

Wednesday, March 1, 2017

Luke 1:1-38

Joe Austin

The first two stories in Luke, where the angel Gabriel visits Zechariah and Mary, are similar. The parents-to-be were told that their children will do great things for God's people. Wow! Isn't this something all parents basically want – for their children to do something good for the world? Imagine if you had a dream, or vision, or a friend tell you that your children will do something good? How would you react? How would you support them? I know, I know. If you have children you've probably had the thought, "My kids? Are you sure you are talking about the same kids?" The answer is yes!

To me these stories tell me to be an active but humble parent. Not to take the spotlight or the credit for anything the children do, but to do your best to raise them and encourage them along their journey of life. We don't hear how the parents supported John or Jesus, but I'm sure they had it in the back of their minds that God had something special for them. Did they ever tell their children this or mention it at any time? I wonder. Perhaps they prayed for them and asked for God to guide them throughout their lives.

As a parent I have tried to be positive and supportive of my children. Even at times when they haven't made the best decisions, or done things the way I would have, I do my best to maintain hope that they find their niche in life. It may not be a world-changing invention or newsworthy accomplishment, but to see how they do small things with love and joy and help make a difference to those around them is a big deal and reminds me that God is with them. And I give thanks to God for being with them even if they don't acknowledge his presence.

Lord God, I thank you for the children you have given me. I entrust them to you, knowing that you have a plan for them far beyond anything I can imagine. Help me to be supportive, encouraging, patient and loving, and to provide guidance when needed. Amen.

Thursday, March 2, 2017

Luke 1:39-80

Pat Babiasz

Mary's visit to Elizabeth, Mary's Song, and Zacharias's Song are in this passage. All three well known Bible passages. I struggled to find something to take away from them that would speak to me at this time in my life, in this world today. I read several commentaries and finally found Jan Richardson's *Sanctuary of Women: Women's Christmas 2017*. In this passage Jan found "Hope". Both Mary and Elizabeth find sanctuary together realizing God has caused the "impossible" to happen in both their lives. Mary breaks out in song, a cry of hope---The powerful brought down from their thrones! The lowly raised up! The hungry filled with good things! The rich sent away empty! And Mary sings those words as if they have already happened. Courageous hope, a tiny child in her womb and God has transformed the world.

Zacharias lost the ability to speak when he questioned the birth of his son and asked for a sign. He could not speak until his son was born and he confirmed his name as "John". Once he did this he was able to speak and broke out in a song of Praise. Praising God in all times is one way we stay connected to Him.

The message to me is that "God is able to turn the world upside down". He turned the world into one where all things are possible! In this time of great apprehension and great division in our country, I have "hope" that God is still in control and good will prevail. However, we play a part in his plan. We are to envision our world as if even justice, even freedom are already in place and to step out with the belief that the action we take will not only bear fruit but that in taking it, we have already made a difference in the world.

Where does hope live in you?

Blessing, Jan Richardson

*Guardian of the seasons,
keeper of every time,
tune us so to your rhythms
that we may know
the occasion for stillness
and the moment for action.
May we be so prepared
so aware*

*so awakened
in our waiting
that when you prompt us
into motion,
our hands may be your hands
and our purposes
your own.*

Friday, March 3, 2017

Luke 2:1-20

Carolyn Bircher

*Mary did you know that your baby boy will one day walk on water?
Mary did you know that your baby boy will save our sons and daughters?
Did you know that your baby boy has come to make you new?
This child that you've delivered, will soon deliver you
Mary did you know that your baby boy will give sight to a blind man?
Mary did you know that your baby boy will calm a storm with his hand?
Did you know that your baby boy has walked where angels trod?
And when you kiss your little baby, you have kissed the face of God
The blind will see, the deaf will hear and the dead will live again
The lame will leap, the dumb will speak the praises of the lamb
Mary did you know that your baby boy is Lord of all creation?
Mary did you know that your baby boy will one day rule the nations?
Did you know that your baby boy is heaven's perfect Lamb?
This sleeping child you're holding is the great I am*

As the choir was rehearsing this song last December, we got into a discussion about just what Mary knew. Sure, an angel had told her that the child she was carrying was conceived by God, but did she really appreciate the magnitude of that? Did she know how drastically her life would change because of the boy she was raising? Did she know how much He would change the lives of generations of people for thousands of years?

What was Mary pondering after the shepherds visited? The shepherds were pretty joyful, so she likely also felt that joy. I could imagine her feeling both relief and apprehension that God was revealing Jesus' identity by sending angels to announce the birth of the savior. Was she wondering whom He would save, and from what, and at what cost?

Do you feel relieved that you weren't the one burdened with raising the son of God? Or have you envied Mary a little bit, that she was singled out for such a special part to play in God's plan? I've felt both. But if we consider that all people are God's children, then we can rejoice that God has trusted us with a part of His plan each time we encounter another person.

*Dear God,
Help me to see each person as a very special child that you have entrusted into my care. May your light shine through my thoughts, words and actions.*

In Luke 2:34b-35, we read of Simeon's prophesy to Mary: "The child is destined for the rising and falling of many in Israel and to be a sign that will be opposed *so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed--and a sword will pierce your own soul too.*" (NRSV)

Why do inner thoughts need to be revealed?

I have often thought that deep inside us, we have the knowledge that can guide us and give us understanding and peace.

- What are your "inner thoughts?"
- What might be keeping your inner thoughts from being revealed?

"...and a sword will pierce your own soul too."

The International Standard Version (ISV) links the severing of our souls with the revelation of other people's hearts. "Indeed, a sword will pierce your own soul, too, so that the inner thoughts of many people might be revealed." (ISV)

Nevertheless, we are left with a soul in tatters. But is that how the story ends?

Prayer

Jesus, I have seen good times and bad. I, too, have risen and fallen. When I feel my soul is torn, Lord, transform me, and make me whole! And when I am still and sense your peace within me, I praise you. In good times and bad, oh Lord, I praise you. Amen

Sunday, March 5, 2017

Luke 3:1-20

Philip Bohannon and Mimi Underwood

Three Prayers for Scene Three

<http://biblehub.com/niv/luke/3.htm>

The first three chapters of Luke are like the first three scenes of a movie, each of which culminates in *recognition*. The first chapter culminates in Mary, Elizabeth and Zechariah recognizing God's role in Mary and Elizabeth's pregnancies, and in John's birth. The second scene covers Jesus's birth, but culminates with the recognition of Jesus as the Messiah by local prophets Simeon and Annas, and the action cuts to scene 3, bringing us forward to the time in which the main story will take place.

In scene 3, we meet Jesus's cousin John, who in verse 2 was hanging out in the wilderness when the word of God came into him, and is now proclaiming "a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins". This brings us to a mystery of this story - the crowds that gather to hear John. Why, why, do crowds gather in the wilderness? How do people know where John is in the wilderness? What drew them to John and why do they continue to listen as they are being told that they are snakes, chaff for winnowing and dead trees due for the fire? What made them "turn and look," to use Pastor Dale's words -- to traipse out to the wilderness?

Dear God, my life is busy and my attention occupied. If I were quiet, would I hear a voice crying in the wilderness? Help me hear that cry, Lord, and get off of my couch in search of it. Amen.

In response to John's earnest words of warning and the need for repentance, the crowd asks what they must do, and in verses 10-14 we learn for the first of many times that repentance and faith, which come from within, cannot stop there, and "whoever has two coats, must share with anyone who has none, and whoever has food likewise." This command is plain, and repeated enough, but for its simplicity, is surprisingly hard to translate to 2017. How do we practically live a fruitful life, sharing our bounty and supporting those in need?

Dear God, I give to the food bank, and cook once a year at the soup kitchen. When I hear of people in need, I try to write a check. I cannot do this every day or all the time - I have to work or there will be no checks, and my family needs me too. Why do these actions feel hollow, leaving me to feel like I am just "checking the box"? Help me truly turn and see the needs of your people, and find ways to help that are as authentic and real in our modern world as the gift of a coat to a cold individual was two thousand years ago. Amen.

In the remainder of this passage, John turns our attention to Jesus's upcoming entrance on the stage, then promptly lands in prison for criticizing Herod.

Dear God, like John let me also turn my attention to Jesus, fearing not Herod. Amen.

Monday, March 6, 2017

Luke 3:21-4:13

John Brawn

In my 46 years of setting up and running sound systems, I've had many opportunities to make voices come from unexpected places. In fact, I've even been asked to create the voice of God! Don't misunderstand me -- I don't intentionally pretended to be God when talking to other people. But I've used technology to help other people play the part of God more convincingly in theater and in worship.

I've had to give some thought to what God's voice might sound like. I say "might", because I don't recall ever hearing God speak to me using words transmitted by sound from the sky to my ears. I don't actually know what God's direct voice sounds like. Would God's voice sound powerful? Huge and deep? Ethereal? Soft? Friendly? Formal? Direct? Mystical? Would he sound genial like Morgan Freeman in "Bruce Almighty", or inviting and yet intimidating like Val Kilmer in "The Prince of Egypt", or droll like Graham Chapman in "Monte Python and the Holy Grail", or would an authentic God voice sound crabby like George Burns in "Oh God"?

Perhaps you think it seems strange to spend time considering *how* God would sound instead of *what* God would say. We know that in most of our verbal interactions, the tone of voice plays a role just as important as the words uttered in completing the message. Irrespective of the message, there are teacher's voices, drill sergeant's voices, librarian's voices, telemarketer's voices, political commentator's voices, and your best friends' voice -- all different, and all with different abilities to make you interpret and react to the message.

The ability to identify others by their voices is hard wired into us. When I read an e-mail from someone I know, I hear in my head that person's voice as I read her words. That makes that e-mail more personal to me than one I receive from someone I don't know.

This passage in Luke 3 starts with Jesus being baptized and then a voice comes down from heaven telling Jesus that the celestial speaker is his

father, loves him, and is pleased with him. The Bible documents the words, and the direction from which the sound comes, but we're left to imagine the voice.

Could that be why reading God's words feels impersonal to so many people?

Maybe God's voice sounds exactly like your voice! When you express God's love for someone else, perhaps your voice is, in that moment, the voice of God. Maybe God's voice sounds exactly like the person you are talking with! Maybe the Bible is exactly right when it quotes the Lord "For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat." (*Sorry, a different book.*) Maybe God speaks to you through other people.

What I do know is that I feel closer to God when I'm in service to others. And I sometimes feel like I've heard God when people express God's love to me.

PRAYER: *Lord, let me be open to hearing your voice. Help me listen for you as I go about my day. And when it helps, use my voice as your own.*

Tuesday, March 7, 2017

路加福音第四章 Luke 4:14-44

邱相國姐妹 Xiangguo Qiu

我出身在中國的一個基督徒家庭。父親是衛理會中國某教堂的一位牧師。母親是信徒。從小我就聽講了許多有關基督耶穌的故事和他所行的各種神蹟，但是我並沒有搞懂他。

在我生命的長河中（我今年四月就八十歲了）並非過得一帆風順。我曾遇到過多種不同的苦難和家庭分隔多年的艱辛。但這種種的不順、挫折和苦難最終都在上帝的關愛和大能的指引下，一一化解，並得到平安。

記得最讓我難忘的事是：大約在七八年前，我曾害過一場重病。那時我已經年過七十。在我感到十分無助，而又不知所措時，憑信靠主，讓我增強信心，下決心去戰勝病魔。在神的大能引領下，我獲得了相較之下即時並良好的醫治，且康復迅速。真讓人不敢相信，一位老人竟會如此平安地度過病痛，並且連止痛藥都不需要服用。這是何等地神奇啊？怎麼解答呢？啊，答案就在路加福音的第四章中。

我要讚美我的神，耶穌基督。他的神能和無盡的愛無所不在。我要以感恩的心述說主的恩典。願上帝與我們同在，直到永遠。阿們。

Tuesday, March 7, 2017

Luke 4:14-44

Xiangguo Qiu

I came from a Christian family in China. My father was a Methodist pastor in China, and my mother was a Christian believer. As a child, I had heard many bible stories of Jesus Christ, and learned about many miracles performed by Jesus. But I never felt like I truly understood the stories. I did not live a life of smooth sailing in my almost eighty years. Many times I encountered struggles and danger, and long separation from my family members. But the difficulty, challenges and struggles eventually got solved through God's love and mighty power, and I felt peace in spite of the circumstances.

One of my most memorable experiences was when I got gravely ill about seven years ago. By then I was more than seventy years old. I felt very helpless and did not know what to do. I prayed to God and trusted God's plan for my life. I felt my faith increase, and decided to fight my illness. Being led by God's mighty power, I found myself quickly getting good treatment; and quickly healing. What an unbelievable blessing! An old lady like me can face such illness in peace; I did not even need to take any pain medication. How can I interpret such surprising wellness? Ah, the answer is in Luke chapter four.

I will praise my God, my Jesus Christ. His almighty power and his boundless love surrounds me. I will tell of my Lord's blessings with a thankful heart. May God be with us until forever. Amen.

Wednesday, March 8, 2017

Luke 5:1-11

Elizabeth Brawn

Luke 5:1-11 is an iconic passage from the New Testament. Jesus is preaching on the shore of a lake and then goes onto a fisher's boat, rowing out into the water. He tells the professional fishermen, Simon Peter, James and John, that they should cast their nets into the water. After explaining they had not caught anything all day, the fishermen did as Jesus said. To their surprise, their nets were full. Pledging themselves to Jesus, they are now proclaimed fishers of men.

What strikes me about this passage is that Jesus knew exactly what would convince these common people that he indeed was the son of God. As fishermen, these men would know which areas of the water to fish and would know if the fish were biting or not. Their catches represented not only their business and trade, but their livelihood. Not bringing home fish for dinner would mean a hungry family. Of course, Jesus knew the way to win them over was with fish. By exceeding any catch they had ever had, Jesus proved his might. Simon Peter, James and John not only were convinced that Jesus was the son of God, but was moved to give up their professions and follow Christ. I believe that even today, God knows how to reach each one of us. Just as Jesus knew exactly how to convince the fishermen, God knows what we need in our lives to see Christ. With his nudging, we are made "fishers of men."

Thursday, March 9, 2017

Luke 5:12-32 (NIV)

Rev. Dr. Peter Lau

Readers of this scripture passage will immediately notice that it is a busy schedule for Jesus. It is quite a list of actions: healing a leper and a paralytic, calling Levi to be his follower, and crowds of people awaiting him for healing. In addition, the religious authorities (the Pharisees and the teachers of the law), challenged him at every point of his ministries; when he forgave the sins of the paralytic, they said, “Who is this fellow who speaks blasphemy? Who can forgive sins but God alone?” (Luke 5:21); when he ate and drank with a large crowd of tax collectors, they said to him, “Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners.” (Luke 5:30). [Note: tax collectors were regarded as disreputable people because they worked for the oppressive Roman Empire.] If we continue reading through the end of the chapter, we will find that the religious authorities also questioned him why he was not observing religious duties, such as fasting and praying. (Luke 5:33) All this will surely create lots of stress on those who are in the same ministry with our Lord Jesus, especially the pastors.

How did our Lord Jesus handle his heavy schedule? He did not act like the “Energizer Bunny” that kept going and going and still going! On the contrary, he “often withdrew to lonely places and prayed.” (Luke 5:16) Yes, our Lord Jesus often withdrew to solitude in the midst of his heavy schedules and every decision-making. (Luke 4:42; 9:10, 18; 11:1; 22:41)

Solitude is the quality time of being alone with God to find rest in Him and then to soar on wings like eagles.

Faithful followers and disciples of our Lord Jesus must often withdraw to solitude even more so in our modern fast-paced culture where quick fix is demanded of us.

Jesus says, “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.” (Matthew 11:28)

Friday, March 10, 2017

Luke 5:33-6:11

Julie Strathdee

In this passage, Jesus is being questioned by authority figures about his unconventional practices. Instead of fasting, he and his disciples eat and drink, instead of observing the Sabbath, Jesus continues to heal. Members of his society who uphold the status quo, religious tradition, and common law clearly disapprove of his radical, revolutionary, rebellious actions, and try to incriminate him. Jesus, however, continues to break the mold and live out his love for others by doing things his own way. Just because something is embedded in our tradition, whether it's within the government or within a religion, doesn't mean it is the right way to move forward. Jesus, like many spiritual guides before him, demonstrated this unapologetic way to live and love.

Saturday, March 11, 2017

Luke 6:12-26

John Cordes

The message I chose to focus on in this reading is 6:22 “Congratulations when you are hated, ostracized, denounced, scorned as evil, because of the Son of Adam.” In the Message it reads. “Count yourself blessed every time someone cuts you down or throws you out, every time someone blackens your name or smears your name to discredit me.”

It encourages me to be an active disciple for Jesus Christ. We need to make Jesus known and work to bring about the Kingdom of Heaven on earth. We need to expect that this will make people uncomfortable, including ourselves. Jesus does not ask us to be comfortable. He tells each of us to “...take up his cross and follow me.” (Luke 9:23, Matthew 16:24).

We are not doing that if we are not willing to make ourselves and others uncomfortable. Jesus was constantly making the powerful uncomfortable by challenging the existing order and everyone’s understanding of God.

Many people are uncomfortable with talking about our Savior with others. We need to accept that sharing the Gospel will make us uncomfortable sometime. We need to focus instead on ...counting ourselves blessed when you are hated, ostracized, denounced, scorned as evil, because of the Son of Adam... when we are uncomfortable about being active disciples.

Prayer: Dear God, Give me the courage and faith to be your active disciple. To work to bring about your Kingdom on earth and share your message of salvation. Help me to remember I am blessed whenever I am uncomfortable working in your name. Help me to pick up my cross and boldly follow you each day. Amen.

Sunday, March 12, 2017

Luke 6:27-49

Dave Paulson

“Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. Do to others as you would have them do to you.”

These are challenging words that Jesus uses in today’s reading. Stop for a moment and think about how you can make this part of your daily practice.

God Answers Prayers

The other day while I was waiting outside the dealership for a service person to sign me in to get my car fixed I saw a rainbow. At first it was faint and I could barely see it. Then a dark cloud came along and the rainbow became brilliant. A darker cloud passed by and the rainbow glowed. As I was thinking about Luke 7:1-17, this became a visual image of how God answers prayer.

When we pray, and like the centurion, we feel unworthy and we can't imagine why God would hear us. Like the rainbow that God placed in the sky with a promise...God also promised to hear our and answer our prayers. It may not be the answer we want, but it is God's will, and it's an answer.

When our problems seem light, and we feel it's not that important and barely ask God for help, we are the light rainbow. When things are rough and/or too difficult to bear, the brighter we shine in the presence of The One who loves us and wants the best for us. We glow, not because God answered our prayers, we glow because we had faith enough to ask.

Prayer: Loving God give us the faith to turn to you in all we do; not just in troubled times but always; In Christ, amen.

Tuesday, March 14, 2017

Luke 7:18-50

Dave Paulson

The story of the sinful woman who is forgiven causes me to stop and Think. She shows her love in her washing of Jesus' feet. How can we show our caring in ways that can really help others?

Wednesday, March 15, 2017

Luke 8:1-18

Barbara Christmann

An old definition of a “parable” is, an earthly story with heavenly meaning. Through telling parables Jesus opened hearts and minds to His teachings. Even if the listener didn’t understand the story’s meaning at the time of its telling, Jesus had planted seeds in the “soil” of human hearts, to ripen over time. As mature Christians, His Word has already taken root in our lives.

We can use this parable to consider ourselves: What sort of soil do we tend? Are we receptive to receive His Word and daily direction? What seeds have taken root and how do our words and actions plant seeds in others? How can we continue to cultivate good ground and consistently bring forth and share a good harvest? Like in a garden, we as believers need to pull the sprouting weeds and sometimes, take old trees down.

What is growing in your “garden” today? Which seeds are from God, and where are we complacent in accepting behaviors that have developed or been passed down to us? Maybe there’s growth from a seed you inherited that was acceptable in past generations, but is not of God today. Likewise we have all received generational blessings. Let’s be courageous in identifying bad seeds, blind spots, or enabled habits. These can plant bad seeds in others and be used by the Adversary to cast shade, stop growth, and prevent us from sharing God’s Light.

God uses US to plant seeds into strangers, family, friends, or foe. In the final verse of this passage, Jesus said, “we’re not hiding things; we’re bringing everything out into the open...Generosity begets generosity. Stinginess impoverishes.” Our “lamp” is His presence shining through US. If we stick with God, the harvest includes an honesty about what is growing in our lives, an ability to become our best selves, and a joyful generosity in sharing knowledge of Him with others.

God, as mature Christians, your good seed has been firmly planted in the soil of our good hearts. Awaken our hearts and give us a fresh look at what has taken root in our lives. Help us to courageously pluck and remove “bad seeds” or “dead wood” that hinder our growth and make us stingy. Let your Light emerge through us, unhindered, into this World. We are all Your works-in-progress; may we generously forgive one another as You forgive us.

Thursday, March 16, 2017

Luke 8:19-39

Kelsey Bohannon

This passage symbolizes the tendency that many have to only rely on Jesus when times get bad. When Jesus gets on the boat with his disciples the water is smooth and calm. However when Jesus falls asleep a storm erupts and tosses the boat around, and the disciples come running in to ask Jesus to help them because they are about to capsize. When Jesus awakes he calms the seas and asks the disciples why they didn't trust him. They only came to Jesus when their journey became stormy and they were on the brink of disaster, only then did they wake him up. And yet Jesus still saved them, even though just moments before they had taken him for granted. Jesus will always save us no matter how we treat him, no matter how much our faith wavers because he has an undying love for each and everyone of us. But in order to have a stronger and more trusting relationship with him, we must stay with him through the good times and the bad.

Friday March 17, 2017

Luke 8: 40-56

Timothy Fisher

This is a passage that I am realizing now, after reading it while I sit here at my computer in my apartment in north Virginia, that has stuck with me throughout my life. I don't know why, but I remember this passage from when I was a child, and hearing it and reading it throughout the course of my life so far. This is the passage where, in the beginning a woman has been suffering ulcers for years, and as a last resort she reaches out and touches Jesus just barely. This heals her instantly, but Jesus notices for he asks "Who touched me?" She answers, afraid of his anger, but he only tells her to go in peace. He then heads into the house of a man whose daughter has died but moments ago. He revives her, telling everyone that "She is just asleep!" but tells everyone to keep this healing miracle a secret.

Every year that I write my devotional, I always feel a similar twinge of panic and guilt as I race to complete it the night before it is due. Whether it be because my parents always ask me if I want to do it days before it is due, or because I lose track of things in the sea of my life, it has been this way since high school, through college, to now. I find myself praying a lot these days, it has been a time of a lot of change and with that, difficulties. Also news of friends and some family going through hard times as well has lead to an unquenchable thirst for escape, an escape from my problems, the chance to lay the weight of them on someone else. So I turn to prayer. Just as the woman suffering physical pain reaches out with her hand to touch Jesus mere moments before he reaches out his hand to bring a girl back from the dead, I reach my hand out to God asking him to, in a way, heal me of the ulcers that have developed in my life. It doesn't always last but when I lay my worries, hopes, questions, and fears down on the shoulders of Jesus I feel, even if just for an instant, healed of the pain they bring me. Many of the miracles Jesus performs are ones that he uses to spread the good word, telling those healed and saved to spread the news to their friends and families. Though I notice in this passage that he does not tell the woman to spread the news, and specifically tells the family of the child to keep the miracle quiet. Now I may be telling you reading this right now about my prayers, but I choose to keep most of this to myself because that is just how I am. And that's okay.

A point I have always made, over and over again, is that anything can be a miracle. From a moment's respite from worry, to healed ulcers, to bringing a child back to life... It is a miracle if you let it be. I love you all whether you know me or not, and truly wish that even just for a moment, you find your own miracle today.

This is the way I word all of my prayers, every time and I offer it to all of you-

Dear Lord, thank you for today and all days. Lord lift me up and grant me courage, wisdom, patience, and love to keep me on the path I want to walk. Watch over my friends, watch over my family, watch over all of us living in the moment of our day-to-day lives. Please remind all of us that no matter when we need you, you are always there behind us, to guide us, to protect and comfort us. This I pray, saying the prayer Your Son taught us,

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. Lead us not to temptation and deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever.

Amen.

Saturday, March 18, 2017

Luke 9:1-17

Dollie Forney

Jesus sends out the twelve disciples and feeds the five thousand.

I have heard a lot of ponderings and sermons on these two events and here, in fact, they fit neatly into 17 verses. It doesn't seem possible that messages you can consider for a lifetime are contained in such a compact space. But there they are.

I read through these passages quickly and experienced the two stories as connected events. Basically, the connecting message was this: Time to roll, it's show time. The powerful Herod is getting wind something is up so there is no time to spare. Jesus equipped the Disciples with this in mind and the message had to be heard far and wide. So, with a leap of faith and no baggage, the Disciples hit the road to encounter the world with the Good News. The appearance of the Disciples to some must have seemed odd. Who travels like this? Who has so much faith in the journey they carry no belongings? Angels, for one, and people with urgent news. There was no time to pause to pick fights or debates. You either got it or you didn't. Seeds had to be planted and it was in God's time they would blossom. The Disciples had to get out there and plant those seeds. All opportunities had to be used so when the crowds followed them upon their returned, the messengers who sought a well-deserved rest could not rest yet. Jesus said no, because the crowd was hungry for the Word, this was an opportunity that could not be ignored. There was no time for "event planning". God had to be trusted to fill in the gaps. There was no room for doubt that He would. With five loaves and two fish, the Creator came through.

How overwhelmed and ill-prepared the Disciples must have felt! How did this experience prepare them for the job ahead? Jesus taught them that opportunities are often presented in a way that may not allow you to fully prepare as you would like. He tells us sometimes "but wait" is not an acceptable answer and you need to lean your incomplete self into the moment and trust the answer to the next worrisome detail will present itself.

Do you have your "elevator speech" ready? Have you fine-tuned your faith story and your message so it can be delivered and heard efficiently and effectively? Could you deliver it and trust God will use it as He sees fit?

Who travels like this?

Jesus does.

Across these passages, I see lack of comprehension as a theme. It is hard to understand Jesus and what is coming.

- Jesus' worshipers think he is John the Baptist, Elijah, or another prophet brought back to life.
- Peter gets the right answer, "God's Messiah", but is still wrong (thinking of military power).
- When Jesus predicts his own death, his followers cannot understand; perhaps cannot believe what they have heard. They are distracted by dreams of personal power as members of Jesus' inner circle.
- The disciples taken up the mountain with Jesus were awed by the appearance of Elijah and Moses talking with Jesus. And perhaps due to sleepiness, or simply their excitement, failed to register that the discussion with Jesus was about his "departure".
- Even hearing the voice in the cloud probably raised more questions than provided answers: "This is my Son, whom I have chosen; listen to him."

Carry-away: Jesus knows His mission, knows exactly what He must do, and even the timetable. However, His disciples still did not comprehend Jesus' ultimate mission, even upon witnessing events on the mountain. Prayer appears essential to His transfiguration. If we are to comprehend and implement God's plan for us, regular prayer is required.

Prayer: Lord, mercifully receive the prayers of your people who call upon you, and grant that they may know and understand what things they ought to do, and also may they have grace, power, and courage to faithfully accomplish them; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, oh God, now and for ever, Amen.

Monday, March 20, 2017

Luke 9:51-62

Kathi and Terry Turner

In the second part of Luke's gospel, he brings together words of Jesus spoken on different occasions. He presents this as an account of Jesus and his disciples on their way from Galilee to Jerusalem.

The route from Galilee to Jerusalem goes through the village of Samaria. Its people were Samaritans, with whom the Jews shared a history of animosity based mainly on their differing religious views. So – when Jews from Galilee were going on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, every door was closed to them throughout Samaria. This angers the disciples who also saw it as an insult to Jesus, and who want to “call down fire from Heaven and destroy the village...”. Jesus rebukes them for calling on violence, and directs them to move on. His response is such a departure from the Old Testament – rejecting the fanaticism of the past and urging his disciples to “take another road.”

In the verses that follow, Jesus seems to be teaching his followers three main things:

- respect for those God leads by another road,
- not to confuse God's cause with our own interests, or those of our religious community,
- the very great cost of following Jesus.

Jesus' response to those expressing a desire to follow him seems harsh in contrast with his customary understanding attitude about human nature, but he is simply stating bluntly the cost of following him. He knows how hard it is to sacrifice everything for the sake of the gospel. The third one of his 'would-be' disciples might have been hoping that his family would dissuade him, with practical arguments, from leaving to follow Jesus – so he could remain with his good intentions: “I would like to, but...” This is the fellow who seems the most like me.

Heavenly Father, help me to be led by love, and not by fear or misguided self-interest. I want to respect all people as children of God. Most of all, I want to follow your way and proclaim your good news – and not be an “I'd like to, but...” person.

Amen

Tuesday, March 21, 2017

Luke 10:1-24

Dave Paulson

Jesus sends out his disciples to share the good news. They return joyful about their experience. Jesus rejoices also about their experience.

Take time to think about experiences you have had that brought joy to your life and thank God for the experience.

Wednesday, March 22, 2017

Luke 10:25-42

Judy Hart

Many of you recognize this scripture as the parable of the Good Samaritan before even reading the actual passage. For our congregation, this passage might be like the John 3:16, which almost everyone knows and can quote (or summarize). Nevertheless, please take a moment to re-read the scripture (Luke 10:25-42) again - even if for the hundredth or thousandth time; sometimes it is good to meditate and hear God's wisdom for your life even by reviewing the familiar and known.

As Good Samaritan's, we all know this story; yet about a year ago I heard a slightly different version that helped me to pause and reflect (it was similar to next layer in the onion). Before I share my newest reflection, please let me summarize my interpretation of the story.

In this paragraph, the parable is summarized in my words. An expert on the law approached Jesus and asked what must be done for eternal life. Jesus responded with a question; asking the expert (teacher) back for his interpretation. The teacher said love everyone like yourself and Jesus agreed. Then the expert (teacher) again questioned Jesus as to which people (neighbors) should be loved. The answer Jesus provided is the Good Samaritan parable. This parable starts with robbers who attacked a person traveling from Jerusalem to Jericho; these robbers beat the person and left the traveller injured. Clearly the robbers aren't the example in any way of love or anything else honorable as for whatever reason they believed they had the right to take or injure another human. The next event in the story is that a Priest was passing by on this road when he saw the injured man, so the Priest moved to the opposite side of the road and kept on his personal journey. My interpretation is that in this example the Priest isn't doing the action God actually desires, even if the Priest was preparing for a sermon or going to help the sick as perhaps God put something in front of the Priest that needed his attention in that moment. The Priest may not have done anything "wrong", yet he wasn't as kind as he could have been. Maybe he was busy, but Jesus doesn't seem to say that was a good excuse. Then another person (Levite) was passing on his journey and also did not stop. Lastly the Good Samaritan saw the injured person and stopped and showed caring. Yes, the Good Samaritan is the hero as he showed love, kindness and caring towards another stranger who was in need of help.

Notice that the Good Samaritan handles the immediate need (cares for his wounds and then transports the injured person to a safe place). The Good Samaritan does continue with his own personal obligations and responsibilities by delegating care of the injured to another (an innkeeper). Perhaps the Good Samaritan did not even go out of his way (stayed on the same road), but he did stop and show much kindness and caring (with both time/effort and money). The kindness seems genuine as he paid the innkeeper coins for accepting the man and said he would come back and pay whatever else was due upon his return. Now the "Good Samaritan" could have completely altered his life priorities that day by personally handling all of the caring requirements for helping the injured, but he did not. That might have caused anger or another emotion in the Good Samaritan, but he just dealt with the problem (the injured in that moment, then brought him to another for continued care). Perhaps working within the community to get additional help (from innkeeper) allowed delegation of responsibilities along with caring and kindness towards the injured. By being part of community and using existing resources, perhaps allowed the Good Samaritan to have some funds to help the injured while the innkeeper continued in his role for continued (maybe 24 hour around the clock) caring. Who knows - maybe the Good Samaritan had perishables that needed to be traded and time was of the essence and he needed to go onwards, yet he still cared and is honored by God for taking moments to love others.

Perhaps the innkeeper felt he was honored to care for the injured and received good compensation. I don't know. Maybe it was no big deal to the innkeeper as just another activity in his daily life. Sometimes individuals have amazing impact (like the Innkeeper) yet are not the main character in the story. Everyone has different talents and roles. Without the Innkeeper, maybe the injured wouldn't have recovered. That isn't the highlight, but I think God has meaning for each task he asks of us.

What it seems to me is that the Good Samaritan was living in the moment and didn't walk away from another human needing help and that the Good Samaritan did what he determined as kind and loving and then let others continue giving help. (When we start something, maybe God isn't saying we MUST see it to the very end and all details in between.) So my newest reflection about this story is that always be kind and know your boundaries and it is not just okay to delegate but it is good.

The essence of our Church is the Good Samaritan parable — providing love, kindness and caring to each other. I am grateful to have and be mentored by such amazing people here within the Good Sam UMC congregation who show real love daily to so many in the world. Thank you for being God's angels in so many divine ways. Personally I pray that when I act like either the Priest or the Levite as illustrated in this parable that I will be able to switch back to living in the moment to give glory to God on this earth as a Good Samaritan.

Blessings to all of you,
Judy Hart

The Lord's Prayer

The Lord's Prayer can easily become routine as we say it each Sunday without full comprehension. The disciples saw Jesus stepping aside and going off alone to pray. So they asked Him about that since the priests prayed openly in the temple each day, bowing in intense ritual for all to see. Jesus answered, beginning with our FATHER, (Abba, literally translated, Daddy). We come to God with an attitude of worship, yet the feeling of a close relationship. Continuing on, there are 5 requests, with the first 2 dealing with God. HALLOWED be thy name; this sets God apart, we treat Him as holy and revered. THY KINGDOM COME; throughout His life, Jesus preached about the coming of God's kingdom, so we too, as followers of Christ, are asking for that coming. Give us this day, our DAILY BREAD; a request for food to sustain us for the day. Forgive us our TRESPASSES (sins) as we forgive those who trespass against us. We believe that God will forgive us because of our faith; we in turn must forgive others. LEAD US NOT INTO TEMPTATION; may we be kept from situations that cause us to sin. We are requesting God's help in leading a moral and just life. The lesson of vs. 5-8 is to persevere in prayer, not to change God's mind but to be steadfast.

Practise God's Presence

Respect God's Power

Ask for God's Help

Yield to God's Guidance

Embrace God's Love

Receive God's Grace

Thank you for your guiding prayer. May we stay focused as we listen for the Holy Spirit.

Friday, March 24, 2017

Luke 11:29-54

Mei Murphy

In this passage, Jesus condemns the Pharisees for caring only about their appearance and reputation rather than what is in their heart. As a teenager, I can attest to the notion that it can be very difficult to look beyond our outward appearance and care about the content of our heart. I often find myself comparing myself to girls at school and on media platforms such as Instagram and Pinterest, subconsciously taking note about what I need to change about myself in order to look more like what America sets as the “ideal beauty standards.” This ranges from makeup trends to the ideal body image. I spend too much time trying to “better” my outward appearance when I should be spending time bettering myself as a child of God; I am trying to learn to have more patience, be more gracious, and love myself just as I am!

Saturday, March 25, 2017

Luke 12:1-21

Binu John

The theme in this passage that stands out to me is to be vigilant against greed and selfishness. This parable is a good reminder that as I go on with my daily life, if I'm not careful, life can be all about acquiring more and more things and safe guarding them. In this endless pursuit of accumulating more material things, I may lose sight of what is important to God.

Jesus makes it very clear - "Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; life does not consist in an abundance of possessions." Jesus is asking me to prioritize my time and effort, he is asking me to think what I can do to be a better disciple of his and make a difference in this world. Jesus wants me to think of more than just myself as I go about my life. Jesus highlights this fact with the parable of the rich fool.

In this parable, the rich man has an abundant harvest and he is thinking about how to safeguard it for the future and how he can enjoy it later. Reading the passage, he does not seem to have acquired this wealth illegally and seems to be making some practical plans on holding on to his possessions. All of it sounds good except the fact that all the plans are very self-centered. Jesus is urging me to think more about what I can do for people around me. How can I use my time, talent and financial resources to touch the lives of others and make the world a better place? During this time where more people are being marginalized, Jesus is challenging me to do more to stand with and up for others.

Sunday, March 26, 2017

Luke 12:22-40

Amy Kaiser

I read this passage in 3 different translations, The New King James, The Common English and The New International Version. In all three versions, the section beginning with verse 22 has a title, “Do Not Worry”. Verses 22-24 include Jesus telling his disciples not to worry about life, what to eat, your body or what to wear. Jesus points out that the ravens don’t have to worry about food, God feeds them. Then a clear question in Verse 25, ***“Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to your life?”*** And the follow up, ***“Since you cannot do this very little thing, why do you worry about the rest?”*** Jesus, known for his parables, doesn’t leave anything to interpretation here. Stop worrying, have faith, God is here.

Our life on earth is full of things that divide our attention from God. Everyday we face so many distractions that cause us worry, material things, work, school, social media, entertainment media and news media. All of these distractions offer ways to enhance our lives and bring us pleasure and knowledge. However, often we allow one or all of these to fill our lives, especially if worry is attached. Distraction and worry leaves little room for God. In verse 35, Jesus asks his disciples to, ***“Be dressed and ready for service and keep your lamps burning.”*** What does being ready look like? How do we keep the lamps burning?

Being ready for service won’t look the same for everyone. I believe being ready for service involves focus and intention. I have always been drawn to the fruits of the spirit referenced in Galatians 5:22-23; love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. If we allow our minds to focus on these aspects of the spirit then we fill our hearts with God and the world’s distractions lose importance. Wearing and practicing our faith with intention brings fulfillment and leaves no room for worry. I focus on joy and kindness to help keep me centered on God. What is the focus that will help you be ready for service?

Monday, March 27, 2017

Luke 12: 41-59

Dick Kaiser

This scripture follows Jesus' warning about watchfulness on the part of faithful servants. Peter asked if the message was for the disciples, or for all, and Jesus told the story of the faithful servant, who was efficient in his responsibilities and always ready for his master to return. Jesus compared this to an unfaithful servant who neglected his responsibilities while his master was gone, and described the reward (or punishment) the servant would receive on the master's return. From everyone who is given much, much will more will be demanded.

Jesus refers to a terrible Baptism that he must face and that his intent was to bring fire and division to the earth, which implies that judgment will fall on the sinners who will be separated from the righteous. He also warns us to be alert to what is going on around us and to accept God on God's terms before it is too late.

When I look at my life, I realize that I have been given very much, not just in earthly goods and relationships, but in the spiritual realm as well. I believe that Christ died for my sins and because of that the pathway to salvation is laid out clearly before me. It seems natural that Jesus should ask much of me in return for such a gift, and indeed the Bible contains many references to the things I should be doing. The Parable of the Sheep and the Goats, the Beatitudes, and the command to "love God and love your neighbor as yourself" come immediately to mind and there are many more.

There is much to do before the master returns, and I'd best be ready.

Blessed Jesus, we thank you for the inestimable gift you gave us through your crucifixion and resurrection, and we realize that there is much to do every day, in large and small ways, to acknowledge that gift and to attempt to fulfill what you expect of us. Help us to recognize these needs and respond to them as you would have us do, that our lives may be in order when you return.

Tuesday, March 28, 2017

Luke 13:1-21

Helen Kung

The human condition makes us speculative. When an unjust governor kills someone in the middle of sacrificing to God, people speculate whether that person was punished for their sin. When a wall collapses, people speculate whether the ones killed under the wall were deserving of the tragedy. Do we do the same thing? When someone is targeted by violence or when someone is suffering, do we quietly wonder whether they deserved it? Jesus tells us, "...unless you change your hearts and lives, you will die just as they did."

The Chinese folk philosophy says, "The good has its just reward; and the evil has its just punishment. They will come in a matter of time". But Jesus teaches us to change our own heart, or we will be treated like the fig tree that does not produce. We are the trees that won't produce after three years; we are on borrowed time. We need to change our hearts and lives, in our faith actively work toward heaven on earth. We do so because Jesus has forgiven us, so we live in response to that love. We should never pretend to know what is good and what is evil: didn't Adam and Eve teach us that the right to make the judgment between good and evil belongs only to God?

When we serve others without judging is like the kingdom of heaven. We build the idea that brings the kingdom of heaven like the mustard seed that grows into a tree where birds can nest. We build the idea that brings the kingdom of heaven like the yeast, working the love through the whole society like the rising bread.

Jesus, help us change our hearts and our lives! We are weak. We need your grace and your love to help us overcome our human condition. Please guide us, dig around our roots and give us the nutrient of your words so we become the fig trees that produce fruit. In your holy name we pray.

Wednesday, March 29, 2017

Luke 13:22-35

Dave Paulson

“ Strive to enter through the narrow door” are Jesus’ words as he is traveling to Jerusalem.

Luke pictures the narrow door of a house that is difficult to enter.

We enter by hearing the words of Jesus and obeying them.

Faith in Christ is a discipline that leads to life in heaven.

For me the message is don’t avoid doing a task just because it may be difficult.

Thursday, March 30, 2017

Luke 14:1-24

Edith and Mark Sutterlin

Jesus is in Jerusalem, going to the home of a Pharisee for dinner, but interrupts the party's social customs, healing a sick man on the Sabbath, then critiquing the way some guests had boldly claimed the best seats at the dinner party. He offers tips on how to offer and to respond to dinner invitations in the form of two stories. Here he has turned society's pecking order upside down.

Who of us is invited to the Kingdom of God? How are we responding to God's invitation? Are we saying, "Wait until I grow my business/get further in my career;" "Wait until I'm out of college when I'll have time to focus;" "Wait until my political party is in power and the scales are tipped in our favor;" "Wait, Lord, I'll be there the next time I am facing a personal crises and really need you?" Do we need to take a 360 degree look at our lives so far to appreciate invitations and blessings from God and to look forward far enough to anticipate our longing for closeness with God on our deathbeds? Heaven help us accept God's invitation to feast today and to invite everyone to share in God's loving hospitality.

Meditation music: "I Cannot Come to the Banquet," by the Medical Mission Sisters. We invite you to listen to these musical and artistic interpretations of this Scripture passage.

1. "I Cannot Come to the Banquet," Medical Mission Sisters vocals, with Lego images that bring the words to life:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JC2NgfkfD5c>
2. Instrumental, with the words on the screen:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KD6PfZbrxOI>
3. Karaoke style – sing along
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tW_vdsU_Bb8

Friday, March 31, 2017

Luke 14:25-35

Gretchen Ludwig

Oooh, that word “hate”. Hate your wife and children, brother and sister, mother and father? How is it that Jesus, who told us to love everyone, should want disciples that hate their own families? This has always been a hard verse for me, but Jesus goes on to explain himself. Unless you’re in it with your whole being, denying even yourself, he can’t call you a disciple. You can’t be relied upon to “take up your cross.” If you turn back, lose your saltiness, how can Christ’s plan move forward as it needs to?

Only Jesus knew that his time was short. He had a lot to accomplish and needed dedicated, unfailing, unencumbered disciples. He knew the dead can take care of themselves, and but his work needed to get going, and it was of vital importance that the work continue even after his death.

So here we are, 2000 years later. We’re not all going to turn into Mother Theresa or a zealous missionary, but we do have a duty to take up our crosses to continue his work, whether it be protest marches or fighting against deportation of illegals, writing to our representatives, or serving at the Family Shelter. Let’s not lose our saltiness, but act, even if we don’t follow the “hate” part of the passage. It’s still vital that we prioritize the work of Jesus in our lives.

*Gracious and Redeeming God, help us walk the walk and act like Christians.
Amen*

Saturday, April 1, 2017

Luke 15: 1-32

Cate Lycurgus

Over the last several years, many people have asked me about my plans for the future or about my current life and work—how I’m living at home to write, yes, but here primarily to be with my dad, which I am so grateful I can do. Having returned four years ago this Easter, I sometimes let my mind wander to other places though, or take my own impatience or insecurities out on my family.

Everyone has an opinion about what I should do—go or stay or for how long. The fact of the matter is, it doesn’t feel like a choice to me—I will always be my father’s daughter; he is one of the most amazing people I’ve ever met (or heard of, or read about) and I know these years are precious. No matter the stagnation or loneliness or my frustration at times, I can’t undo that bond—or imagine a better place to be.

But this scripture has me thinking about how often I have viewed situations as tasks with timestamps, as one might a degree, an entry-level position, a career. The younger son had this in mind too, and I’m struck by his idea that he could be re-recruited to work on his father’s behalf. However his father never considered him unemployed, and simply waited for his son to return and contribute—through community, through family, through work and first through celebration—to his household. While the older son had different ideas (more along my conceptions, I suppose) of what it meant to be faithful, the younger son experienced his lack of volition in the matter. A son is his father’s life-long employee; not only am I Peter and Ginny’s daughter for life, I am God’s, too.

Which is to say, I need to realize that I am not temporary, in this season or in uncertainty, but on the payroll for all time. And it is payroll—I am so blessed! Whether I am doing the work or not, I have work (and home) waiting for me, as the place I must love and live for others in joy and with expectation that both fathers will provide. And since this is so, how could I not devote myself in this way for whatever days there are? When all the father has is mine, the response is not duty but gratitude—a posture I’m after this Lenten season—and to be prodigal with it.

Dear Lord,

Thank you for the endless celebration of our return to you. Let our gratitude lead us to the work we must do in your name, in whatever homes and lands and ways we are able.

*In Christ’s name we pray,
Amen.*

Sunday, April 2, 2017

Luke 16: 1-18

Ginny Lycurgus

I absolutely love baseball. It doesn't matter if it's Little League or high school, my SJSU Spartans, or MLB. I love the slowness of the game, that there is no clock or buzzer to beat. There also is something special about watching the game in person rather than on television. You get to see the whole field in action, like a beautifully choreographed dance. Each player knows his role and responsibilities. Each play has been practiced so many times that it seems effortless to me. But it is all the result of hard work, years of practice, and habit.

We often think of habits as bad things, and I can name several of my own that I need to relearn. But in this passage in Luke, we are encouraged to develop good habits for living. The parable of the shrewd manager illustrates the end result of taking short cuts, of being careless in intent and action. The manager has been untrustworthy throughout his career and now that he is being fired, is unfaithful to his employer one last time. He fails to be a steward of what has been entrusted to his care. In this example, money is the issue. Jesus reminds us that if we cannot be faithful in how we handle the money God has given us to use, the gift becomes our master instead of the Giver. Jesus also warns that if we cannot be faithful in small things, we will not be faithful with larger ones. Like the baseball player, if we have not worked hard on practice fields and developed essential habits, we will not prevail when the game is on the line.

It would be comforting to think that this passage applies only to money, but I think God is asking more of us. He is asking me to be patient in dealing with daily frustrations so that I learn to be patient when it is really important. He is asking me to be grateful for the sun on my face, a dog lying by my side, a baseball game low on the radio, so that I learn to be grateful in all things, good or bad. He is asking that I trust him with small worries so that I learn to trust and lean on Him when hard times come. He is asking us to practice our faith as deliberately and regularly as baseball players, to develop spiritual muscles and habits that sustain us.

I need to start limbering up!

Gracious and loving God,

Thank you for being patient with me when I drop the ball. When I forget to play by the rules you have given me for my own protection. When I am too lazy or tired or just don't feel like exercising my faith. Thank you for giving me another chance each day and for never giving up on me.

Monday, April 3, 2017

Luke 16:19-31

Barbara Shev

Wow! That was pretty clear! So I suggest that our devotional today be active rather than contemplative.

Some suggestions to help a modern Lazarus:

- Make a donation to Second Harvest Food Bank.
- Buy a gift card to a supermarket or restaurant and gift it to a homeless person you see on the street.
- Sign up to walk or sponsor a person for the CROP Hunger Walk.
- Sign up to cook for the Family Shelter.
- Find another way to help a Lazarus we may encounter in our lives.

Lord, help us remember to see your face in the people we encounter each day.

Tuesday, April 4, 2017

Luke 17: 1-19

Dave and Frances Bartholomew

Forgiveness and Faith

What does Jesus say about forgiveness and faith? I didn't know, so I read it. Read it again. Read different versions. Read the commentaries. Then read it all again. This is our takeaway.

Temptation will always exist, it is up to us to make that choice not to follow or fall into that temptation. Do not lead others to sin, but show your disapproval when they do. Be ready to forgive their wrongdoing and use what they did wrong to teach what is right. Be patient with your fellow brothers and sisters and don't stop showing how to be a good Christian.

“...and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us...”

Do this always with love in your heart. Turn that person around with examples of small deeds. Those deeds can be miniscule, just as having faith as small as a mustard seed. Planting that seed in your heart is all it takes to let God grow from within, and that's good. To do good is right, right with God. By doing what is right, seeking approval is unnecessary since you're supposed to do what's right in God's eyes anyway! Right? Right!

We can see the hope and faith of the ten lepers who cried out to Jesus for mercy. There they were, standing from afar, on the margin of society. They too had faith that he could heal them. It's even better when one of them remembers to give thanks to God. We see only the foreigner, the Samaritan, who did the right thing and returned, praising God and giving thanks to Jesus. This is a reminder that God's grace is for everyone, even those who are different from ourselves.

Dear Lord, help us appreciate what we have, care about those less fortunate, help where we can, and trust in You. Amen.

Wednesday, April 5, 2017

Luke 17, 20-37

Todd Baggett

The Coming of the Kingdom of God

When the Pharisees asked Jesus when the Kingdom of God would come, Jesus replied, “The coming of the kingdom of God is not something that can be observed, nor will people say, ‘Here it is,’ or ‘There it is,’ because the kingdom of God is in your midst.” I take this to mean the Kingdom of God is already here, in our hearts, not some specific event in time.

He then goes on to say when Jesus returns it will be swift. “But first he must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation.” But why I ask? Are we in a generation of Jesus rejection? The statistics on church attendance seems to indicate so.

This passage goes on to talk about how people went about their daily life while Noah built the Ark, and soon they were all destroyed. It continues to say “the day Lot left Sodom, fire and sulfur rained down from heaven and destroyed them all.”

On Jesus’ return it says, “It will be just like this on the day the Son of Man is revealed.”... “Whoever tries to keep their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life will preserve it”. It goes on to say some will disappear and be taken. When asked, “Where”, Jesus says, “Where there is a dead body, there the vultures will gather.”

Gruesome stuff! I will be honest, this picture of a punishing second coming really does not align with my vision of God. This reading takes me to thoughts of “fire and brimstone” that really challenge my understanding of God. The thought of a punishing God has, in the past, lead me away from church, and would again if I believed it! Instead, I choose the loving God; the One who embraces me. Every day, I am presented with the lessons and opportunities that lead to my highest self. If I am willing to claim my dreams, do my part, and believe in an all-powerful God, he will bring me to the mountain that I may bask in his glory.

Prayer:

God help my unbelief! I don't want to fear you my Lord. Let my praise come from courage not cowardice, from love not fear, in both my joy and in my sorrow it is you who sustains me. Thank you Lord for my journey, it is through you I reach my potential. Help me to be your hands, your feet, your voice that I may share your love into the world as you have shared with me. I am far from perfect, yet I am showered in your love and cleaned by your Amazing Grace!

Amen.

Thursday, April 6, 2017

Luke 18:1-14

Ben Murphy

The Parable of the Persistent Widow

This story is very interesting. It's, to me, a triumph of persistence over opposition. It goes to show that, if you keep working at whatever you want to change, you will eventually overcome. The judge was actively working against the widow, and yet he still caved, if only for his own personal interest. I think that can be applied to daily life as well. Even if you're facing some tough situation, just keep working and you'll eventually catch a break. Something will give eventually, you just need to have faith that the thing that gives won't be your will.

The Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector

Yet another reminder that we are all flawed, and that is ok. Don't spend your time comparing yourself to your neighbor and thanking God that you are better off than your neighbor. Spend your time really reflecting upon yourself and working to improve things about yourself. God loves us, flaws and all. Indeed, this is the reason that we have them. Acknowledging that we have them is akin to acknowledging that we are human. This passage seems to be challenging us not to be better than our neighbor, but rather to be better than the person that we were yesterday.

Friday, April 7, 2017

Luke 18:15-34

Dave Paulson

Jesus Blesses Little Children.

Jesus' disciples did not want Jesus to take time with children. Jesus saw the importance of taking time with the children and reminds us that we all need to receive God simply.

The Rich Ruler.

The rich ruler asks what we must do to inherit eternal life. Jesus reminds him he needed to obey the commandments. The ruler says he has kept the commandments since his youth. Jesus said the ruler needed to distribute his money with the poor, but the ruler was not ready to do that.

Jesus Foretells His Death and Resurrection.

Jesus says he will be handed over to the Gentiles and be insulted, flogged and killed. And rise again on the third day. The disciples could not grasp that this would happen.

I think we face similar issues today. We need to respond to Jesus' guidance and not reject it as the people did in this passage.

Saturday, April 8, 2017

路加福音第十九章 Luke 19:1-27

萬青姐妹 Qing Wan

感謝主。讀了稅吏撒該的故事和主人交銀子給僕人的比喻。故事讓我們知道，耶穌是我們所信的神。我們的信心有多大，神的恩典就有多大。耶穌是神，看人是看我們的心。

耶穌看到撒該，沒有看他的身材矮小，沒有看他做稅吏時佔了同胞的便宜，也沒有看他有錢。耶穌看到撒該是他追求的心；他的信心極大。他是財主，願意在眾人面前承諾不再訛詐別人。還歡歡喜喜地接待耶穌，跟耶穌之前的教導，接待陌生人人到自己的家就等同接待了耶和華。所以耶穌住在他的家。當眾人議論紛紛說，耶穌竟然住在罪人的家裡。耶穌當面告訴眾人說，“人子來，是要尋找拯救失落的人。”這樣，撒該因為耶穌看見他能夠悔改的心，而得到了救贖的允諾。

耶穌有用僕人的比喻告訴我們，他將要再來，查看我們白白得到來自上帝天父的救恩。我們是否平安地度過每一天，我們有沒有在地上做好上帝託付我們做的事情，做好教會的事工，愛你身邊的每一個人。撒種、傳福音、完成神的大使命，將來見主的面，有更大的賞賜。

Thanks to God, that I get to reflect on the story of Zacchaeus and the parable of money to the servants. The stories help us see that Jesus is the son of God in whom we believe. The stronger our faith, the more blessings in our lives. Jesus is our God, and when he sees people, he sees into our hearts.

When Jesus encountered Zacchaeus, he didn't see that Zacchaeus was short; he didn't see that as a tax collector he took advantage of his peers, and Jesus didn't see that Zacchaeus is rich. What Jesus saw was a seeking heart: a strong faith in Jesus that he can be saved through Jesus. As a wealthy man, Zacchaeus was willing to admit to his mistakes in front of a crowd and promise to change his ways. He happily welcomed Jesus, a stranger into his house. This matched the teaching in the scripture and the Jewish tradition, welcoming people is like welcoming God. When Jesus came to stay with Zacchaeus, people were talking among themselves that Jesus was staying with a sinner. Jesus spoke directly to these people "The son of man came to seek and to save what was lost." In this way, Zacchaeus, who was lost in the ways of corruption, is saved by Jesus' recognition.

The parable of the ten men tells us that Jesus will return. By the time he returns, he will examine the gifts that God has given us freely. Have we lived each day of our lives peacefully? Have we done on earth what God has called us to do? Have we served the ministries of the church? Have we loved everyone around us? Have we spread the seeds, spread the Good News, and accomplished the great commission that God has commended for us? If so, when we see the face of our Lord, we will be given better rewards.

Sunday, April 9, 2017

Luke 19:28-48

Dave Paulson

This passage shows examples of highs and lows in Jesus' experiences. The triumphal entry into Jerusalem is joyful. Jesus weeps over Jerusalem since he knows of things that will happen in the near future. How do you deal with the highs and lows the you experience?

Monday, April 10, 2017

Luke 20:1-26

Patty Groves

Jesus was a great teacher! He was asked many questions by the disciples and others. He frequently answered them with a question or taught them with a parable. This way, the multitude was not spoon fed an answer but was given a chance to think for themselves and come up with their own conclusion. When Jesus was teaching and proclaiming the Good News in the temple court, he was asked by the teachers of the law “Who gave you this authority?” Jesus replied with a question, “John’s baptism-was it from heaven or of human origin?” The chief priests knew either answer would get them in trouble with the people, so they answered “we do not know where it was from.” Jesus said “neither will I tell you.” Jesus did not give a direct answer but He did imply that His power came from God the Father in heaven and not of human origin.

Jesus went on to tell the people the parable of the vineyard. A man (God) planted the vineyard (the world) and rented it to some farmers (men). Three times, he sent his servants (prophets) to collect fruit which belonged to him but the messengers were wounded, treated shamefully and sent away empty-handed. Finally, he (God) sent his son (Jesus) whom his loved, “perhaps they will respect him”. The tenants said, “this is the heir, let’s kill him and the inheritance will be ours.” The teachers of the law knew Jesus had spoken this parable against them.

Jesus asked them yet another question, “What is the meaning of that which is written, ‘the stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone’?” Jesus was saying to them, “I am God’s beloved messenger, more than John the Baptist and all the prophets before him. You persecuted those before me, you rejected me but I become the cornerstone, the most important messenger of God.”

How foolish are they who reject Jesus, God’s topnotch messenger, His only Son, the bridge that connects God to men, our Savior! His crucifixion and death on the cross fulfill God’s plan of redemption, His resurrection frees us from sin and gives us eternal life.

In our own daily life, do we sometimes reject Jesus and crucify Him all over again with our sinful ways? How well do we follow Jesus’ example, learn from His parables, be still and listen to God’s message through scripture reading and meditation?

Prayer: Creator God, open our hearts and minds so that we can hear your messages for us, help us follow Jesus’ example and do Your will, not ours.

Tuesday, April 11, 2017

Luke 20:27-47

Dave Paulson

Some of the religious leaders try to trap Jesus with their questions but Jesus is not trapped by their questions. My reaction is why waste time on that activity when there are positive things that need to be done?

Wednesday, April 12, 2017

Luke 21:1-38

Tyler Baggett

This passage begins with a poor widow donating all she could to the temple, and ends with Jesus warning about how there will be trials testing each one of us. To me this passage is important as each and every person in this congregation has faced a roadblock of sorts at one point or another. For those of us in youth group it could be a hard class, or a fight with friends. However Jesus says that heaven and earth will pass away, but his words will not. He reminds us that things will come and go, but the lessons He teaches us are timeless and if we follow His word then we will stand before Him at last.

Thursday, April 13, 2017

Luke 22:1-38

Dave Paulson

Today's reading describes the institution of the Lord's Supper. The surprise for me is the Supper ends with a dispute about which of them was the greatest. It seems to be difficult to keep our focus on the important things.

Friday, April 14, 2017

Luke 22:39-45

Ginny Johnson

This is the part of the story where it starts getting hard. Jesus knows what's coming and He knows how bad it's going to be. So He prays. He prays so hard that, even in the cool night air, He sweats. He sweats so much it runs down his face and drips off his chin. And He asks the question we all ask when we are facing unthinkable pain—"Really? There is not another way? I have to walk through this? I will, if that's the only plan."

God sends an angel to give him courage, but the praying and the sweating continue.

Have you been there? Have you been driven to your knees calling out "why me?" And "Don't you have a miracle up your sleeve so I can just avoid this altogether?" Did you even notice God sent you an angel to give you courage?

When my daughter was dying of cancer, inch by inch, I got up each day and said to God "I can't?", and everyday God said "Just today. Go to the hospital and be with her, just today." And I thought of Jesus, just doing the next best possible thing, and I went. I guess it helped me to know that when I said "I can't!" Jesus said "I know." So Jesus walked with me all day, every day, because he had made a journey just like it himself.

When I read this story I cry for Jesus because I understand. And I know for sure when I am called upon to make that journey again, when my soul cries out "Help me! This is too big! I don't want to! I can't!", Jesus will cry for me and take my hand and will never, ever, ever leave me alone in that garden.

Prayer

Dear Sweet Jesus, I know you were afraid. I know you dreaded what was to come. But you did it anyway. Thank you for your courage and faith and for teaching me to do it anyway. But most of all, thank you for walking with me, no matter what.

Amen

Saturday, April 15, 2017

Luke 23:1-56

Jim Hane

This account of the “trial” and crucifixion of Jesus is difficult for me to write about, because it raises so many emotional reactions which do not directly pertain to the great sacrifice being made by Christ in obedience to God’s will. I find myself angry at the religious leaders (the Sanhedrin) because their charges are a concoction of blatant lies, or at best a misrepresentation of truth, and perjured testimony. The “trial” is a mockery of justice but still produces no evidence of guilt.

Then I’m appalled at the fickleness of the crowds who wildly cheered him only a few days before but now are loudly calling for his death and choosing a known assassin (Barabbas) in preference to Jesus for release. How could they! Then I start to feel total contempt for Pilate and Herod, neither of whom could find any fault in Jesus, but who treated him with contempt and mockery; and who ultimately decreed his death for no other reason than to pander to a screaming mob. This is nothing but cowardice and a total abdication of their responsibility to uphold the law: They had zero integrity!

Then I have to ask myself - if I had been there, knowing only what they knew, am I sure I would have done any better? So I shouldn’t be angry and judgmental of them. And if they had all done what was right, they would not have crucified the Lord, and what then for God’s Plan of Salvation? So then I get back to what this passage really tells us.

First, it tells us that God loved humankind so much that He required a means of atonement for our sin that only His own Son could satisfy. The symbolism of the torn veil (v45) tells us that Jesus’ sacrifice gave us as individuals direct access to God’s forgiving presence. Previously, the temple veil could only be passed by the high priest, going into God’s presence on behalf of someone. This heavy veil, 60 feet high and being torn top to bottom, was an act of God which opened the door to direct penitence and forgiveness.

Second, it tells us plainly that Jesus was so much more than a man. At the height of His agony in the crucifixion, he forgave the thief who repented (v42, 43), and prayed for all those who had done these deeds (v34). Even in the face of all the contempt and mockery and totally inhumane violence, Jesus loved us all to the end, because this event was for all the people who follow until the end of time. How can we not respond to such unlimited love and forgiveness as to give ourselves totally back to Him?

Lord, thank you from the bottom of my heart that You were obedient until death, and purchased my soul’s salvation despite my total unworthiness. May I always be true and faithful to You!

Sunday, April 16, 2017

Luke 24:1-53

Rev. Dr. Dale M. Weatherspoon

The final section of the Gospel of Luke contains the discovery of the empty tomb, the appearance to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, the appearance to the eleven back in Jerusalem, and ends with the departure of Jesus. All the appearances of the risen Christ are in or near Jerusalem, and they are told as occurrences on one day, the first day of the week.

The Empty Tomb - Luke 24:1-12

On the first day of the week, “they”, the unnamed women, came to the tomb to find the stone rolled away and found no body when they went into the tomb. They are “perplexed” when two men, not called angels in this text, ask them, “Why do you look for the living among the dead?”

There are three times in which to know an event: in rehearsal, at the time of the event, and when you are remembering the event. (think about a wedding: the wedding rehearsal, the wedding day and then looking at picture of the event and/or celebrating the anniversary)

The law, the prophets and the psalms foretold what was to come and Jesus told them what was going to happen. Then it happened. He was handed over, crucified, buried and raised on the third day. Now they remember his words and go tell the others. They tell not just the eleven but other women and followers of Jesus. Luke is enlarging the circle of disciples.

Appearance of the Road to Emmaus – Luke 24:13-35

Later that day, near evening, two men are walking to Emmaus talking about “all these things that had happened” when Jesus, unbeknownst to them, joins in the journey. In these verses 13-35, we learn of several major theological themes:

- Christ is known by revelation – the risen Christ appears to disciples, not to unbelievers on the street and in synagogues to frighten them into an acquiescing faith

- Summary of the gospel is recited – Cleopas, the only one of the two named, tells of Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people
- Old Testament Scriptures witness to Jesus – beginning with Moses, all the prophets shared of the coming Messiah
- Christ is revealed in the sacramental meal – took...blessed...broke...gave. Even today Christ is revealed in our communion meal
- Disciples understand by remembrance – sometimes we don't get it at first. But when we have an "Aha moment" our hearts are strangely warmed. A smile comes to our face. We become excited and our spirits are renewed and hope-filled.
- Disciples witness to what they have seen and heard – disciples of Jesus witness first to other disciples. After waiting and receiving the power of the Holy Spirit only then do they witness to the world

The women at the tomb come back to Jerusalem. The two disciples who walked to Emmaus come back to Jerusalem. After going to Judea, Samaria and to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8) the apostles all come back to Jerusalem. We too are to come back to the church to share our testimonies of God's grace, mercy, and transforming love through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Appearance in Jerusalem - Luke 24:36-49

Jesus is not a ghost. Jesus is the living Christ. Look at his hands and his feet. It is him! He has defeated death. In his raising he has fulfilled the words in the law of Moses, the prophets and the psalms. Easter is forever tied to Good Friday. The disciples are filled with joy even as they were "disbelieving and still wondering." It is alright to have doubts. While eating a meal of boiled fish, Jesus opened their minds to understanding the scriptures. Faith does not usually move from promise to fulfillment but from fulfillment to promise. Remembering is often the activating power of recognition. One cannot remember what one has not heard.

The Blessing and Departure – Luke 24:50-53

Jesus leads them out to Bethany, lifts his hands and blesses them before departing. Luke has come full circle. He began his Gospel with a scene in Jerusalem, in the temple, at the hour of worship. Events in that opening scene generated anticipation in the reader: God is at work and something marvelous is about to happen. We, the readers, are again in Jerusalem, in the temple, at the hour of worship. Events in this closing scene again generated anticipation: God is at work and something marvelous is about to happen.

We are God's Easter people! Because He lives we can face tomorrow!
May we continually praise God as we wait on the Holy Spirit so that we move with power, boldness and courage. May God's resurrection power live in you! Happy Easter!