline or rushing a love one to the hospital, but could not. Certain happenings in life are beyond our control and could not be helped by worrying. God has all the love and power to help and provide for us. It may be more fruitful if we let God take over the steering wheel and we be the obedient, meditative and humble passengers for a change.

Jesus told His disciples that God clothes the flowers and grass of the field which live today and die tomorrow, and He said, “How much more will He clothe you – you of little faith!” (v.28). Jesus continued, “But seek his kingdom and these things will be given to you as well.” (v.31). Have faith that our heavenly Father already knows what we need and will provide for us in his own way and time. Our most important focus in life is to seek His kingdom and do His will. Jesus promised that a treasure in God’s kingdom is available to all who seek and we must be willing, be watchful, be prepared and be ready to receive.

Prayer: Dear Lord, thank you for sending your son Jesus, our teacher and savior. Please take away my anxiety and worries, give me calm so I can hear your voice and feel your presence. Fill me with the Holy Spirit so I can have the wisdom to trust in you and be your humble servant. In Jesus name, Amen.

Saturday March 21, 2020

Luke 12:41-59

Carolyn Bircher

Doing the Right Thing

Vs. 43: “How happy that servant is if his master finds him doing what’s expected when he comes home!”

Vs. 48: “Much is required from the person to whom much is given; much more is required from the person to whom much more is given.”

Vs. 56: “Hypocrites! You can look at the earth and the sky and predict the weather; why, then, don’t you know the meaning of this present time?”

These are pretty harsh words that are hard to hear and even harder to write about. Just as in Jesus’ time, we have so many excuses for sidestepping our responsibilities....

“Were you talking to me?”

“It’s OK. I won’t get caught. Besides, everyone else does it.”

“I didn’t know I was supposed to do that!”

“I would be rejected by my tribe if I did that.”

We were truly blessed to be born into a land where much is given. Most of us have more than enough resources to feed and shelter ourselves. We have access to education and freedom to study spiritual writings. Unfortunately (or fortunately), we don’t have many excuses for shirking our responsibilities.

In verse 56, Jesus asks us to read the times as well as we read the weather. As we see the realities of Climate Change every night on the news, though, it makes me wonder if maybe we haven’t even been reading the weather correctly. The sad truth is that our land of plenty has contributed vastly to global warming but maybe not so much to helping the less developed countries cope with the results of it.

I have the privilege of knowing Jesus and reading His teachings. Are my actions consistent with the truths that I’ve learned from the Gospels? Am I giving a proper share of my wealth and time back to God? Am I willing to take a stand, even when it might cause division within my crowd?

Prayer: Lord, help me to search for the truth and feel the conviction to do what You expect of me. Help me to see those displaced by my lifestyle through Your eyes and give me courage to reach out.

Sunday March 22, 2020
Luke 13:1-21

Dick Kaiser

This scripture has several stories with different points. The first involves telling people that simply because a certain group of people died in a battle or an accident, it did not mean that they were worse sinners than anyone else. Jesus told the people that they should turn away from their own sins. If they did not, he said, you will all die as those others did. He was very specific that sinners would receive punishment.

The second story is of the unfruitful fig tree. The owner of the tree wanted it cut down because it hadn't produced figs in the three years since it was planted. The gardener urged him to wait another year while he watered and fertilized it before ordering it removed. We don't know if the tree had been properly cared for during the three years, but the gardener wanted to give it one more year. The story doesn't say if figs were produced the next year, but it does promote the idea that patience might well be rewarded and the first three years could then be regarded as an investment.

One when Jesus had been teaching in a synagogue, a woman was present who had been sick for 18 years. She was bent over and could not straighten up at all. Jesus saw her and said to her, "Woman, you are free from your sickness." She straightened herself up and praised God. The official of the synagogue criticized Jesus for healing on the Sabbath. Jesus answered by calling his critics hypocrites, saying that they would care for their animals on the Sabbath, so why shouldn't he care for a child of Abraham on the Sabbath?

The last story is about the mustard seed. Jesus said that the kingdom of heaven was like a mustard seed; very small, but would grow into a tree and the birds could make nests in its branches. The point being that a small faith, with proper nurture, can become powerful and life sustaining.

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, we are amazed at your works while you lived among us, and we pray that we might rise above our sinful ways, develop patience and a strong faith the better to serve the purposes of the Kingdom of God. AMEN*

Monday March 23, 2020
Luke 13: 22-35

Mohan A. Raj

A questioner asks Jesus while he is on his way to Jerusalem, "Lord, are only a few people going to be saved?" If we look at the motive of the questioner "saved" means participation in Messiah's kingdom with eternal life with all its power and glory on earth, which was the prevalent Jewish belief at that time.

Jesus answers to the crowd and not to the questioner using door as a metaphor. The door to the kingdom of salvation is narrow but allows admittance to the spiritually fit who have given up worldly ambitions and temptations. The second one is the door that can be shut. Salvation is a gift of God, and he expects us to attain it through hard work, discipline and determination in pursuing entrance through a narrow door that can be shut any time. He also says that the Salvation is available to all in the world and not just to Jews. This is the message of inclusion and entrance is for all peoples of the world that meet the criteria.

"Indeed there are those who *are* last who will be first, and first who will be last." Throughout his ministry, Jesus has been a friend of tax collectors, lowly people, the discarded and sinners and shared fellowship with them signaling that God's love extends to everyone. Attaining salvation requires commitment, humility and discipline.

Prayer: *Dear merciful father, help us to create in us the discipline, humility, discipline in pursuing your goals and not worldly goals. Amen.*

Tuesday March 24, 2020

Luke 14:1-24

Katherine Turner

I do love the book of Luke – the only gospel written by a Gentile, and a well-recorded history of Jesus' life and teachings. In this chapter Luke shows great interest in people, and how their lives are affected by Jesus. As a physician, he is sensitive to the physical and even emotional needs of people.—and he exhorts us to be the same.

In verses 1 through 6 Jesus, our teacher, defends his choice to heal on the Sabbath, and no one could refute his common-sense reason for doing so. In 7-10 he provides us with for a biblical basis for being modest in social gatherings. This really speaks to me, and perhaps to any of you who love a party, telling us we don't have to be the "life of the party," and should not seek a "favored place at the table," i.e. seek to be noticed as special to the host and certain honored guests. Whatever the area of human activity may be, Jesus urges us to let others seek the "first place" (often while stepping on other people as they do so). God knows how to exalt the humble and place them where it suits Him.

The next verses (12-15) build on the statement by one of the guests; "Happy are those who eat at the banquet in the Kingdom of God." Perhaps he did not know that in order to participate in the eternal feast it was necessary to answer God's call to gather in his community, and to build a more loving world. In the parable of the host who invited close friends to his feast (16-24) only to find them declining the invitation in order to check on a new parcel of land, or a recent purchase of oxen, the host told his servant to go into the streets and bring in "the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame! Go out to the highways and country lanes and force people to come in, to make sure my house is full."

We are given reasons why those who were invited did not respond to the call of the Lord, when he summoned them to build a better world along with him. They were good, practical reasons – but they reflect how much we humans are held captive by the mortal world, often at the expense of our spiritual life. In the parable, God relies on the poor and the marginalized to help maintain the passion and pursuit of peace and justice in the world.—and, hopefully, to awaken the consciences of us "good" people who are too comfortable.

Prayer: *Lord God help me to show compassion for the hurting and the lost, as Jesus did. He is not interested in status, race, gender or sexual orientation. Although I cannot be completely like Jesus, by my acts of love I may be able to point others to the Spirit of Jesus, which lives in all of us.*

Wednesday March 25, 2020

Luke 14: 25-35

Judy Hart

In this passage, Jesus tells the crowds who were with him that to be his disciple, that they must love him. Love that is more than surface level, a true and deep love is needed. Then the passage continues to say that his followers should calculate what it would take to reach the goal so that at the end of the journey his followers can be still his disciples. Jesus continues that his followers must be willing to give up everything.

I interpret the ten verses as saying that if you have a goal, then carefully review the various aspects. The scripture says just pouring a foundation (without a building) is missing the overall objective; we all want the roof as well as the floor. Sometimes one's path may lead to new ways (maybe those are God moments!). The new path may give insight or possibilities to be inspired or inspire others while reaching the end goal from a different angle. Ideally having the goal be achievable is wise with a way to finish the task.

Verses 34-25 say, "If salt loses flavor, what is the value?"

Perhaps a way to interpret this is if you do one hundred things and can't finish any of them fully or with love, then perhaps it would be good do just one thing very well so that the salt (your efforts) can add flavor to the world. Perhaps this is the calculation that Jesus is referring to with the building analogy?

Prayer: *As we head towards Easter 2020, wishing you health, answered prayers, harmony and happiness as you reach out in love to make the world a better place using your gifts and talents. Blessings from Judy Hart, Kevin Aitken and Brandon Aitken.*

Thursday March 26, 2020

Luke 15: 1-32

Sneha Krishnamurthy

In Luke 15: 1-32 Luke narrates three parables. The parable of the lost sheep, the parable of the lost coin and the parable of the prodigal son. It is the same theme that runs through all the three parables in which Jesus uses stories and examples to explain to the Pharisees and the Scribes why he receives and eats with sinners. When he eats with the sinners, Jesus is setting an example for us to be accepting of others. He is showing us that we need to be more inclusive of people who are trying to embrace Jesus and make good choices in their lives. He is teaching us to let go of past mistakes and take into consideration the efforts people make to better themselves.

These parables tell us how equally important each and every single one of us is in the eyes of God. Even if we may sometimes feel left out by the people around us or even unloved and unimportant. These parables stir in us a deep sense of hope. Unconditional love rings through the parables.

Jesus tells us in these parables that divine help is always available to us. All we have to do is be able to identify our sins and repent for them. The moment we acknowledge our mistakes, God welcomes us with open arms much like the father of the prodigal son. When Jesus says in Luke 15:7- "I tell you that there is more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine respectable people who do not need to repent." He is telling us that he knows how hard it is to return from a dark place and be brave enough to seek help so he understands and values our efforts to change our ways. It fills the Lord with joy when we choose him over the dark. He reiterates how happy all of heaven will be when a sinner repents in all three parables.

In the Parable of the lost sheep and the parable of the lost coin both show that even though the shepherd had a hundred sheep, one of them going missing bothered the shepherd deeply and he did not rest till he found that sheep and brought him home. In the lady with ten coins, when she lost one, she worked so hard by sweeping and rested only when she found the coin. This shows us that even though we may feel like just a drop is the vast sea of souls, Jesus is our keeper and we are each important to our maker. He shows us with these words that he will not rest till he finds us and guides us back towards the light.

The parable the prodigal son most resonates with me. I was much like that son. I have always struggled with my faith and have wandered away a few times, but Jesus has always found me each of those times that I have strayed and brought me home into the light. My life is a testimony of the truth of these parables.

Tuesday March 27, 2020

Luke 16: 1-18

Judy Hart

This passage concerns managing the things of this world. A summary can be found in verse 10, "Whoever is faithful in small matters will be faithful in large ones; whoever is dishonest in small matters will be dishonest in large ones."

The passage starts with an analogy of a manager who was managing property for the owner. Jesus states that owner was told that his manager was wasting money, so he requested an accounting of assets. The manager was shrewd and realized that after providing an accounting his job would be gone. Since the manager was too weak for manual labor and didn't want to beg; he chose to alter the books and the amount owed to the owner from those in the community in hopes to be welcomed by these people when his position was terminated. The manager reduced the debt owed in his accounting by 50% to all the people in debt to his master (the owner). If one can't handle the small things, then certainly they will be dishonest with larger responsibilities.

Jesus states in verse 11, "If, then, you have not been faithful in handling worldly wealth, how can you be trusted with true wealth? And if you have not been faithful with what belongs to someone else, who will give you what belongs to you?"

The Pharisees who heard this chuckled. Then Jesus said to them in verse 15, "You are the ones who make yourselves look right in other people's sight, but God knows your hearts".

Prayer: *May we all be honest to ourselves and God in this world with whatever we are asked to manage on this earth. May your honesty bring blessings. Happy Easter from The Aitken family.*

Saturday March 28, 2002

Luke 16:19-31

Gretchen Ludwig

The story of Lazarus and the rich man is sobering, because I personify the rich man rather than the poor beggar. While I don't want to believe in hell, here Jesus is telling us that it exists. Over and over in the Gospel of Luke, Jesus tells us:

Luke 6:24-25

But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation.

But woe to you who are filled now, for you will be hungry.

Woe to you who laugh now, for you will grieve and weep.

Luke 11:42

Woe to you Pharisees! You pay tithes of mint and of rue and of every garden herb, but you pay no attention to judgement and to love for God. These you should have done without overlooking the others.

Luke 16:15

What people value is highly detestable in God's sight.

Luke is not subtle about this, and our Protestant vision of heaven, and life without wretched consequences by a gracious God, is challenged. Our economic system of glorifying accumulation of riches on earth, is clearly condemned. And it's not just a first century prophet telling us. He is going waaaay back, citing Moses and Abraham. Abraham, in heaven, is telling the rich man, "You already had your day." Jesus tells the Pharisees, "You tithe to God, but that's not enough." Abraham says, "YOU WERE WARNED." Woe, indeed.

So, what to do? Do we gnash our teeth and tear our hair? A palm reading Preschool teacher, who doesn't really know me looked at my palm and said, "You tend to carry around too much guilt." Touché. Get me a hair shirt. My struggle with this Gospel really began as a child. In Sunday School we were learning about what Jesus said of rich people, but my Dad's boss, the owner of the company, was very well-to-do, and a practicing Methodist too! My mother told me there were good rich people and told me of the various organizations the man supported, scholarships he sponsored, children he fostered overseas, etc. He was not ostentatious about it. My Mom just knew about it because he worked with my father for 40+ years. Is there a metric to know if a rich person has done enough to get into heaven, Jesus? Let me measure that camel and needle.

Wait. This is all about me. An individual's hopeless struggle for moral perfection. Jesus never told us to try to be perfect. Jesus said to love God and

love our neighbors. Love God. Be with God. Feel God. Talk to God. Love each other. Love the poor, the "different", the sick. The actions inevitably will follow. Collectively, connectedly, God will move through all of us and use us for God's divine purpose. We are all one body.

Prayer: *Precious Creator, gracious God, I know it's not all about me. It's about you. And about us. And about love. Help me ignore my quantitative brain. Lead me to do what you need me to do, and give to whom you want me to give without wondering, "Am I doing enough?" "Have I delayed too long?", "Is this where you want me?" There is no "I" in Love. Amen*

Sunday March 29, 2020

Luke 17: 1-19

Tim Lycurgus

In this passage, we read of Jesus talking to his disciples about faith and forgiveness. He notes that everyone will stumble at times in the eyes of God but also stresses the importance of not causing others to stumble. We should not be the vehicle through which others sin. He then proceeds to teach that when others sin against us, we need to forgive them, always. This holds true regardless of the nature of the offense or how many times it has occurred, even if they sin against us seven times in the same day. This may seem hard at first. Maybe even impossible. How are we to forgive someone who keeps hurting us the same way over and over again? I know I probably wouldn't have forgiven even the first offense of the day by the time of the second (much less the third and fourth and so on), and Jesus tells us to go far beyond that. But it all comes down to perspective. We as humans are flawed and as much as we might strive not to, we sin ourselves time and time again. Nevertheless, God forgives us each and every time that we do. So as a result, while we might stumble, we should try to emulate God and forgive others who sin against ourselves just like God does for us.

Jesus then heals ten men of leprosy through the local rabbis. Only one of the ten men, the Samaritan, returned to Jesus to thank him for this act of healing. Jesus asks where the other nine are, noting that only the foreigner, the outsider in society, came back to give praise. This both foreshadows how Christianity would spread throughout the world and also teaches us a lesson that still rings true in the 21st Century. Christianity originally gained followers among the downtrodden, among gentiles and non-believers. Jesus was not particular about who followed him, just that they followed him and that is how the word spread in the early church. For today, this story reminds us that our race or nationality doesn't change how God views us or allow us to be closer to God. Rather, anyone can please God, regardless of whatever man-made constructs might separate us from one another.

Prayer: Dear God, as we travel through this season of Lent, help us forgive those who sin against us, just as you forgive us when we stumble ourselves. Remind us that you love all your children, regardless of race or nationality. Amen.

Monday March 30, 2020

Luke 17:20-37

Joy Brawn

Greetings in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ!

As I read the passage assigned, I got stuck on the first verse, verse 20.

Although Jesus explicitly says people won't say, 'here it is,' or 'there it is,' that is exactly what I am going to do here. I do see the Kingdom of God around me – it is in our midst. For me it is the towering redwoods, or the crash of the waves against the rocky shore. It is the tiniest flower that most would pass by as a weed. It is the cry of a newborn baby and the twinkling in elderly eyes. It is laughter. It is love shown by each and every one of us to our loved ones, to our Good Sam Family and to strangers in our midst. I'm proud of the work our church does supporting those in recovery during Adopt-a-miracle or serving the homeless at the shelter or in our own building.

Although I can see it, I have a strong sense that there is work to be done to build God's Kingdom here.

There are people in our community who feel ostracized by "the church" and/or by "our church."

Perhaps they identify as LGBTQ, are homeless, are depressed, lonely, or hurting physically or spiritually. Perhaps they grew up in this church and no longer feel as if they are welcome or belong. Perhaps they are youth or young adults who do not feel as if they fit, belong and have value or respect.

Today was Scout Sunday and John preached a sermon from the Growing Young book on Empathizing with today's young people (age 15 – 29). Afterwards, I began comparing our current church structure and that of a boy scout troop. In boy scouts, it is often the 15 and 16 year-olds who are patrol leaders leading others aged anywhere from 11 to 17, and the senior patrol leader runs the troop meetings – not the adult scout master. Of course, there are guidelines and adult leaders provide oversight and guidance, but the young people are respected, are given real responsibility, and rise to the occasion.

How can we as a church let our young people know they are respected and valued? How can we involve them in meaningful conversation? How can we grow to understand their challenges and appreciate their gifts?

Next, I think of our planet. The dramatic spike in CO2 levels in the atmosphere is causing CO2 levels in our oceans to rise, causing the water and air temperature to rise. As a result, the ice caps are melting at an alarming rate raising the ocean level and putting millions of people at risk from life threatening floods (the Maldives and Louisiana come to mind). Increasing evaporation rate over the oceans is causing "100 year storms" each year creating larger and more frequent

hurricanes. Something's got to give. Although God 'gave us dominion over the earth,' I believe the intent of that passage was to ensure that we cared for the earth, not abused that power. We have a responsibility to care for and build God's Kingdom here.

I am reminded of the song by Rend Collective, [Build Your Kingdom Here](#).

We seek your Kingdom first
We hunger and we thirst

Refuse to waste our lives

For You're our joy and prize
To see the captive hearts released
The hurt, the sick, the poor at peace
We lay down our lives for Heaven's cause

We are Your church
And we pray revive this earth
Build Your kingdom here
Let the darkness fear
Show Your mighty hand
Heal our streets and land
Set Your church on fire
Win this nation back
Change the atmosphere
Build Your kingdom here,
we pray

This verse and chorus are my prayer for Good Sam. Will you join me in working to build God's Kingdom here?

Tuesday March 31, 2020

Luke 18:1-14

Roxanne Leary

The first parable is about a judge who wasn't afraid of God or man and a widow with a just cause who wouldn't go away. The judge decided to act on the widow's behalf not because he thought it was the right thing to do, but because she was bothering him. I feel that the judge was given a nudge by the Holy Spirit to help the widow, and the judge passed it off as a way to get rid of an annoyance. I think the Holy Spirit nudges me to do things that I wouldn't usually do. There have been too many times when I have volunteered to do something I thought I had decided not to do, for me to not believe in the Holy Spirit.

The second parable is about a Pharisee and publican who came to the temple to pray. The Pharisee told God about all the righteous acts he did during the week (something God already knew), and the publican acknowledged that he was a sinner and asked for mercy. I feel that the Pharisee was boasting about his righteousness, and the publican was accepting that he was not perfect, but doing his best. God knows all about all of us, and loves us faults and all. As one child put it, "God doesn't make junk."

Jesus said "Suffer the children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of Heaven. Verily I say unto you, whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child shall in no wise enter therein." Mine is a childlike faith, and for a long time, I thought I should develop a more sophisticated faith. I no longer strive for a more sophisticated faith. I believe and that is enough. I didn't have a religious background as a child; my parents didn't attend church services or read the bible to me. As a child, I learned about the bible stories from an illustrated bible stories in the dentist's office. Later, as a teenager, my best friend invited me to attend her church. I went because that was where she was. As an adult, I took a class called "Finding Jesus", and I did develop a relationship with Jesus. I ask Jesus for help with human issues and I pray to God for guidance. I feel that I was always meant to develop a relationship with God.

The last story is about the blind man who asked Jesus to restore his sight, and Jesus said "Receive thy sight: thy faith hath saved thee." There are many stories about Jesus and those who approached him asking for healing, and Jesus said they were healed by their faith. I think God hears all our prayers, I find the prayers that ask for guidance work the best.

Prayer: Blessed Lord, help us to understand the lessons and the guidance provided to us in the parables and stories of Jesus, that we might learn to be effective members of thy kingdom.

Wednesday April 1, 2020

Luke 18:15-34

Dollie Forney

Yesterday I surrendered my California Driver's License for a new Hawaii Driver's License. I put off doing this because not long ago I went through the process of converting my California License to a California REAL ID Driver's License. According to the State of Hawaii, there cannot be an identification card for a California Dollie AND a Hawaii Dollie. The California Dollie had to go. So again, with vital documents in hand, I provided evidence I was born, I have a name, I changed that name once, now I have another name, I live at an address in Hawaii, I receive mail at this address, I am an American Citizen and I hold a valid driver's license. I had to surrender my hard-earned California REAL ID for a temporary Hawaii Star ID. I have to trust my new REAL ID will arrive in the mail. Am not comfortable with this level of surrender and trust. With this experience in mind, I reflect on today's scripture message.

In verses 18-30, a rich ruler seeks assurance that he is following the recipe that leads to eternal life. As rulers go, he was probably fair and just. He points out that his credentials must qualify him to be on the short list to inherit eternal life. But not so fast, Jesus warns, he must do one more thing: he must sell everything he owns and give all the money to the poor. That's right. He must live a life without a safety net. He must exchange that worldly REAL ID for a Kingdom of God Gold Star REAL ID. He can't hold both. But that's not all! He must follow Jesus who engages in this crazy bohemian, wandering, homeless lifestyle that will lead to, literally, only God knows where. That was a real deal breaker for the ruler. So, who can be saved, the crowd wonders? According to Jesus, only those willing to leave it all behind. Every morsel and comfort. BUT if you trust God, you will be rewarded richly. The kingdom belongs to those who are willing to be rejected, cast out and forfeit their Worldly REAL ID, even to the point of death in order to receive God's promise of eternal life. In other words, the Worldly you has to go.

Jesus tells us those who are closest to the Kingdom of God possess nothing, have no protection or insurance, depend on others, are most marginalized, most vulnerable, most bereaved, most despised. But the world tells us to inherit our place we are to strive to be strong, rich, independent, feared, attractive, revered and possess both protection and insurance. You can't have it God's way and the world's way. How frustrating and confusing. But don't despair. We arrived on this planet with nothing. During our lifetime, the only REAL thing we possess is the love we receive through God's grace. This takes the form of forgiveness, nurture, wisdom, care, kindness and generosity. Hopefully, we freely give and receive this grace. And in the end, we must let it all go. There is no other way. No shortcut. No fast pass. No privilege. The best we can do is lead a life that aligns with the truths we learn from Jesus and seek God's will for us in this moment...and then in the next moment...and then in the next.

Have I embraced this truth as I find it in Scripture? Come on. I could barely give up my California ID. But also buried within these lessons of Jesus, in the very verses that make us feel so overwhelmed, we find the most important truth that transcends all our failings as well as the shortcoming of the world: "Jesus replied, 'What is impossible with man is possible with God.'" (18:27)

All things are possible. Your REAL ID awaits.

Prayer: Creator God, Thank you for your Grace. Help me to remember it is my weakness that glorifies your strength. May I identify with you and your grace closely and live a life that will reflect the promise you hold for me is available to everyone. In your time, I pray that I gracefully release this life to claim my life in your glory. Amen

Thursday April 2, 2020

Luke 19: 1-27

Wang Xi

Zacchaeus blessed

Zacchaeus was a chief tax collector in Jericho. He was rich, why would he be blessed?

Tax collectors were notorious. They overestimated people's property and income, took improper money, and everyone hated them. At the same time, Zacchaeus' wealth did not please him, and could not satisfy his hope for eternal life.

The scripture said he "ran ahead (19: 4), came down (19: 5), and rushed down, vividly expressing Zacchaeus' eagerness to see and obey the Lord's will. Zacchaeus responded quickly to the Lord's will and was trying to please the Lord. This is one of the reasons for his blessing.

Zacchaeus said to the Lord, "Lord, I will give half of what I have to the poor, and if I have cheated anyone, I will pay him back four times." He called Jesus Lord: he acknowledged Jesus as his Savior and promised to obey Him in the future. Justification by faith, because of his strong faith, this has allowed him to be blessed. Zacchaeus was a son of Abraham, as Abraham did he showed his faith and the fruits of that faith. He believed that God's promises would be fulfilled. With firm faith, listen to the Lord and follow God's footsteps, and you will be blessed. Zacchaeus was not bonded by his love of property. The official in Luke 18 cannot earn eternal life because he wouldn't sell everything he has to give to the poor and accumulate treasure in heaven, so he goes away in sorrow.

Jesus Christ said, "How difficult is it for rich people to enter the kingdom of God? It is easier for a camel to cross through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God." Zacchaeus is a rich man, but he changed his heart away from the love of money. He is not controlled by his love of things, so he could cleanse his past sins. The most important thing is God's salvation. What cannot be done by man, can only be done by God. God is at every step of our lives, at every little stop of our lives, always holding our hands.

God loves boundlessly, and all glory belongs to God. Amen

Prayer: Blessed Lord, help us to be faithful to you and considerate of those around us that we might be worthy in thy sight. Amen

Friday April 3, 2020

Luke 19:1-10

Sukkyu Lee

This story makes me smile with Zacchaeus's action bringing humor and joy. In the last setting of Jesus' pilgrimages to Jerusalem, His Encounter with Zacchaeus brings the audiences and readers in Luke's Gospel some of the thoughts about how to be prepared as a gospel spreader and also the receiver of the Gospel.

In the passage, Luke describes Zacchaeus as a chief tax collector and a short figure. These two characteristics of Zacchaeus have impeded his access to Jesus. These obstacles, however, bring him a stronger desire to see Jesus. His running forward in front of the crowd and climbing up the sycamore express his mindset of how much he wanted to see Jesus. Furthermore, he is a very wealthy chief tax collector. The two elements cause the residents in Jericho to hate and curse him; He took advantage of his job to make extra money for himself. Above the beyond Zacchaeus was stuck in, he was ready to see Jesus. His desire to encounter Jesus is much stronger than the hindrances that are holding him back from knowing the truth of salvation.

On the other hand, Jesus called Zacchaeus to come down from the tree and see Him. Jesus called his name, Zacchaeus. When someone calls my name in a worship setting, it is an amazing incident for me as a person in a new setting where I don't know everyone. When a fellow worshiper calls my name, whether or not I have my name tag on, it always makes me glad. As a follower of Jesus and a gospel spreader, this passage challenges me to be prepared and ready to encounter an opportunity to witness to someone by calling his/her name in the fellowship hall or anywhere else.

Finally, in verse 8 Zacchaeus states that "I give half of my possessions to the poor", which notes that he was not a slave of money even if his job as the tax collector was lucrative. And he confesses that if he cheated anyone out of anything, then he will pay them back four times the original amount. These verses let the audience know about how Zacchaeus lived his life and how he wants to live after encountering Jesus.

To wrap up, this hour before the Lord, I would reflect on how I have been prepared and how I am ready listen to Jesus' gospel and to spread it. What would I expect from myself if I were to live a life in mission?

Prayer: Lord, Help me seek you with all my heart. Lead me into your way, your promises and your salvation. I pray in Christ's name.

Saturday April 4, 2020

Luke 20: 1-26

Wang Xi

Verse 25: Jesus said, said to them, “Then give back to Caesar what is Caesar’s, and to God what is God’s.”

I remember more than 20 years ago, when I arrived the United States from China and talked with my mother for the first time, my mother told me from Tianjin a surprise, "Our family is a Christian family. Now you are safely in America, you are free to practice your own faith. So, your first task is to find a Christian Church and learn about God.” Through God’s guidance and grace, I found my Christian faith. I have the light inside me, and I am no longer in the dark. It is God's grace that I came to America, worked for 12 years and retired here. I look at the banknotes of the American dollar with the portraits of wise leaders of the United States, and the phrase "In God We Trust" shocked me. I understood this as we trust God, this money also belongs to God. God gave us everything, and God only requires one-tenth of our income in offering. God's things belong to God.

Verse 18: Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces; anyone on whom it falls will be crushed.”

In the second year of my retirement, God made me experience His grace even more. I had kidney cancer, but in God’s grace I did not experience fear but joy. God sent the best doctor to treat me, gave me the best treatment plan. Three days after my operation, in the hospital room, I saw three cherubim who sent the good news, telling me "Wang Xi, you will have a good Kidney, you will have a healthy body. "After 8 days in the hospital, I was only charged \$ 120. Until today, God has been guarding me, doctors tell me that the "metastasized cancer cells" have been inactive for the past 7 years. Thank God. God made a covenant with people, placed the rainbow in heaven, and no longer used the great flood to destroy humanity. We are to do exactly God’s will. Never let God be sad and do things against God's will. Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken.

Prayer: *Lord we thank you for the many blessings we have had in our lives. Help us to remember them with gratitude.*

Sunday April 5, 2020

Luke 20:27-47

Carl Schulenburg

In the midst of Luke’s recounting Jesus’ eloquent response to challenges directed to him by Sadducees, he pauses to deliver a warning to his disciples about the character of the Teachers of the Law – watch out, beware.

But as Luke describes, Jesus said this “while all the people were listening”. After I’ve read this full set of verse in Luke perhaps 10 times or so, I find that I get caught on this particular wording at the start of verse 45. Listening to our Lord... how basic, how fundamental. Yet, do I listen?

If I reflect on the nature of my prayers I realize just how little time I spend listening to my Lord. A prayer is a conversation, a two-way communication yet I’ve been using it as a one way push of thanksgiving and requests for healing and peace along with a litany of other things all of which I believe are important.

I don’t think that God will necessarily speak to us when we feel it convenient; “Okay God, I’m sitting here quietly, speak to me now.” I realize that He can speak to us at any time, at any place – but am I aware? Do I make myself available when that does happen?

I ask you to join me during Lent to count your blessings and give extra effort in tuning in and listening with an open heart to what our Lord is saying and asking of you. Make your prayers a two-way conversation even if he chooses to respond at an unexpected time. He will shower you with blessings!

Prayer: May God keep our minds, ears and hearts open to His wishes for us, and may He bless you and keep you in your journey.

Monday April 6, 2020
Luke 21:1-38
Barbara Christmann

This chapter is full chock-full of content, covering the story of the poor widow giving virtually everything she had, prophecies relating to the destruction of the temple, the future of Jerusalem, the world's end times, and our own fate and behavior throughout.

I am particularly drawn to the verses in which Jesus reminds us how God will take care of us throughout these calamities, partially summarized here: *“There will be signs in sun and moon and stars, and on the earth dismay among nations, in perplexity at the roaring of the sea and the waves, men fainting from fear and the expectation of the things which are coming upon the world; for the powers of the heaven will be shaken.”* (Luke 21:25-26)

Verse 14 of this chapter reminds us to depend on God for ALL of our trials, including those in our daily lives. God will equip us, fill us with the Holy Spirit in times of need, and literally speak on our behalf, giving us words and truth that no one can deny or refute. There is freedom in the guidance of verse 14-15, *“But make up your mind not to worry beforehand how you will defend yourselves, for I will give you words and wisdom that none of your adversaries will be able to resist or contradict.”*

Think about a moment when you were at a loss for words, and magically the right phrase came out of your mouth. Try to remember a time when you were aching to verbally lash out, but somehow, by the Grace of God there was a magical and momentary intervention, and you were spared from speaking your own harsh words that would have caused harm. Also consider when you felt persecuted or accused wrongly. A contentious break from business or relationship, a wrongful traffic ticket, someone's false gossip or assumption about you. Remember how natural it is to build a defense to prove your own innocence or justify a situation? If we can truly have faith in these two verses, we can be set free from lingering in defensive behavior. We can also trust that God will give us the perfect words for each and every situation, working on our behalf to redeem and restore us onto His course, for His purpose.

The key to maintaining Faith and being the recipient of Grace through tough moments, is through patience and persistence with oneself and your Christian practice. John Wesley's notes on Luke 21:19 couldn't express it more clearly [19] *In your patience possess ye your souls—* “Be calm and serene, masters of yourselves, and superior to all irrational and disquieting passions. By keeping the government of your spirits, you will both avoid much misery, and guard the better against all dangers”.

Let's PRAY:

Loving God, with each new day, guide us to persistently trust in you and manage our own rebellious spirits. Let us remember that our carnal nature and minds are a broad, turbulent river; but YOU, are the strong riverbank, holding us lovingly on course. Help us surrender to present time, and remain flexible to Your course corrections. May we notice, more and more, how Your grace moves in and around us and the world, thereby becoming encouraged and steady in our Faith, even in perilous or fearful times. We are grateful for your Word, which reminds us that we are participants in the fulfillment of Your promise; and with faithful practice and loving fellowship, we can anticipate your intervention to truly secure the safety of our souls.

Tuesday April 7, 2020
Luke 22:1-38
Joyce and Mark Fisher

This scripture tells the story of the Last Supper. It actually has many parts: Preparing for Passover; Judas' betrayal; Disciples arguing over their greatness; Jesus predicting Peter's denial; and Jesus preparing the disciples for what is to come. Jesus is still teaching, still patient, still acknowledging his fate all while he actually just wants to celebrate Passover with his disciples and friends.

Do you remember Jesus Christ Superstar? The song *The Last Supper* is a catchy tune. The disciples blissfully sing:

*Always hoped that I'd be an apostle.
Knew that I would make it if I tried.
Then when we retire, we can write the Gospels,
So they'll still talk about us when we've died.*

But an intense argument between Judas and Jesus is interspersed between that refrain. The rock opera portrays Jesus as a man wrestling with feelings of failure and doubt. Yet Jesus continues to try to redirect the disciples and help them focus as he tries to prepare them for what will come next.

We are blessed that Jesus continues to be patient with us today. After so many lessons and missed opportunities on our part, Jesus patiently guides us to try again and again as we grow and understand his word. Jesus knew that the disciples would continue as best they could following his instructions, teaching, and guidance. We must pray that we can also do the best we can, living the best life we can, following the truths of our faith as Jesus patiently guides us.

Prayer: Blessed Lord, we thank you for the example of your son Jesus and His willingness to persevere in His mission despite the fears and doubts which beset Him. In Jesus name, Amen.

Wednesday April 8, 2020

Luke 22:39-46

Kim Donaldson

In times of crisis, do you stay cool, get hot, panic or dig in? Where do you go to be alone?

What strikes you about Jesus' prayer? In saying, "your will be done," is Jesus:

Helpless submitting to fate? Admitting defeat before a power that beat him? Bitterly resigning himself to the inevitable? Or quietly trusting in God's love?

The Mount of Olives: While in Jerusalem, Jesus spent the nights on this mountain located just outside the eastern wall of Jerusalem (Luke 21:37)

Mark 14:32 says, He went to Gethsemane which was an olive orchard in an estate (perhaps owned by someone sympathetic to Him?)

22:40 Jesus, asked the disciples to pray that they would not fall into temptation because He knew that he would soon be leaving them. Jesus, also knew that they would need extra strength to face the temptation ahead; temptation to run away or to deny their relationship with Him. They were about to see Jesus die. Would they still believe and think He was the Messiah?

22:42 Father. This intimate title for God was not used by the Jews in prayer in the first century. It distinguishes the nature of the relationship Jesus enjoyed with God. **This cup** The Old Testament often pictured a person's destiny as related to the nature of the "cup" from which God gave the person to drink. For those who trust Him, it was seen as a cup of blessing (Ps 16:5; 23:5), but opponents would be forced to drink a cup full of wrath (Isa 51:17; Lam 4:21; Hab 2:16). It is this "cup" that Jesus will drink in the place of those who deserved it. The "cup" meant the terrible agony He knew He would endure. (The horror of the crucifixion but, even worse the separation from God that He would have to experience in order to die for the world's sins.

22:43 Then an Angel appeared to Him from heaven, strengthening Him.

During Jesus' most difficult hour, when He had to make the final decision to accept His Father's will and march to the cross, God sent Him angelic help to encourage Him. **He will always give us just what we need.**

22:44 Only Luke tells us that Jesus' sweat resembled drops of blood. Jesus was in extreme agony, but He did not give up or give in. He went ahead with the mission for which He had come.

"Yet not my will, but yours be done." The wrestling in prayer is resolved in Jesus' trusting the Father in spite of the fear he felt about what He knew was coming soon.

Prayer: *Father God, thank you for dying for us and for the pain and agony you endured for the forgiveness of our sins. Thank you for your sacrifice. In Jesus name. Amen.*

Thursday April 9, 2020

Luke 23:1-56

Sharon Zhou

In verse 34, Jesus said, "Father! Forgive them, for they do not know what they do"(referring to his crucifixion) Why is the prayer by our Savior so extraordinary at this moment?

When I read this passage, I was very touched. How should we respond when others treat us wrong? We can take Jesus as an example and choose to forgive those who mistreated us. In our lives, we will inevitably encounter mistreatment by people or circumstances. Now I have learned to be calm and forgive. After I divorced a long time ago, I never let go. I felt that my ex-husband owed me and our children an apology. Even in my dream I felt that he "owed" us a

"Sorry", so I was very unhappy. I can't let it go. At that time, I prayed and asked the Lord to grant me strength to forgive people. In the end, God guided me to choose forgiveness.

Now my son and I are living better and better lives. And I deeply understand that forgiveness is the same as a second chance: saying goodbye to the bad and keeping good memories

So, forgiveness is a choice, choosing joy and happiness.

Forgiveness is a type of forgetting, forgetting troubles and sorrows.

Forgiveness is a kind of letting go, letting go of burdens and labor.

No more tangling, no more complaining. Learn to forgive and say goodbye to troubles.

Learn to forgive, because everything is God's best plan!

Learn to forgive, return to a quiet heart, and become a joyful person.

When we are all busy, don't forget to pray. When you are upset, don't forget to read the Bible. When things go well, don't forget to be grateful. When you are angry with others, don't forget to confess your sins and use Jesus as an example to learn to forgive and forgive others forever.

Prayer: *Blessed Lord, help us to relate to others as Jesus did, with love, kindness, and forgiveness, for these are blessings which, when we give we get the same in return. Help us to use them as the foundation of our relationships with others.*

Friday April 10, 2020 (Good Friday)

Luke 24:1-12 He is not here; He has risen!

Greg and Angie Bush

5 In their fright the women bowed down with their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, “Why do you look for the living among the dead? **6** He is not here; he has risen!”

Seven words. This passage can be summed up in seven words. We can't offer up an explanation of exactly what happened, when it happened, and especially not how it happened. We can, however, sum up this passage in seven short words. He is not here; He has risen!

This is the source of our hope. Hope that death does not get the final word. Hope that though evil may win a round, it will not win the battle. Hope that even though things looked bleak on Saturday, Sunday will dawn with a Risen Christ leading us into a New Creation.

We live our lives on Saturday. In the already/not yet. Christ has risen, but it's hard to see that in our day-to-day lives. There is so much hurt in the world--much of it we humans collectively inflict upon ourselves--that it seems inevitable that evil is going to win. But the message of Easter is in these seven words: He is not here; He has risen! This gives us hope that God can take this mess of a world we live in and make something beautiful out of it.

But God does not simply do this by Himself--we are invited into the process of making something better in the here and now. We ought not sit idly on the sidelines waiting for God to fix everything; we should join the Creator in remaking this world to be a little more like the Kingdom of Heaven, wherever we are.

Having moved to Prague six weeks ago, we're seeing the Kingdom from a different perspective. But even here, especially here, God invites us to bring the light of Christ to our neighborhood, to our kids' school, to my (Greg's) work, and to all of my (Angie's) interactions with both locals and expats. While we don't see our Good Sam family weekly any more, know that we are still part of Christ's body, carrying on the work of the Kingdom in our small way.

Kingdom work is not easy, it's not always fun, and only sometimes can we see the progress being made. But in our experience, it's worth it, even in the struggle. And some day, when we hear, “Well done, good and faithful servant,” it will all be clear. He is not here; He has risen!

Prayer: Lord, bless our efforts to spread your word and give us the wisdom to witness properly to others wherever we may be. Thank you for the gift of your Son and for His sacrifice for us. Amen

Saturday April 11, 2020

Luke 24:13-36

Cangang Zhao

On that same day, two disciples were traveling to a village called Xilin village, my home town, my birthplace, about 10 kilometers away from Tai'an City. They were talking to each other about the virus and Pneumonia that had happened in Wuhan. While they were discussing these things, Jesus himself arrived and joined them on their journey. They were prevented from recognizing him. He said to them, "What are you talking about as you walk along?" They stopped; their faces downcast. One person named Canaxue Zhao answered: "You do not know about the news of corona virus?" Jesus asked, "What's the matter?" They said, "It was the news of pneumonia in Wuhan, and many villages and cities were sealed. During this period, people in our village began to worry. The Spring Festival was originally a very lively festival, but now no one is going to visit others now. They are all staying in their own homes and not going out. " Then Jesus said to them, ""You foolish people! Your dull minds keep you from believing all that has been taught in the Bible. Didn't Jesus once say that He is the light of the world, and those who follow Him will not walk in the darkness, but will have the light? Follow Jesus, for his testimony is true. Because he knows where he comes from and where he will go. He who believes in Jesus is saved. "

Near the village they went to, Jesus seemed to be moving forward, but they forced him, "It's late, the sun is already settled, please stay with us!" Jesus went in and was staying with them. At the table, Jesus picked up the bread, gave thanks, broke it, and gave it to them. Their eyes were opened, and they recognized him, but he disappeared from their sight. They said to each other, "Weren't our hearts on fire when he spoke to us along the road and when he explained the scriptures for us?"

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, my Lord, show Your power. I know that You are the only true God in the world. Please let us understand the sin of people's pride and false faith in their own power; change our hearts and turn the world towards You. Have mercy, calm down this plague! Only You, our one true God can have such great power to end this illness as soon as possible.

Sunday April 12, 2020

Luke 24:36-53

Pastor Rajiv Pathik

While they were still talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you."

Jesus' disciples were still in shock. It was just few days ago Jesus was murdered on the cross. They were so afraid at the time that like little children they ran away from that place. As they were coming to grips with that reality they heard from other disciples that Jesus had risen again. By hearing this they were more confused. In that complex and confused state now Jesus stands before them. As they are looking at him not knowing how to respond, Jesus offers them peace.

Not only have immediate disciples of Christ gone through the states of fear and confusion. We too have often gone through these emotions in our lives. What we considered so near and dear to us may have vanished. We might witness the sickness and death of our loved ones like Jesus' disciple. And it will be natural for us go through being afraid to being lonely. Like the immediate disciples of Christ, we too will experience him standing with us. We too will experience God's peace. That is his blessing to everyone in the room. For some it might take longer like few disciples who did not trust Jesus immediately even while he is standing in front of them. He took a little more time to prove them by giving his hands and body for them to feel and touch it so that their faith might increase. Notice, Jesus is not upset with his disciples who took little longer to trust him. They needed some more proof of his resurrection power and his new body, because he knows that we all are different from one to another. We have different experiences in the past which have shaped our understanding and world view. Many of us have gone through trauma which requires more proof of goodness around the world. It takes a while to verify kindness and goodness in this world. But Jesus is passionate enough for us to walk with us and give us time so that our faith in his resurrected self will be restored. And when we experience his gift of acceptance of us, He will grant us that peace.

It is my prayer that all who read this will experience: "*The peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus,*" (Philippians 4:7), April 12,2020.