THE LIFE OF

JESUS



VOLUME 3

READINGS, DEVOTIONS, POEMS

FISHERS UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

INTRODUCTION

The life of Jesus has been centermost to Christians for over 2000 years. His birth, life, death, resurrection, and ascension are central to the faith for believers all around the world. Everything that came before Him is B.C. – Before Christ. All that has come since is A.D. – Anno Domini, a Latin phrase that means, "in the year of our Lord." Indeed, Jesus is the centerpiece of history.

This study of Jesus' life provides a means to slow down and spend a year getting to know Him more deeply, more authentically, more intimately. His life is told in the four Gospels of the Bible: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. This study merges them together into one chronological series of 260 readings, at five readings a week. Sometimes an episode from Christ's life is told in only one of the four Gospels. Other times it is told in two, three, or even all four of the Gospels. In those instances, the reference for all of the Gospel occurrences is noted.

Now a little reminder. While this is a chronological study of the life of Jesus, nobody can piece together all of the events in Jesus' life in the exact order they occurred. This study follows a plausible sequence of events. But it is good to remember that the gospel writers weren't overly concerned with these sequential matters. They had a story to tell. There is great merit to reading each Gospel on its own from beginning to end. But that is for another time. Here, we will attempt to look at the overarching story of the life of Jesus in roughly chronological order.

There are several components to this year-long exploration into Jesus' life:
1. Daily Scripture Readings – Actually, they are five days a week. Consider reading each weekday to anchor your day in Christ. (In This Booklet)
2. Daily Devotions – These are written by me and correlate with the daily readings to help you think more deeply about what you are reading. (In This Booklet)
3. Daily Poems – These are written by my sister-in-law, Rev. Dr. Martha FrizLanger. They will help you imagine Jesus' story through poetry. (In This Booklet)
4. Weekly Studies – These studies, written by my colleague Rev. Dr. Ben Greenbaum and others, are great tools for small groups and classes.
5. Weekly Sermons – If you cannot attend worship with us in person, you can always go to fishersumc.org/resources/sermons to view online.
6. Weekly Podcasts – Ben and I will spend some time each week dialoguing about that week's readings.
7. Seasonal Opportunities – There will be varied opportunities for children, youth, and adults to connect with Jesus deeply throughout the year.
Many of these components are available online at fishersumc.org/the-life-of-jesus or in our Fishers UMC app that is available to download free in your app store.

Throughout my devotions, I use capital letters when referring to Jesus: Son, King, Messiah, His, He, Him, etc. This sets Jesus apart from other mere humans. An exception is when talking about his relationships (e.g. "Mary's son"). I do the same for references to God the Father and God the Holy Spirit. The hope is that we are all drawn to God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in this study as One who is Holy, yet approachable through His kindness and salvation.

All Scripture references are NIV unless otherwise noted.

Enjoy the journey!

Rev. Mark A. Ellcessor
Senior Pastor, Fishers United Methodist Church

MONDAY, MAY 30TH - WEEK 27, DAY 1

The Seventy-Two Disciples Return

☐ Read Luke 10:25-37

DEVOTIONAL

The phrase "Good Samaritan" is still used in modern culture – from hospital names to descriptions written on the news of people who do good deeds. Yet this story goes deeper than simply being nice.

Samaritans were seen as anything but "good" by their Jewish neighbors. The law expert would have considered the Samaritan to be unclean, even "bad." Over 700 years earlier, the northern kingdom of Israel was conquered by Assyria, resulting in a mixed breed of people despised by the pure breed Jews of Galilee and Judea. Even before that, these relatives from the north and south hated one another, resulting in the divided kingdom a thousand years before Jesus.

In one of the skirmishes between these factions, Israel returned captives of Judah to Jericho and "provided them with clothes and sandals, food and drink, and healing balm. All those who were weak they put on donkeys" (2 Chron. 28:15). In Jesus' story, all in Judean territory, the pure-bred Jewish religious leaders refuse to help the beaten man (also presumably a Jew). But a Samaritan (out of his territory) felt compassion and acted on it, providing healing ointment, transportation on his own donkey, and room & board at his own expense.

The expert in the law who was testing Jesus would have been friends with people like the priest and Levite in the story. He certainly understood that Jesus was pointing out his hypocrisy in knowing (he was an expert) but not doing.

This story is about being a neighbor without borders, and it is the kind of life Jesus calls us to live. We are to live with the eyes and hands of Jesus, ministering to all without regard to their status.

POEM

Dare I Stop?

We've all seen them, haven't we?
With their placards of need
Wanting the hand out
The meal
The cash
Dare I stop?
Reach into my pocket?
Pull out a few coins?
Be generous?

We've all seen them, haven't we?
With their pleas for a ride
Thumbs out to hitch hike
To the next town
To the hotel
Dare I stop?
Let them into my car?
Share space?
Be vulnerable?

We've all seen them, haven't we?
The one 'cross the tracks
With lifestyle consequences
The drugs
The poverty
Dare I stop?
Put my judgment aside?
Walk a mile in their shoes?
Be like Jesus?

NOTES

TUESDAY, MAY 31ST - WEEK 27, DAY 2

Jesus Visits Martha & Mary

☐ Read Luke 10:38-42

DEVOTIONAL

When Jesus went to the home of Martha and Mary (and their brother Lazarus), He sat down to speak. It was normal for the men to sit and listen while the women worked and prepared in another room. But Mary slipped in with the men, choosing to listen to Jesus rather than help her sister.

Martha confronted Jesus for allowing this, saying, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!" (v. 40). Did you catch that? "Lord, don't you care?" It's a common phrase we spew at God when we are not getting everything we want in life.

Before truly answering her request, Jesus just looked at her and said, "Martha, Martha." I wish we had a recording so that we could have heard His tone of voice. All I know that it mean different things when my parents addressed me as "Mark" vs. "Mark, Mark..." vs. "Mark Alan Ellcessor!"

After using her name twice, Jesus said to her, "you are worried and upset about many things, but few things are needed—or indeed only one. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her" (v. 41-42). Jesus didn't exactly work out a compromise between these sisters. He told the hard-working hostess that her lazy sister had actually made the better choice.

Jesus said, "few things are needed—or indeed only one." What is that one thing? Listening to Jesus? Relationship with Him? Worship? Faith? Following Jesus with complete abandon? But doesn't following Jesus include serving others?

There is much to wrestle with in this brief passage of Scripture. Take some time to pray and ask God what is the "one thing" that is needed.

POEM

Hospitality

I've waited for your coming
I've planned for each detail
My list is all consuming
I do not want to fail
To make you feel sure welcome
To meet your every need
Ensure your visit special
Your comfort to exceed
I wish, though, for a helper
Who sees what must be done
Who pitches in this mission
To have aid from someone
I've waited for your coming
What news you have to tell
To hear all that excites you
And if your life is well
To listen to your dreaming
The visions God has shared
The challenges before you
Adversities you've dared
Delighting, being with you
Is food enough for me
Just sitting in your presence
Absorbing your decrees

NOTES

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 1ST - WEEK 27, DAY 3

The Parable of the Persistent Friend

☐ Read Luke 11:5-8

DEVOTIONAL

When teaching on persistent prayer, Jesus used an analogy of asking a friend for bread after his family was tucked into bed. Keep in mind that the typical first century home was small, with everyone in the family sleeping in the same first floor room (see Week 2, Day 5). Getting up, grabbing bread, and opening the door would be a real disruption to the family. Jesus said, "even though he will not get up and give you the bread because of friendship, yet because of your shameless audacity he will surely get up and give you as much as you need."

This is a powerful image of the result of incessant, persistent prayer. I know a Christian man whose adult daughter walked away from the faith. When asked about her, the man said he was not worried. Why? Because he had been praying for his daughter every day for over twenty years. That's over 7000 times that he had knocked on the door of heaven and pleaded with God for his daughter to come back to faith. Rather than being discouraged that it had not yet happened, the man was buoyantly confident that it would occur. That's "shameless audacity!"

How is your prayer life? Do you knock, and keep on knocking? Do you ask, and keep on asking? Do you seek, and keep on seeking? Do you confidently expect that your Father in heaven will give you good things? More than that, do you completely trust that God will "give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him" (v. 13)?

Take some time to pray the Lord's Prayer. As you say each line, pause for as long as it takes to deeply reflect on what you are praying. If need be, pray it over and over. Do the same for your own prayers.

Approach the throne of heaven with shameless audacity!

POEM

I Want To Learn

I want to learn
Can you teach me?
How do I talk to God?

It seems that John
Spoke and heard directly
Can I sit at his feet
And learn?

I've sat with the righteous
I've prayed the Psalms
The rote prayers are memorized
But is this what God wants?
How am I to pray?

As your disciple, Jesus,
I want to pray like you do
Must I go away from the world?
Into the desert?
Atop a mountain?
Must I fast?
How long must I spend?

And what do I say
To attract God's attention?
Do I heap up praise?
Do I spill my heart?
Do I sit in silence?
Do I beat myself in repentance?
Do I limit my asking?

Lord, teach me to pray like
John taught his disciples.

NOTES

THURSDAY, JUNE 2ND - WEEK 27, DAY 4

Jesus Teaches About Being Filled with Light

☐ Read Luke 11:33-36

DEVOTIONAL

Just like a lamp brings light to a room, our spiritual eyes either enlighten or darken our souls. The world is full of both good and bad things. What we choose to look at, examine, focus on, and absorb into our lives makes all the difference. The obvious includes what we look at on TV, computers, phones, and in print. Also impactful is whether and how we look at other people, whether with lust, with disdain, or with blessing.

Our lives are also illuminated by the words we speak. This includes the choice to have conversations that are spiritually boundary-breaking, either toward or away from God. Words matter. What we say and how we say it will either enlighten or darken our spirits.

This metaphor might be extended to include our thought life. How we think about ourselves, others, and God certainly brings light or brings darkness to us. Jesus said, "See to it, then, that the light within you is not darkness" (v. 35). Choosing Christ-like light is less obvious than flipping a switch in the living room. We must make sure that all we do brings the light of God into our lives.

Prayer: "God, I have sinned against You in thought, word, and deed. Please forgive me. Help me to align my mind, my eyes, my mouth, my hands and my feet to Your will for me. Fill me with the Light of Christ, so that it may radiate from me through all my thoughts, words, and actions. If there is any darkness in me, illuminate it so that I may glorify You at all times in every way. Amen."

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POEM

This Is War!

I'm not one who usually fights
Getting into battle
I usually avoid conflict
Trying to opt for peace

But when I see beloved ones
Attacked by The Enemy's
Horrible arrows
And besieged upon by
The Enemy's minions

I armor up

This is War

There is no middle ground

When lies are being told
When truth is being hidden
When souls are being sold
When bondage becomes the norm
When demons are running a muck
And taking up residence
In beloved ones' temples
When battering abuse begins
And continues
On the body
In the mind
Upon the soul
When thieves break in and steal
Innocence
Life
When darkness tries to snuff out
Light
Truth
Hope

There is no middle ground

This is War

I'm armored up

Against The Enemy's minions
Who are besieging the beloved ones
With spiritual weapons
From the arsenal of The Enemy
And I stand with The Beloved, for the Beloved

Until peace is restored
Until the conflict ceases
I am in the battle
I am in the fight

FRIDAY, JUNE 3RD - WEEK 27, DAY 5

Jesus Challenges the Pharisees' Rules

☐ Read Luke 11:37-54

DEVOTIONAL

We say your walk should match your talk. Practice what you preach. Your inside should be consistent with your outside. Jesus said we radiate light from the inside out. Same for darkness. So when the Pharisee criticized Jesus for not doing a ceremonial hand washing, Jesus seized the opportunity to point out the hypocrisy of rule-creating, love-ignoring religious leaders. He scolded them for:

- Being full of greed
- Being full of wickedness
- Neglecting justice
- Neglecting the love of God
- Seeking self-honor
- Being spiritually dead

One thing is for certain: Jesus had courage! The Pharisees had long been looking for ways to discredit and dispatch with Jesus. Yet when one of them invited Him to his home for dinner, Jesus accepted. Most people avoid their enemies, but Jesus willingly walked into the conflict, then confronted His host!

Jesus hated hypocrisy – religious show without loving God and His poorest and most burdened children. The Pharisees were experts in looking good, but abject failures in being good. The result was the religious establishment "began to oppose him fiercely and to besiege him with questions, waiting to catch him in something he might say" (v. 53-54).

Hmmm. The host became host-ile. Things aren't always as they appear. That's hypocrisy at its worst. Jesus demanded an integrity that has the inner person and outer person equally washed clean.

POEM

Caught!
I tried to sneak
I tried to hide
In plain sight
My ego's pride
The masks I wear
My living lie
My evil thoughts
My boasting pride
All my excuses
My blinded eyes
The ways I cheat
My slippery slide
My weak resolve
My compromise
The ways I've strayed
A road that's wide
You have exposed
My wrongful guide
The fancy garments
I've applied
To cover up
The ways I've died

NOTES

MONDAY, JUNE 6TH - WEEK 28, DAY 1

Jesus Teaches about Authentic Discipleship

☐ Read Luke 12:1-7

DEVOTIONAL

Once again Jesus was with many thousands of people. But rather than lean into them for support, Jesus turned to His twelve trainees and spoke about the contagious hypocrisy of the Pharisees. With His actions, Jesus told them not to be enthralled by the crowds. With His words, Jesus told them not to be intimidated by the powerful. He challenged them to authentic discipleship.

What does it mean to be an authentic disciple of Jesus? It is definitely not hypocrisy, which aims to separate private life from public persona. It is not fear, which values praise of people over God. It is not worry, which forgets that God will provide in all circumstances and ways. An authentic disciple is one who both publicly acknowledges and privately trusts the Lord.

Putting it bluntly, Jesus said, "I tell you, my friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that can do no more. But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear him who, after your body has been killed, has authority to throw you into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him" (v. 4-5). It's plainly true, isn't it?

Yet God not only has the power to throw you into hell, he also has the power to bless you immeasurably and welcome you into heaven. Jesus put it like this, "Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? Yet not one of them is forgotten by God. Indeed, the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows" (v. 6-7). God won't forget you. Don't forget God.

Now is the day when the previously hidden words of God are being made known, when the things kept hidden in darkness have been brought into the light, when whispered secrets are rooftop proclamations!

POEM

They Can't Take That Away From Me

They can take
My possessions
My status
My job
They can rob my dignity
Disrespect
Bully
Brutality, jeering all can come
They can take my life
By pointing a gun
My tongue cut out
My voice silenced
Even my brain construed
By electric current
But the promises of God
Toward me
For me
About me
Cannot be construed
They
Nor you
Can take that away
From me

NOTES

TUESDAY, JUNE 7TH - WEEK 28, DAY 2

Jesus Teaches about Honoring the Holy Spirit

☐ Read Luke 12:8-12

DEVOTIONAL

Admittedly, this is one of the more troublesome passages for me. Jesus said, "And everyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but anyone who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven" (Luke 12:10). This comes on the heels of Jesus warning His disciples to avoid the hypocrisy of the religious leaders at all costs.

In a completely different context in Mark 3:28-29, Jesus said, "Truly I tell you, people can be forgiven all their sins and every slander they utter, but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven; they are guilty of an eternal sin." The setting here is that the religious leaders were accusing Jesus of using demons to drive out demons. They were calling that which is holy, evil. This is similar to what appears in Matthew 12:31-32.

I have so many questions as I wrestle with these passages:

Why is it forgivable to speak against Jesus, but unforgivable to blaspheme against the Holy Spirit?
Is there a difference between "will not be forgiven" and "cannot be forgiven"?
What is blasphemy against the Holy Spirit? Why doesn't Jesus spell it out for easier understanding?

It seems that blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is denying His work and accrediting it to the devil. This denies the very authority and power of God, cutting that person off from the work of God. I don't believe this is something that people who are authentically pursuing God need to worry about.

What do you think?

POEM

Prayer

How often have I
Missed the way of the Lord
By listening to my own GPS
Instead of taking God's path?

How often have I
Questioned a call from the Spirit
By needing all the facts first
Instead of obeying God's voice?

How often have I
Broken the heart of my Lord
By knowingly or unknowingly wandered
Instead of staying with the flock?

How often have I
Led another astray
By flirting with evil, even doing it
Instead of shouting "Be gone, Satan!"?

How often have I
Missed the chance to encourage another
By packing my calendar to the brim
Instead of inking in Sabbath space?

How often have I
Asked for forgiveness for dishonoring the Spirit
By my rebellious and stubborn ways
Instead of confessing, "I need you, Lord!"?

NOTES

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 8TH - WEEK 28, DAY 3

The Parable of the Rich Fool

☐ Read Luke 12:13-21

DEVOTIONAL

Be on your guard.

In Luke 12, Jesus used this phrase two consecutive times: "Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy" (v. 1) and "Be on your guard against all kinds of greed" (v. 15).

Jesus again looks at the inner person. He is not interested in who gets what inheritance in a family. But He is interested in reminding us that "life does not consist in an abundance of possessions."

His story of a self-focused entrepreneur who sets himself up for a life of luxury, only to die and end up with nothing, is a reminder to focus on God, not self. Jesus warns: "This is how it will be with whoever stores up things for themselves but is not rich toward God" (v. 21).

Focus on the phrases "stores up things for themselves" vs. "rich toward God." Does this mean it is wrong to set aside savings or prepare for retirement in our modern world? I think not. But if we do so at the expense of being rich toward God, then we are on thin ice. The problem is not so much the amount of wealth, but the focus of that wealth: self or God. Our desire and focus is to be God alone.

We say, "The one with the most toys, wins." Jesus says, "The one with the most toys, dies."

Be on your guard.

POEM

Worry Warts

You kiss a toad
You get a wart
You worry sick
You break your heart
You sit depressed
You crumble sure
You live a life
You can't endure

Instead allow
The toad to hop
The cares away
The worry stop
The kiss instead
The Lord will give
The comfort sure
Upon your head

NOTES

THURSDAY, JUNE 9TH - WEEK 28, DAY 4

Jesus Teaches about Preparing for His Return

☐ Read Luke 12:35-48

DEVOTIONAL

Being ready for the return of Jesus has nothing to do with knowing when He will come back. In fact, it will be a shock when it happens.

Rather, it is about living every day as if He is coming back tomorrow AND as if he is coming back in a thousand years. We are to use everything we have been given and entrusted with to the full extent, investing for the long haul to transform the world. The more we're given, the more Jesus will demand and ask of us (v. 48b). This kind of obedience will change the lives of others and bring about the kingdom on earth. If Jesus returns tomorrow or if we die first, either way He says, "Well done," if we have served Him faithfully.

There are several players in this teaching of Jesus:

The Master – that is Jesus, who will return
The manager – who will put the servants to work
The servants – who make themselves ready by serving
The unbelievers – who will end up in the place of torment with the servants who don't serve.

Servants who live a life of service will be served by Christ when He returns (v. 37, 42-44). Servants who live a life of selfishness will lose it all and be punished in severe measures (v. 5, 20, 45-48). I must say that hell is not my favorite topic. But we can't ignore it in Scripture. Earlier in Luke 12:5, Jesus said, "Fear him who, after your body has been killed, has authority to throw you into hell."

Discipleship is demanding. Jesus summed it up like this: "From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked."

POEM

Read The Signs

Angry sticks rubbing
Arrows, swords warring
Sparks fly
Fill the sky
Bombs, grenades exploding

Mountains mouths spewing
Cannons balls chewing
Earth apart
Body parts
Children, widows wailing

Tornadoes whirling
Wind bags hate hurling
Filth everywhere
Filling the air
Pollution, destruction ripping

Tsunami waves crashing
Atomic waste splashing
Planet warms
Prophets warn
Signs, endings coming

NOTES

FRIDAY, JUNE 10TH - WEEK 28, DAY 5

Jesus Warns about Future Division

☐ Read Luke 12:49-53

DEVOTIONAL

The fire that Jesus ignited on Earth cannot leave the landscape unchanged. He said, "Do you think I came to bring peace on earth? No, I tell you, but division" (v. 51). This family against family kind of discipleship is not something you see on a typical Christmas card greeting, nor something you usually hear in an Easter worship message.

But being a follower of Christ is an all-in, self-denying, cross-bearing, family-splintering undertaking. It is not something that is pleasant to behold. While it is God's desire that all people would come to know Him, the reality is that some refuse. In many parts of the world, families are ripped apart when a person begins to follow Jesus. I imagine that they would read this passage with real understanding.

Even in the American culture, we experience a taste of this. Our "cancel culture" will unfriend and unfollow you on social media, and unwelcome and "uninvite" you to family gatherings if you state beliefs that are not held by others. Blood may be thicker than water, but it seems that political correctness can be thicker than blood.

This passage is similar to Matthew 10:34-36 (see Week 20, Day 2). There Jesus was sending out the Twelve Disciples on what would be a sometimes successful, sometimes hostile mission. Whether among family or in the community, being an authentic disciple of Jesus often turns a calm sea turbulent.

Here is a question: If it came down to following Jesus so closely that you would experience family division, or believing in Jesus so casually that your family wouldn't care, which would you choose?

POEM

How Unpleasant It Is

How unpleasant it is
When we fight and we quarrel
When we hate one another
When we hold bitterness
Our stomachs, they tighten
Our blood pressures rise
Our mouths spew out poison
We sit and despise
How unpleasant it is
How unpleasant it is

When our Facebook posts hatred
When we "one-up" another
When we insist we are right
Our circles get smaller
Our muscles grow tense
Our teeth grit in anger
We stand and lift placards
How unpleasant it is

How unpleasant it is
When we cancel our families
When we lock our hearts' doors
When we yell or stop talking
Our gateways get chained
Our minds get stuck
Our children go to war
We run and grab weapons
How unpleasant it is
How unpleasant it is

When we realize the destruction
When our resources end
When we bury the casualty
Our eyes can't stop crying
Our prayers go unanswered
Our faith-light goes out
We lay and die unreconciled
How unpleasant it is

NOTES

MONDAY, JUNE 13TH - WEEK 29, DAY 1

Jesus Warns about Future Events

☐ Read Luke 12:54-59

DEVOTIONAL

In the previous reading, we saw Jesus warning people that following Him could lead to division in our families. Yet in this passage, we see Jesus reminding us to be reconciled to our adversaries before taking our civil disputes to court. So there is a tension: the call to follow Jesus demands both division and reconciliation. How can this be?

In our lives we often don't get close enough to Jesus for either to happen. Complacency and avoidance are our marching orders, not division and reconciliation. Jesus demands more. Much more.

I have heard so many people say that religion is a private thing. It's just me and Jesus. My faith is personal. I couldn't disagree more. Following Jesus is a public thing, not a private one, and it is by nature interpersonal, not personal. And thinking it's just me and Jesus? Sorry. How about Jesus and me… that is the mission of Jesus enlisting me into His co-mission to change the world!

Many of us think of Jesus something like the blanket that the Peanuts character Linus carried around. Always there when he needed comfort and companionship. Rather, we are more like Snoopy on top of his doghouse, ready at a moment's notice to risk everything to take on the Red Baron.

On a discipleship scale from one to ten, where one is, "I believe in Jesus" and five is "I go to church every week" and ten is "I am risking my livelihood and relationships for Jesus," where would you place yourself? Take a moment and ask the Holy Spirit where He wants you to live? If there is a difference, spend some time today asking yourself why.

POEM

Why Do You Hate Me?

Why do you hate me?
I've done you no wrong
I'm just living my life
Just going along
The path God is taking
This soul of mine on
Why do you hate me?
I've done you no wrong

There's plenty of room
In this big spacious world
For talents and day dreams
For both of us, Girl
Your focus is off
I'm not in your way
Stop looking at me
And live your today

You catch me off guard
With your knife killing words
At time of my joy
You whip out your sword
I don't want to fight you
I don't have a clue
Why do you hate me
I'm me and you're you

This isn't a contest
This isn't a fight
I just want to express me
And live my full life
Let me give my offering
And you give yours, too
Why do you hate me?
I haven't a clue

NOTES

TUESDAY, JUNE 14TH - WEEK 29, DAY 2

The Parable of the Unfruitful Fig Tree

☐ Read Luke 13:1-9

DEVOTIONAL

It is natural for us to ask why bad things happen to good people. In Jesus' day, the assumption was that bad things happened to bad people. Jesus used incidents of martyred Galileans and of people from Siloam who died in a tragic accident to let the people know that the deceased were no worse sinners than they.

In fact, Jesus said twice, "But unless you repent, you too will all perish." Taken together with Luke 12, where Jesus focused on our eternal destiny (see Luke 12:5, 10, 20, 40, 46), this warning seems to have eternal implications. Jesus reminded the crowd that they have time to straighten out their lives and bring them into alignment with God.

In the parable of the non-producing fig tree, Jesus put the tree on notice for one more year. Imagine the impact when, at a later time, Jesus saw a fig tree not producing fruit and made it wither before their eyes (see Matthew 21 and Mark 11). Indeed, in this parable, the landowner had been looking for the tree to produce fruit for three years. Jesus' ministry on earth was three years. Jesus didn't come simply be a good, moralistic teacher. He came to call us to a repentant and fruitful life.

The truth is that we are all bad people, because "all have sinned" (Romans 3:23). The question is not, why do bad things happen to good people? Rather, it is why do good things happen to bad people? 2 Corinthians 5:21 says, "God made [Jesus] who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."

Let us live fruitful lives, based not on our own goodness, but solely on the righteousness of Christ given to us on the cross!

POEM

The Scale

There is a lie
About a scale
Of Justice weighing acts

We think some sins
Weigh more than most
While others merely specks

We pray good deeds
Will tip the scale
Full in our favor sure

Our tally list
Is all a jest
Comparing devoid score

No one is good
None free of sin
There is no tipping rule

To join the game
Comparing weight
Is folly for the fool

Our Holy God
No sin can stand
E'en one, the judgment death

Each demon rules
A choking hold
And strangles all our breath

We try to calm
It's hunger cries
By soothing, numbing drugs

When all is dark
And silence falls
Our pillow, tears will flood

The scale, a lie
A covering
Of blood, our only cure

Unless we trust
And turn to God
The sentence--death--is sure

NOTES

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 15TH - WEEK 29, DAY 3

Jesus Heals a Woman Crippled for 18 Years

☐ Read Luke 13:10-17

DEVOTIONAL

It seems like Jesus healed on the Sabbath more than other days, or maybe these were more noteworthy due to controversy. Throughout the Gospels, the religious leaders were continually challenging Jesus for breaking Sabbath laws, and Jesus was continually challenging them for hypocrisy. Here, Jesus humiliated them by pointing out that they loved their farm animals more than this handicapped woman.

Both Luke ("crippled by a spirit") and Jesus ("Satan has kept her bound") attribute this woman's condition to the presence of evil. Again, this is a common theme in Jesus' healing. It certainly set up a contrast. On one side was a Satan-inflicted woman that Jesus called "a daughter of Abraham." On the other were law-abiding religious leaders that Jesus called "hypocrites." Actually, both needed to be set free, but only the woman accepted.

It seems strange that when Jesus healed the woman from eighteen years of misery, the synagogue leader could only become critical. Didn't he notice that she could now stand straight? Didn't he get excited just a little when she "praised God" and "all the people were delighted" at her healing? Why is it that we so often get trapped in the form of godliness, but deny its power (see 2 Timothy 3:5)?

At the end of this episode, the only one left "crippled by an evil spirit" and "bent double" was the synagogue leader. Why didn't Jesus just heal him of his paralyzed thinking? Perhaps you have to want it in order to receive it from Jesus.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, open me to all the work that You want to do in my life this day. Free me from my physical, intellectual, emotional, relational, and spiritual handicaps. I trust You to set me free. Amen.

POEM

Free

I once stood erect
My head I held high
I leapt through the fields
My face towards the sky
My fingers creative
My mind full engaged
A song always singing
My heart unafraid

One day, captors found me
I fell in their trap
Once beat, fire-branded
They bound me with strap
My body was stripped bare
Abuse, brutal rape
The whip ate my back raw
The gouges full gaped

On slop they did feed me
Manure was my bed
They mocked and they scorned me
Their lies filled my head
My dreams of deliverance
No Savior would come
I soon did believe them
No hope for you, Scum!

The days, weeks and years passed
Monotony, void
Mistreatment and cruelty
My daily reward
Dry bones in a graveyard
A corpse walking dead
Bent over and stumbling
Ne'er raising my head

A twisted gait brought me
Before a large crowd
Expecting more insult
For blows I did bow
But then heard the words clear
Woman, you are free!
Do ears now deceive me?
It's surely not me

Then suddenly, strangely
My body did stretch
My back with its scarred bend
Stood straight and erect
My captors attacked him
His body, my shield
His strength everlasting
His love mighty steel

I now stand in deep awe
My head I hold high
I leap through the green fields
My face towards the sky
My fingers creative
My mind full engaged
A song always singing
My heart unafraid

THURSDAY, JUNE 16TH - WEEK 29, DAY 4

Jesus Teaches the Way of Salvation

☐ Read Luke 13:22-30

DEVOTIONAL

While teaching, someone asked Jesus, "Lord, are only a few people going to be saved?" (v. 22). His answer is a bit of a surprise: "Work hard..." (NLT) or "Make every effort..." (NIV). Kingdom life in heaven will be attained by kingdom living on earth. Ephesians 2:8-10 says that we are not saved by good works, but we are saved for good works. How we live matters.

Those who find themselves on the other side of a locked door at heaven's gate will hear the words, "I don't know you or where you come from. Away from me, all you evildoers!" (Luke 13:27). Apparently being born a Jew doesn't give one an eternal green card. Nor does tacit knowledge of or belief in Jesus – "We ate and drank with you, and you taught in our streets" (v. 26).

This only leads to weeping and gnashing of teeth. To add insult to injury, Jesus told them that while they were locked outside, they would see not only spiritual giants, but also foreigners from every corner of the earth entering the kingdom of God.

So, will everyone be saved? The simple answer is, "No." In John 14:6, Jesus said, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." And in Acts 4:12, Peter told the Jewish leaders, "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved."

In 2 Corinthians 6:2, Paul wrote, "now is the time of God's favor, now is the day of salvation." That offer is open to you now, today. Confess your sins to the Lord. Accept His gift of salvation through Jesus' death on the cross. Ask the Holy Spirit to fill you so that you may live a life worthy of your calling!

POEM

Don't Miss Your Chance

With all the hub
And bub of things
Don't miss your chance
For anything
The Spirit's here
Not often clear
Apparent
If you're listening

It wants to nest
Within your breast
A home the Dove
For settling
The fox, a den
The bull, a pen
Allow It rest
Most gentling

So set your mind
Resist the blind
Of eyes busy
A-flitting
The focus clear
Christ's presence here
Embrace your chance
A-sitting

NOTES

FRIDAY, JUNE 17TH - WEEK 29, DAY 5

Jesus Grieves Over Jerusalem

☐ Read Matthew 23:37-39, Luke 13:31-35

DEVOTIONAL

Pharisees in Jerusalem warned Jesus, "Leave this place and go somewhere else. Herod wants to kill you." Whether or not this was true, the religious leaders just wanted Jesus to leave the center of their religious and political power. He proclaimed that He would "keep on driving out demons and healing people" and acknowledged that He would be killed in Jerusalem.

Jesus then wept over the city, "Jerusalem, Jerusalem!" Jesus loved Jerusalem, and longed for the leaders and people to come to Him. But He was not successful by the world's standards.

How many of us weep over our communities today? When referring to their churches and communities, many pastors I know say they and them instead of we and us. Rather than grieving over our communities, we serve them with passionless obedience, hoping for their approval. Rather than boldness that leads to changed lives (at our own risk), too many take the safe road. As a result, nothing much changes. We too remain unchanged, unharmed.

Jesus would grieve over Jerusalem again, not long before His crucifixion (see Luke 19:41-44). In the same way, Jesus grieves for all people who will not come to Him. Jesus weeps for pastors and church leaders who serve with passionless obedience. Jesus cries out for His Church, the body of believers, to follow Him with absolute dedication.

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POEM

Famine

I hear the time is coming
When a famine will occur
Not of access to the Scriptures
But the hearing of the Word

The prophets will be speaking
And high callings be present
But most will seek the easy
And the thrill of the next moment

Translations will be plentiful
We'll have the chance to roam
But mission trips will falter
If we leave our Bibles home

We'll hear the Word read loudly
Tech experts making clear
But preachers might interpret
Wrongly, tickling the ear

And most will be distracted
Lots of nothing they will do
The thrill of surface skiing
Deep conversations few

There'll be talk about the weather
Sports and problems of the day
We'll throw our candy to the poor
And leave them in dismay

Until we learn to take it in
Unto God's Word, deep listen
Until we learn to live it out
And to the Word to hasten

We'll look good on the outside
Thinking truly we are sated
Though our bellies will be
big and round
Starvation the true state is

Until we not just "come" and "see"
But have bowels stirred with feeling
We never will complete a task
To minister deep healing

Would we be wept for by our Lord
and hear of our rejection?
Or will we hasten to the call
Disciple our intention?

So do not crawl up to the trough
And eat husks meant for swine
Come to yourself, return to home
And with your Father dine

His table spread for you each day
His Word, a banquet sure
Yes, dine with, celebrate
Christ's feast
True fullness you'll procure

MONDAY, JUNE 20TH - WEEK 30, DAY 1

Jesus Heals a Man with Dropsy

☐ Read Luke 14:1-6

DEVOTIONAL

Same song, second verse. Jesus and some religious leaders are in the presence of a person needing healing on the Sabbath. In this case, Jesus was having dinner at the house of a "prominent Pharisee" and his colleagues.

The religious leaders could have seen this as an opportunity to display compassion for the man with abnormal swelling in his body. Providing him a place to rest and prop his feet above his heart might have drawn the man closer to God.

They could have leaned forward with breathless anticipation for Jesus to perform a miraculous healing. Seeing the powerful touch of Jesus which provided instantaneous disappearance of the man's edema might have drawn them closer to God.

Rather, they took the posture of silence (v. 4). They just would not say whether it was right or wrong to relieve this man's suffering on a Sabbath day, when work was prohibited. Even after Jesus healed the man, they continued their silence (v. 6).

Their silence was not because they were speechless at the majesty of God in their midst. It was more like the silent treatment, a means of strengthening their solidarity with each other while watching Jesus dig a hole for Himself by breaking their Sabbath rules.

Sad. They just missed the point. The man was in need of a miracle, and the Miracle Worker was right there with them! But they cared more about their own positions of authority than the One who healed with authority. Think about it: in what ways do you remain silent when your voice may be needed to speak out?

POEM

Just What's Allowed?

Is it allowed to pull a cow
Out of a ditch a-bellowing?
Is it allowed to halt the plow
And take some time for mellowing?

Is it allowed to walk a mile
Or two if you are dreaming?
Is it allowed to sit and scowl
A-resting but yet scheming?

Is it allowed to cook a meal
For guests upon the Sabbath?
Is it allowed foul thoughts to sit
Within your mind inhabit?

Just what's allowed? Only what's seen?
Or is there deeper resting
Commanded on the Sabbath day
Compassion full investing?

NOTES

TUESDAY, JUNE 21ST - WEEK 30, DAY 2

Jesus Teaches about Humility

☐ Read Luke 14:7-14

DEVOTIONAL

After a showdown with His hosts over healing on the Sabbath, Jesus then looked at all the prominent people elbowing their way to the head table seats of honor. He challenged them to take the lowest place, at the foot of the table. This was a countercultural jab to the Pharisees who adored their own prominence in society.

I wonder, how many times do we pick the places of honor? It is normal to want to be the best, to be the first, to be at the head table near the host (what famous people are you following on social media?). It is part of our self-centered nature to want to be noticed, while ignoring those of a lower status (don't forget them giving the silent treatment to the guy with dropsy).

When Jesus said, "love your neighbor as yourself," He didn't need to give us a primer in loving ourselves. So, Jesus warned against being that kind of guest, always jockeying for the best position. He said we should eschew the place of honor and seek out the lowest place. Who does that? It is over-the-top humility.

In fact, Jesus warned against being that kind of host as well, only inviting those who can and will repay you for your hospitality. He challenged them to not invite their friends and family and rich neighbors, but instead invite "the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind" (v. 13). Who does that? Remember, this is about dinner parties, not food pantries. It is over-the-top hospitality.

This whole encounter began with a debate over proper etiquette on the Sabbath (v. 1-5). But Jesus shifted their focus on a religion of rules toward a humility of the heart: "For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted" (v. 11). What would Jesus say to you?

POEM

High Mighty

High and mighty
Buttons tight-y
Chest swelled out and pompous
Scan the crowding
Join the proud-ing
Center staging conscious

Throw the tails high
Nose up to sky
Looking down on others
Climb the ladder
No one matters
Stepping on your brothers

Take the high seat
Fork the best meat
First in line your goal-ing
Hog the air space
Others disgrace
Intention is controlling

'Til the hostess
Who's the most-est
Pulls your chair from under
Seats you lower
As you glower
Embarrassing—your blunder

NOTES

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 22ND - WEEK 30, DAY 3

The Parable of the Great Banquet

☐ Read Luke 14:15-24

DEVOTIONAL

Jesus was at a dinner party being hosted by a prominent Pharisee for some of his elite friends. He had just warned the host about only inviting the people of high status, and the guests about seeking the places of honor at such gatherings. They had to be appalled. So, Jesus told a story!

Extending the banquet metaphor, Jesus told a parable of a wealthy man who held a banquet and invited many guests, all of whom were too preoccupied to come. So, the poor, crippled, blind, and lame were invited, exactly as Jesus had just taught them (v. 13, 21).

Since there was still room, the host sent his servant to the streets, alleys, roads, and country lanes to fill the house. All this is about what it takes to be "repaid at the resurrection of the righteous" (v. 14), and "eat at the feast in the kingdom of God" (v. 15). Kingdom living demands compassion for the least of these.

Most of the guests in Jesus' parable would not have been allowed to come to the Temple by the Pharisees to whom Jesus was speaking. Inviting them to a dinner party would have been unthinkable.

Remember, this parable is about eating "at the feast in the kingdom of God" (v. 15). The elitist Pharisees saw themselves as being on the A-list. When Jesus said, "A certain man was preparing a great banquet and invited many guests," they no doubt pictured themselves. But Jesus jabbed at their self-importance by saying all the A-listers were simply too busy to show up for God, while all the outsiders eagerly participated.

What about you? Do you tend to make excuses when God is inviting you to commune with Him? Or do you eagerly go in to His banquet table?

POEM

The Table

A friend of mine once had a dream
About the banquet table.
It held abundance, every plate
Was filled more than it able.
While overflowing, more came out
From the Great Host's rich store--
Donned with wide grin and
White chef's hat
He laughed, "Yes! Have some more!"

My friend saw that the table full
Had people from all tribes.
The beggars sat right next to kings;
Illiterate talked with scribes.
Each toasted to each other's health,
Each shared respect and blessing,

Each felt an equal to the least;
No one suggested besting.
And in the corner were two dogs
On short leash they were chained,
Their collars tight, a muzzle kept
The guests from being maimed.
And if they barked or even growled
The Great Host's face would darken
And loudly silence terror meant
Upon weak souls to frighten

This friend, enjoying the great feast,
Was thrilled to be invited.
But with a sadness she did note
An empty seat beside her.
Upon the place card was the name
Of one for whom she'd prayed
Her friend had sat but from the chair
Had wandered and not stayed.

"She's missing out on this great feast;
I wonder where she's gone."
And so her eyes began to scan
The vast and numbered throng.
With horror, she, her friend soon spied
Not with the heirs of God,
But in the corner, on the floor,
Caressing the chained dogs.

Her LORD had chained these vicious curs
Which previously had hounded,
Which chased and bit and mangled life
Were now helpless and bounded.
But though they were her enemies
Their comfort was familiar
And so to them she did return
Rejecting her Deliverer.

And so, we've, too received the call
To come and join the table
But often the familiar acts
Chain us from being able
To feast upon the LORD's full grace
And rest in his full presence.
We're left outside, by our own choice,
To live as though a peasant.

THURSDAY, JUNE 23RD - WEEK 30, DAY 4

Jesus Teaches about the Cost of Discipleship

☐ Read Luke 14:25-35

DEVOTIONAL

It is noteworthy to see that "large crowds were traveling with Jesus" before looking at His words about being a disciple. Jesus was always interested in true discipleship, regardless of the number of people who that challenge drew in and how many it pushed out.

Here He says that being His disciple demands such dedication that our love for our families and our own lives looks like hatred by comparison. The picture of carrying your own cross makes one think – would I die for Jesus?

So, He says that before jumping in and becoming a Jesus follower, we should count the cost on what this will demand. His statement sums it up: "those of you who do not give up everything you have cannot be my disciples" (v. 33).

Just like salt loses its flavor when it gets wet and dries out again, so we lose our discipleship when we soak ourselves in the world's values and temptations and successes, then try to merge back into life with Jesus. According to Jesus, this makes us expendable. Jesus wants only true disciples.

What does a disciple look like today? My working definition is this:

A disciple is someone who knows, loves, and obeys Jesus.

Being a disciple involves the head, heart and hands. It is a surrender of self and an immersion into the person, work and calling of Jesus. It is about loving God, then loving others into loving God. So, perhaps my definition should be expanded:

A disciple is someone who knows, loves, and obeys Jesus,
and helps others do the same.

A warning: living like this will cost you everything that the world tells you to hold dear. How is Jesus calling you to be His disciple?

POEM

Tabulation

You add, subtract
Your books intact
Accounts are full
Awaiting

The plan's in place
You have the space
Surveying done
Foundation

Investments made
Division, trade
The money spent for
Building

The cost is more
The cross beams sore
The impact
Multiplying

Now incomplete
The purse fatigued
"You fool," the tongues
Are wagging

All spent for naught
All that was bought
Now sits abandoned
Wasting

NOTES

FRIDAY, JUNE 24TH - WEEK 30, DAY 5

The Parable of the Lost Sheep

☐ Read Matthew 18:12-14, Luke 15:1-7

DEVOTIONAL

Once again Jesus is at the epicenter of a tsunamic cultural clash. Luke's setting pits on one side the religious elite – the Pharisees and teachers of the law. These men were the respected spiritual authorities in the land. On the other side were the despised and rejected – tax collectors (think traitors) and sinners (think prostitutes). They were the disrespected dregs of society. Somehow, Jesus preferred to hang out with the lowlifes (see Luke 15:1-2)

Matthew's gospel sets the story in the question from His own disciples, "Who, then, is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" (Matt. 18:1). This topic was a continual source of debate among the Twelve, each of whom want the number one position at Jesus' side. But Jesus challenged their aspirations, instead calling them to become like little children, who were the lowest rung on the Jewish family ladder (see Matt 18:2-10).

In these two similar contexts which pitted the haves against the have nots, Jesus told the parable of the lost sheep. He knew that no shepherd would be happy if he started the day with a hundred sheep and ended it with ninety-nine. A summer of those kind of days would make for a small flock. Every shepherd worth his wool would do whatever it took to find that one wayward, wandering sheep.

In the context of lowly children, Jesus said, "In the same way your Father in heaven is not willing that any of these little ones should perish" (Matt. 18:14). In the context of lowly traitors and prostitutes, Jesus said, "I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent" (Luke 15:7).

Do you feel like a spiritually lost sheep? No worries. The Great Shepherd is on a search and rescue mission for you! Take a moment and read Psalm 23, picturing yourself as a sheep and God as your Shepherd. Find rest on His shoulders!

POEM

Baa, Baa, Black Sheep

Baa, baa, black sheep
Have you not a friend?
Are your days of safety
Coming to an end?
Have you wandered way too far?
Is there not a guiding star?
Has your throat its baa-ing stopped
For not an ear can hear you?

There, there, black sheep
Do not give up yet
One is searching, trav'ling
Conscious of the threat
Wolves a-sniffing round you
Thorns a-bruising crown you
Cry out, lamb, your shepherd comes
A-reaching down to save you

Anointment, Soothing
All that cuts so deep
Water, fresh and cooling
Now your thirsting quench
Lifting, bearing all the way
To the fold where you will stay
Quiet, lamb, rest peaceful now
A-gently in his strong arms

NOTES

MONDAY, JUNE 27TH - WEEK 31, DAY 1

The Parable of the Lost Coin

☐ Read Luke 15:8-10

DEVOTIONAL

Nobody likes to lose things. When we do, we can think of nothing else until we find them. Jesus told these three stories (the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost son) to remind us of the value of one.

1 out of 2 sons
1 out of 10 coins
1 out of 100 sheep

When even one is lost, it matters to God. In today's story, a woman with ten silver coins (each worth a day's wages) lost one of them. She misplaced a tenth of her worldly wealth, then turned the house upside down until she found it.

This story is about how God views the one: "And when she finds it, she calls her friends and neighbors together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost coin" (v. 9). It is also about turning our lives around and turning them over to God: "In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents" (v. 10).

1 out of 2 sons
1 out of 10 coins
1 out of 100 sheep
1 out of 8 billion people

The value of one. That is you. That is me. Without Jesus, I am the lost son, the lost coin, the lost sheep, the lost person. The amazing part of the Jesus story is that He turned the world upside down to find you and me. If either of us had been the only sinner on earth, Jesus would have died for us!

Right now, God is turning the universe upside down for you. That is the value of one. That is how much God loves you!

POEM

Lost

Sitting in darkness, swept under the rug
Deep in the prison of sin
Forgotten, unwanted, condemned
and un-plugged
The critical voices within

Once all bright and shiny, a priceless reward
Now lost, fully hidden from light
A-crying in silence, hope to be restored
Longing to catch Savior's sight

The house is turned over, the sweeping begun
The dust circles, stirred by the Wind
Sin's covering lifted, picked up from the floor
Now let the rejoicing begin!

For that which was wasted, a-molding in ground
Full dead to the joy of the dawn
Because of intention, once lost now is found
Alive now, held fast in Christ's hand

NOTES

TUESDAY, JUNE 28TH - WEEK 31, DAY 2

The Parable of the Lost Son

☐ Read Luke 15:11-32

DEVOTIONAL

Also known as the Parable of the Prodigal Son, this is the third of three "lost things matter to God" stories in Luke 15. In the first parable, one of a hundred sheep wandered off when the shepherd wasn't looking. In the second, one of ten valuable coins was misplaced by the homeowner. But the third story takes a different turn. The lost thing gets lost on purpose.

In an act of ultimate disrespect, the youngest son demanded his inheritance while his father was still living. Then he went away, lived wildly, blew through the cash, and ended up doing the worst job imaginable – a Jewish boy feeding pigs! Sounds like some of us, whose prayers often sound like demands from God.

I've heard it said that you haven't hit bottom if you still have a shovel in your hands. This young man finally threw his shovel aside and crawled back to his father, just hoping for a job like any other hired servant. The way his father responded is the way our Heavenly Father responds when we come to Him, with joy and blessings and celebration!

But the young man's older brother would have none of it. He had been going to his church all his life, showed up every Sunday, served on committees, gave faithfully. Why should he go out of his way for this backslider? And why does God throw a party when a prodigal punk becomes a faithful follower of Jesus? It's just not fair!

One of the problems with the American Church is that it often resembles a fortress (to protect the holy huddle) rather than a hospital (to heal the wayward wanderers). In too many ways I have been an "older brother" pastor, more concerned with pleasing the people in my churches than pursuing the people not in my churches. God, forgive me. God, change me.

How about you?

++

POEM

I'm In The Story

Of sweet baby bundling
Who trusted in me
To clean and to feed
How when he decides
My teaching to chide
My wisdom to laugh
And takes his own path
Despite my clear warnings
No matter how harming
And off he goes roaming
With no plan of homing
A-heading for danger
My soul thus to anger
A-wasting his life
Upon strife

I am, too, the one--
The arrogant son
Who thinks he knows better
Refusing home's tether
Who's bent on rebellion
To live like a hellion
Out looking for fun
My father to shun
Delighting to shirk
The family's work

A-buying for play
Enjoying the stray
Not counting the cost
I am my own boss
There's nothing to stop me
A-wandering

I, too, am the worker
The shepherd, the herder
I follow the rules
I've mastered the tools
Of living a life
Of causing no strife
Of saving and caring
With others a-sharing
Of getting along
Resisting the throng
Who'd steer me away
Or tempt me to stray
Who feels rather proud
Of fields I have plowed
The strides I have made
Toward success

The father and sons
Combined into one
This story do tell
Which lived not so well
Show sorrow and pride
God's patience well tried
Rebellion v. duty
Forgiveness and beauty
True jealousy, envy
Real loss and re-entry
The stubbornness, guilt
The arrogance, filth
It's heady, it's gory
Yes, I'm in the story
Each character's face
I know well

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 29TH - WEEK 31, DAY 3

The Parable of the Shrewd Manager

☐ Read Luke 16:1-18

DEVOTIONAL

In this curious story, Jesus seems to be praising a person for being dishonest. The master was ready to fire the manager for wasting his money, perhaps embezzling it for himself, maybe mismanaging it out of laziness or incompetence, or a host of other possibilities.

I love the manager's thoughts about being jobless: "I'm too weak to dig and too proud to beg." Sometimes honest confrontation with our own limitations will drive us to actions we need to take. In this case, the manager wanted to make sure the debtors thought well of him when he hit the streets.

So, he called them in and slashed the amount of debt each owed the master, who in turn commended (NIV) / admired (NLT) the man for his shrewd actions. Jesus even added a surprise moral to the story: "use your worldly resources to benefit others and make friends, then when your earthly possessions are gone, you will be welcomed to an eternal home" (v. 9, NLT).

It all leads to Jesus' teaching, where faithfulness and honesty are character traits that engender trust, and where dishonesty and untrustworthiness are red flags for others, and for God, to notice (v. 10-12). Then in verse 13, Jesus sums it up: "No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money" (see also Matthew 6:24).

Ultimately, Jesus reminds us that what we do when money flows through our fingers is a good indicator of how faith is flowing through our hearts. Proverbs 4:23 says it well: "Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it."

What does your bank account say about you?

POEM

Street Smart

If I've never known luxury, comfort and gain
If I've only known cunning, survival and pain
My senses are keener
My focus is leaner
I'm street smart
I'm cunning
I'm shrewd

If I'm ever effective, the gospel to tell
I need to discover and practice full well
The precision of keenness
Aware of the meanness
Full street smart
Full cunning
Full shrewd

Though dove-like surrounded
by wolves and by foxes
Evangels must be fully wary of boxes
In which they'll entrap us
The plots, lies, to snap us
Be street smart
Be cunning
Be shrewd

NOTES

THURSDAY, JUNE 30TH - WEEK 31, DAY 4

The Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus

☐ Read Luke 16:19-31

DEVOTIONAL

In Jesus' day, nobody lived in luxury like the Pharisees, who saw wealth as a sign that God approved of their righteousness. This thinking became common knowledge: the righteous are blessed; the sinful are cursed (see the debate about who sinned to cause a man to be blind in John 9). We haven't come far from this way of thinking, for even today when someone lives luxuriously we like to say, "You must be living right!"

It must have come as a shock when the rich man in Jesus' story went to hell and the poor beggar went to heaven. Wealth and possessions seem to be a trap – or at least a trip wire, that if not navigated properly will destroy us – leading to eternal damnation.

In this story, the rich man ignored Lazarus on a daily basis, even though he lay starving and sore-covered at the rich man's gate. In death, he not only wanted the poor man Lazarus at his side, he even wanted him to put his once disgusting finger in the rich man's once pristine mouth. Death is the great equalizer.

On this side of it, status and wealth and appearance mean everything; on the other, nothing of it means anything at all. God is not impressed by who we are, what we do for a living (including preaching well), who we know, what others say, what we have, and so forth. At death, the richest and the poorest person are simply dead, awaiting judgment and eternal marching orders.

So, the rich man went from a life of luxury to a place of torment (v. 19, 28). Lazarus went from being surrounded by disgusting dogs to glorious angels (v. 21-22). Prophetically, referring to either His own impending resurrection, or the actual one of a real friend named Lazarus, Jesus said, "they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead" (v. 31).

Ask Jesus what He wants you to do with your resources? Will you obey?

POEM

Which Side Of The Wall?

Upon which side of the wall
Do I sit?
Within the veranda, tree shaded,
Wine sip?
With artisan bread and rich olive
Oil poured?
My children a-playing in grass
Covered yard?

Or am I the poor one, no home to
My name?
The stench of my poverty always
The same?
My home overtaken by gangs and
By war?
My feet callous covered by miles
All sore?

Is there a vast river to keep us
Apart?
The rich and the poor ones
distant
From the start?
Which one of us carries the
Comfort of God?
Which one of us
deserves a piece of
The sod?

In heaven will we have a land
which
We share?
Or will a high wall keep us
separate
Up there?
Will family of mine hear the
message
To free?
Will one dip a cup in the water
For me?

NOTES

FRIDAY, JULY 1ST - WEEK 31, DAY 5

Jesus Teaches about Authentic Faith

☐ Read Luke 17:1-10

DEVOTIONAL

Being a follower of Jesus comes with great responsibilities:

- Don't tempt others to sin. God's wrath awaits the tempter in ways that make a violent death seem mild.
- Be willing to confront believers when they sin, and be willing to forgive them every time they ask for forgiveness.
- Grow your faith. Learn to trust in God so completely that nothing is impossible.
- Consider it an honor to obey God. We don't serve in order to get blessings, but simply to be grateful, responsible followers of Jesus.

Too often, we look at faith in Christ as a transaction: I believe, I receive. There is truth in this. We are co-heirs with Christ. However, we receive for a purpose. We receive in order to serve, give, love, minister, and bless others and God.

Being a follower of Jesus is not for the lukewarm, the unforgiving, the faithless, or the self-seeking. No health and wealth, name it and claim it gospel here.

Discipleship is an all-out surrender of self to Jesus.

It is our duty.

It is our privilege.

How is Christ calling you to deeper discipleship?

POEM

There'll Be A Change In You

If you lose something precious
You'll leave something behind
You'll go out searching
You'll hunt high and low
You'll hope greatly to find it
You'll rejoice when you do
Though others might not notice
There'll be a change in you.

If you're hurt by a neighbor
You'll be tempted to brood
You'll have to move toward him
You'll have to pursue
You'll have to be honest
You'll have to be true
Though others might not notice
There'll be a change in you.

If you're stating a sentence
You'll say yes or no
You'll not be able to change it
You'll have written in stone
You'll have marked it in heaven
You'll have made it a prayer
Though others might not notice
There'll be a change in you

If you think someone owes you
You'll have to be careful
You'll have to remember
your own debt
You'll have to be humbled
You'll have seven times
seventy times
You'll feel the exhaustion
of forgiveness
Though others might not notice
There'll be a change in you.

NOTES

MONDAY, JULY 4TH - WEEK 33, DAY 1

Jesus Heals Ten Men with Leprosy

☐ Read Luke 17:11-19

DEVOTIONAL

Borderlands are interesting places, whether between nations, states, school districts, or even stages of life – infancy, adolescence, engagement, pregnancy, empty nest, separated, dying. Each comes with a realization that the past is being left behind and the future is being joyfully explored or painfully experienced.

Jesus was on the border between Galilee (the northern region of pure Jews) and Samaria (the in-between land of half-breeds, outcasts, and untouchables). Galileans to the north would have nothing to do with Samaritans to the south. And vice versa.

Leprosy was the great equalizer of the day, the ultimate borderland between health (where you can afford to call people outcasts) and death (where it really doesn't matter). Jesus healed ten lepers, presumably some of them Jews and some Samaritans. But only a Samaritan returned to give God praise and to thank Jesus for what He did. Jesus' response (v. 18) makes me think that at least some of the other nine were Jews.

Jesus told the Samaritan man, "your faith has made you well" (v. 19, NIV). The New Living Translation says, "Your faith has healed you." And the Christian Standard Bible says, "Your faith has saved you." The Greek word "sozo" has both physical and spiritual connotations of being made whole. Indeed, all ten lepers were healed from leprosy; this Samaritan man's faith cleansed him beyond skin deep.

Discipleship requires an attitude of gratitude, giving thanks and praise to God for the blessings we have received. This matters, for we must remember that we do not deserve what we have. We are completely dependent upon God for health and wealth, in breath and death, from womb to tomb. Will you take time today to thank God for all that you have and all that you are?

++

POEM

Abandoned

Lepers walking down the road
Skin deformed, a heavy load
Upon their minds
The world is blind
In sorrow now
Abandoned

Behind their rags a deadness lives
In covered secret odor gives
The stench of rot
No mercy brought
To free them now
Abandoned

In vain they call out to the crowd
Their cries full muted though aloud
In others ears
No grace to cheer
Mercy to give
Abandoned

Along they walk ten fold they be
With tired raspy voice they plea
No help to cope
Forbidden hope
Yet One stops, sees
Abandoned

"Go, show yourselves
unto the priests."
The voice of God calls to the least
Can this be true?
We bid adieu
To lives of known
Abandoned?

"My skin is clean!" one says to all
"Our lives are healed!" each other call
They run to health
A new born wealth
Acceptance, not
Abandoned

One hesitates, to Mercy turns
Falls on the knee, perceiving, yearns
Deep gratitude
Full magnitude
No longer lives
Abandoned

My hidden sin held deep within
You saw and touched forbidden skin
Though others sighed
And turned their eye
You left me not
Abandoned

My once dead arms, now strong, I raise
In gratitude, I lift my praise
You touched my soul
Lep'rous, now whole
To never be
Abandoned

TUESDAY, JULY 5TH - WEEK 32, DAY 2

Jesus Teaches about His Return

☐ Read Luke 17:20-37

DEVOTIONAL

Jesus often talked about the Kingdom of God in two ways. First, it is among you, in your midst, within you. In many ways, we don't need to wait and worry (or hope, depending on your eschatology) about the end. Jesus gives us the Holy Spirit who lives with us and in us. The Kingdom is at hand!

Second, it is not yet. The Kingdom will be fully realized when Jesus returns like a flash of lightning (v. 22-25) while people are minding their own business (v. 26-30). Some will be taken and others left behind, causing everyone to neither look back or go back (v. 31-36).

For all this, there will be a multitude of signs, just as a large gathering of vultures indicates a nearby carcass. Curious. The Kingdom of God cannot be detected by visible signs, yet an accumulation of signs indicate that the end is near (v. 20, 37).

In August 2017 was the first total solar eclipse in the United States in ninety-nine years. Several people said it would be amazing if Jesus returned then. He didn't. Big astronomical and political and social events do make people wonder when Jesus will return. On this He is clear: we cannot predict it.

The Kingdom of God is now, but not yet. It is in our midst, but in the future. So, we must live every day as if it were our last, but assume that we have decades and that Jesus has millennia before the end.

Prayer: Jesus, I embrace Your Kingdom here and now, there and then. If You should return before I finish reading this, thanks be to God. If You should tarry beyond the end of my life, I commit every breath, every thought, every word, every step to Your glory and purposes. Thanks be to God.

POEM

Here and Not Yet

A child in womb yet still unborn
The "here and not yet" miracle
God's Kingdom deep within one's soul
The Holy Spirit's oracle

And yet our eyes horizon scan
The Kingdom's advent coming
A new creation yet unborn
The Holy Son's full dawning

NOTES

WEDNESDAY, JULY 6TH - WEEK 32, DAY 3

The Parable of the Unjust Judge

☐ Read Luke 18:1-8

DEVOTIONAL

Some Bibles title this passage, "The Parable of the Unjust Judge." Others label it, "The Parable of the Persistent Widow." It's all about perspective. And this parable is all about persistence.

Persistence in prayer. There is something about this that God loves and people hate. We want quick results; God wants deep relationship. As a pastor I've done hundreds of weddings. It only takes a few minutes to say the vows and a few seconds to sign the marriage certificate. But it takes a lifetime to build and sustain a healthy, honorable marriage. Try saying, "I do," followed by years of complete silence. Can you spell S-T-R-A-N-G-E-R-S?

It is the same in our relationship with God. If we pray only a time or two for a minute or two about something, then withdraw from God, do we really expect an answer? More importantly, do we really expect a relationship?

Jesus said that the greatest commandment is to love God with everything you are and everything you have. How does that affect your communication with Him? Here are some ideas:

- Get a notebook or journal.
- Write down your prayer requests. Go back to them on a regular basis, bringing them before God.
- Write down your blessings. Give thanks to God often for all that He has done for you.
- Write down your hopes. Thank God for your past, trust Him for your present, and seek Him for your future.
- Write down what you hear from God. This could be from your time of listening in prayer, reading Scripture or other Christian material, listening to a sermon, being in community with other believers, etc.
- Deepen your relationship with God. Be persistent!

++

POEM

Badgering God

Dear God,
Remember the last time we met
I mentioned something to you?
Well, not exactly mentioned...
I pretty much took up our whole conversation
Not giving you a minute to respond
Because I was going on and on

But God,
This is always on my mind
I can't let it go; I need you to act
Come to my aid; Do something!
Though I try to do the whole
"Not worry" thing and "praise you" thing
You need to attend to "this one" thing

So God,
Do I continue to badger you?
Do I keep asking, knocking?
I know you're not asleep
I know you've heard me
Aren't you tired of this
same prayer of
mine?
Should I give up my plea?

But God,
In your Word, the man knocks
And calls out even when his neighbor
Says, "Go away; I'm in bed."
Your Son tells of the man's persistence
And says this is how I am to pray
When will you answer my knocking?

And God,
In your Word, the widow pleads
The godless judge does not care
Yet gives her justice to escape all her
Badgering. I know you are not like that
Godless judge. You care and love me
How long, Lord, must I call out?

So God,
I know you hear me and empathize
I will continue to badger you if that is
What you want from me
I don't understand the delay but
I do trust you. And even when I sit quietly
To wait, I feel your call to persistence

Dear God,
Here I am again with the same petition
I will not stop badgering you until you act
On my behalf in this crooked and sinful world
I know I am praying within your will
I know you, too, long for my loved one to
Be set free. You say, "Let my people go!"

So God,
I will continue to ask, seek, knock
I will continue to pound on the Door
I will continue to ask for bread to feed this one
I will continue to beg for justice and mercy
I will continue to be before you
I will badger you, God, as long as you want

THURSDAY, JULY 7TH - WEEK 32, DAY 4

The Parable of the Pharisee & Tax Collector

☐ Read Luke 18:9-14

DEVOTIONAL

Jesus told a story about two men's prayers.

The Pharisee's prayer: "O God, reward me, for I am a righteous person." Then he reminded God of the things he wasn't (a cheater, a sinner, an adulterer) and refreshed God's memory about the things he was (a person who fasts, a man who tithes).

The tax collector's prayer was very different: "O God, be merciful to me, for I am a sinner." He didn't need to jog God's memory. Everybody in heaven and on earth knew that he was "a despised tax collector" (v. 10, NLT) who sold out his Jewish roots to collect money for the occupying Roman forces.

As if Jesus weren't already in hot water with the religious establishment, He said, "I tell you, this sinner, not the Pharisee, returned home justified before God" (v. 14, NLT). The collective Pharisaical gasp was no doubt followed by a scornful grunt. Jesus put Himself directly in the Pharisees' crosshairs by suggesting that they who "had great confidence in their own righteousness" (v. 9, NLT) would not be justified by God. Even worse, He suggested that those traitorous tax collectors would be justified by God if they came clean and repented.

Deep down, are you more like the Pharisee or the tax collector? Do you compare yourself with others and think of your faith and ministry with pride? Or, do you compare yourself with God, and think of yourself with humility?

Prayer: Lord, deliver me from the attitudes of a Pharisee that are within me. I am a sinner. I am unworthy to be called Your servant, much less Your child. I do not deserve Your mercy, but I gratefully accept it. Make my life a reflection of You, but help me not to become enamored with my own image staring back at me in the mirror. O God, be merciful to me, for I am a sinner. Amen.

POEM

Noses

Have you ever noticed
The nose on the proud
All bulbous and red
Thoughts shouting aloud
Eyes small peering down
Insult prayers roller coasting
Veins bursting red hot
Other people a-roasting?

Have you ever noticed
The nose, humbled one
Pointing not to the sky
But downward, undone
A-sniffling back tears
Red, pinched, snot on the ground
Tears abundant from eyes
Dripping pain, flowing down?

Have you ever noticed
The nose of a child
All pudgy and cute
Tipped up with a smile
Expecting your love
Can't imagine rejecting
No pretense, no shame
A blessing expecting?

Have you ever noticed
The nose on your face
Which way it is pointing
To love or disgrace
To shame others, self
To snort or to blow
Just what is the message
Your nose will bestow?

NOTES

FRIDAY, JULY 8TH - WEEK 32, DAY 5

Jesus Teaches about Divorce

☐ Read Matthew 19:3-12, Mark 10:2-12

DEVOTIONAL

In Deuteronomy 24:1-4, Moses wrote a provision for what happens when a man divorces his wife, she remarries someone who eventually divorces her or dies, then the first man wants to marry her again. This became the perfect context for the Pharisees to try to trap Jesus.

Jesus referred to Genesis 1 and 2, saying, "at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female,' [5] and said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh'? [6] So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate" (Matt. 19:4-6).

That's when the Pharisees tried to trap Him with the Moses reference. But Jesus stood firm, saying, "Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning" (Matt. 19:8). From Genesis to Jesus, the Bible is clear: marriage between a man and a woman is for life.

Jesus mentions an exception for a person whose spouse commits "sexual immorality." The Greek word here is "porneia" and it refers to any form of sexual activity outside of marriage between a man and a woman. Jesus also speaks of eunuchs – people who do not have sexual relations for a variety of reasons. There is no room for pre-marital sex or extra-marital sex in the teaching of Jesus. Indeed, singleness and celibacy for the sake of the Kingdom are what's best for some.

This teaching on marriage, sexuality, and divorce echoes Paul's teaching in 1 Corinthians 7:1-16. All this flies in the face of our culture wars over human sexuality and marriage. Undeniably, there is much to wrestle with here. Let us seek God's wisdom as we navigate these waters in our society with faith and understanding.

POEM

Hard

There are some things in life that are just
Hard

Perseverance
Patience
Relationships
Unselfishness
Forgiveness
Submission
Obedience
Hope
Waiting
Consistency
Humility
Sacrifice
Repentance
Love

These things are difficult because my heart is just
Hard

NOTES

MONDAY, JULY 11TH - WEEK 33, DAY 1

Jesus Blesses the Children

☐ Read Matthew 19:13-15, Mark 10:13-16, Luke 18:15-17

DEVOTIONAL

Jesus said, "For the Kingdom of God belongs to those who are like these children. I tell you the truth, anyone who doesn't receive the Kingdom of God like a child will never enter it" (Mark 10:14-15, NLT).

How does a child explore and interact?

⇒ With wonder
⇒ With playfulness
⇒ With excitement
⇒ With abandonment
⇒ With focus
⇒ With imagination
⇒ With trust
⇒ With expectation
⇒ With joy
⇒ With energy
⇒ With trust
⇒ With laughter
⇒ With running
⇒ With purpose

How do you explore and interact with the kingdom of God?

POEM

Don't Stick Me in the Nursery

Don't stick me in the nursery
Or in the cry room, walled
With sound proof cushioned padding
Or keep me in a stall
But let me cry and jabber
And in the church aisle dance
For I am Jesus' little lamb
Just longing for the chance
To be a part of God's great flock
Though my behavior messing
Your orderly and decent prayers
I, too, desire God's blessing
So let me crawl upon your lap
Or even under pews
My little brain absorbs it all
The hymns, the prayers, Good News

NOTES

TUESDAY, JULY 12TH - WEEK 33, DAY 2

Jesus Talks with the Rich Young Leader

☐ Read Matthew 19:16-30, Mark 10:17-31, Luke 18:18-30

DEVOTIONAL

The man had it all. He was rich, young, and in charge. He was accustomed to using his wealth to get what he wanted. Add to that, his faithfulness to God made him a stellar citizen. So, he came to Jesus with a question: "What good deed must I do to have eternal life?" Maybe he was hoping for Jesus to say, "Nothing more I can think of. You're good, dude."

Jesus' actual answer is a bit surprising. He says nothing to the man about the necessity of believing that Jesus is the Son of God. He simply says, "Keep the commandments." The man proudly proclaims that he has been a commandment keeper since childhood. Jesus then went straight to the heart of this wealthy guy, telling him to sell all, give all, and follow completely.

I wonder what would make me walk away from Jesus with sadness. Perhaps if He asked me to surrender my position. Or give up ministry. Or sell everything and give it all away. Before you judge me, make your own list.

Jesus knew that this man didn't need a simple "you're good" affirmation or an easy "believe in Me" offer. He needed a life-altering "follow Me" at all cost challenge. Jesus does the same with you and me. Recall my working definition of a disciple:

A disciple is someone who knows, loves, and obeys Jesus,
and helps others do the same.

The call to follow Jesus is not a nod to God with every eye closed and every head bowed. Rather, it is an all-out pursuit of Jesus with every eye open and every head raised. It is saying to Jesus, "The answer is yes. Now what is the question?"

To what is Jesus challenging you to say yes?

POEM

What Is It?

Though I ask, "What must I do?"
That's really the wrong question
For in "doing" I think
I am accomplishing.
I am achieving.
I am getting what I deserve.

You look at me, deep into me
And change the question.
What is it? What do I lack?
I am in a position of need?
I am in a position of weakness?
I am in a position of emptiness?

You ask, before I can be filled,
What is it I need to be rid of?
What is it that fills too much space?
I am afraid to give up
what is familiar.
I am afraid to give up
what is comfort.
I am afraid to give up my idol.

What is it, LORD?
What do I lack?
What do I need to be rid of so that I might become
A little child of trust.
A servant to your loved ones.
An heir to eternal life.

What is it?

NOTES

WEDNESDAY, JULY 13TH - WEEK 33, DAY 3

The Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard

☐ Read Matthew 20:1-16

DEVOTIONAL

A landowner hired day laborers to work in his vineyard. The first group started at 6:00 am. Then he hired more groups, starting 9:00, noon, 3:00 and 5:00. When it came time to call it a day at 6:00 pm, the landowner paid all of them a full day's wages. Though compensated fairly, the 6:00 am work crew protested. Jesus compared this story to the kingdom of heaven.

I have been a Christian all of my life. I was raised in the church, accepted Jesus at a young age, and received a call to ministry as a young man. To my knowledge, I have never missed three weeks in a row of being in worship, and I have been a pastor nearly four decades.

Yet there are many who have a different story. People accept Jesus and begin to follow Him at various ages and stages of life. All who do so receive the blessings of salvation, forgiveness in His name. It is not for me to be jealous – or prideful – wanting more for myself.

Think about it, should somebody get more credit for being a Christian for one hundred years on earth than another who accepted salvation only one hour before their death, when put in the context of billions and trillions of years of eternity in heaven? As James 4:14 says, "What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes." Compared to eternity, all of life is a blink of an eye.

I consider it an honor to have been a follower of Jesus my entire life. When I arrive in eternal glory, I will consider it an honor to be in the company of people who were Christians for only a few years or weeks or minutes. It is not a contest. Rather, it is a calling to reach out to people of all ages and stages with the love of Jesus!

To God be all the glory for His grace, mercy, and calling in life.

POEM

Generosity

Press it down
Shake it together
Press it down again
Lord, I want the full, full measure
Of your lavish grace

Here's my brother
We're together
Here's my sister, too
Just as much for them, you see
Give with liberty

Here's the hearty
Working steady
Here's the faithful, too
Long and hard they've labored true
Open hand receive

Here's the lazy
Avoiding, hiding
Here's the weak and lame
Working only when inspected
Those you give the same?

Here's the doubters
Last hour believers
Here's the ones on fringe
Squeeze in as the door is closing
And you let them in?

I am stingy
Think I'm righteous
I cry, "It's not fair"
Generosity trumps my arrogance
Overwhelming share

NOTES

THURSDAY, JULY 14TH - WEEK 33, DAY 4

Jesus Predicts His Death for the Third Time

☐ Read Matthew 20:17-19, Mark 10:32-34, Luke 18:31-34

DEVOTIONAL

By now, Jesus was nearing the end. He knew that He was on His way to Jerusalem for the last time. Mark says His disciples walked next to Him "filled with awe" while other people followed behind "overwhelmed with fear" (v. 32, NLT). You could cut the tension with a knife.

In all these synoptic Gospel readings, Jesus had just told a rich young ruler how to gain eternal life. When the man rejected His offer, Jesus told His followers, "Many who are greatest now will be least important then, and those who seem least important now will be greatest then" (Matt. 19:30; Mark 17:31, NLT). Matthew adds the parable of the vineyard workers, which Jesus concludes by saying, "those who are last now will be first then, and those who are first will be last."

Now Jesus added the ultimate weight to the atmosphere, predicting that He was on His way to Jerusalem to be betrayed, sentenced, mocked, treated shamefully, spit upon, flogged and crucified. I wonder if the disciples even heard His final words that after three days He would rise again.

Luke says the "disciples did not understand any of this. Its meaning was hidden from them, and they did not know what he was talking about" (18:34). Matthew and Mark follow this prediction with James and John and their mother asking Jesus for the two highest places of honor when Jesus is on His throne. Talk about lack of empathy!

Even today, after the fact, we often dismiss the weightiness of Jesus' suffering and death for our sins. He was the Lamb of God, sacrificed for us. By His wounds we are healed (Isaiah 53:5; 1 Peter 2:24). Yes, His birth, life, teachings and miracles were amazing, and His resurrection was hope-filled and promising. But let us never forget His suffering and cruel death for our sins. Praise you Jesus!

++

POEM

Jerusalem

When I was young
I skipped toward
Jerusalem's festal days
And, O, the sights!
Camels, merchants, wares
Among them I did play
I did not know
The preparations
By my mother done
Nor papa's guarding
Watchful eye while
I was having fun

And as a youth
I danced along
Jerusalem's holy times
With new prayer shawl
I dreamed of all
The mountains I would climb
Perhaps I'd be
A royal priest
A rabbi or a scribe
A prince, a king
A righteous one
A prophet free from bribes

A young man now
Family in tow
Jerusalem I head
There's bills to pay
And worries sore
Some days are filled with dread
I work real hard
To get ahead
I struggle for my place
If not the top
At least beside
The one winning the race

A man of age
No fantasies
Clear thinking, keep head low
I fly below
The radar screen
Jerusalem, I know
Is not a place
Of fun and games
But challenge, risk and death
Sometimes I turn
And face away
I hide and catch my breath

I say to Jesus
Let's not go
There's danger on the road
I've had enough
Let's just retire
I'm tired of the load
I've fought some fights
But see much more
There's robbers on the way
I've heard they'll beat
And strip me bear
At home I'd rather stay

"Enough! Did you not
Count the cost
Are you not able, Son?
Did you not know
You lose your life
That's how the battle's won?
Jerusalem,
That is our goal
Rise now and follow me
We'll face the cross
Then we'll arise
The world will then be free"

Okay, dear Lord,
I'll follow you
No matter what the cost
If I to your
Jerusalem go
I'll count my life as loss
For nothing else
Is greater, Lord,
Than being by your side
Where else, Who else
Holds the True Word
Of God's Eternal Life?

My Lord ahead
I walk the road
Jerusalem I'm bound
I carry high
Cross' standard pole
New energy I've found
The Spirit's wind
Upon my back
With power pushes strong
Though tough the way
Joy's in my heart
As praises are my song

The New Jerusalem
In view
The city pure descending
I hear the angels
And the saints
With songs of praise unending
The door flung wide
The gates are open
Christ's arms reach out in greeting
The table's set
The cup is poured
God face to face I'm meeting

With Christ, our king
I'm royalty
A priesthood long appointed
My prayers in bowls
My tears are gone
My head with oil anointed
Jerusalem
Is now my home
All sorrow is defeated
God's plan fulfilled
My dreams restored
Christ on the throne is seated

Each pilgrim child
Each pilgrim man
Each mother, aunt and son
Will have a day
At crossroad stand
Mid journey there along
Am I able?
No, not on my own
I falter, stumble, fall
Lord, bear me to
Jerusalem
You are my all in all

FRIDAY, JULY 15TH - WEEK 33, DAY 5

Jesus Teaches about Servant Leadership

☐ Read Matthew 20:20-28, Mark 10:35-45

DEVOTIONAL

No sooner had Jesus announced His impending torture, crucifixion and resurrection, than James & John & their mother (who apparently left Zebedee in the boat as well) came to Jesus to ask for the two most honored and powerful positions in His kingdom. Undoubtedly, they still assumed that Jesus would become an earthly king over Israel. They just couldn't comprehend a crucified Messiah.

Jesus quickly reminded them that His was the way of suffering. Still oblivious, they said, "Pick me, pick me!" When jealousy ensued from the other ten, Jesus again reminded them of his upside-down kingdom:

- To become the greatest, be a servant
- To become first, be a slave of all
- The last will be first, and the first will be last (Matt. 20:16)

In ancient Greek mythology, Narcissus was so in love with his own reflection in the water that he stayed there until he died. Today, we use the term narcissist to describe a completely self-absorbed person. In this passage, James and John seem to fit the bill, thinking only of themselves as Jesus poured out His grief about the imminent agonies He would face.

But let's be honest. How many times do we try to make the faith about ourselves? For example, we might base our devotion upon what God can give us, how the church can meet my desires, or whether the Scripture agrees with our opinions. Whether intentionally or not, we place ourselves at the right and left side of Jesus, the most honored and powerful positions in His kingdom.

Where do you need an attitude adjustment? What will you do about it?

POEM

Able?

Are you able, Jesus, to promote me
To the highest levels of heav'n?
Are you able, Jesus, to teach me
All my colleagues to make an impress'n?
Are you able, Jesus, to heal me
To make my life full of bliss?
Are you able then to defend me
And ev'ry enemy dismiss?
Are you able, Jesus, to accept me
Despite unrepentance of sin?
Are you able then to forgive me
Despite holding hatred within?

Are you able, my child, to be lowly
To take the place last in line?
Are you able, my child, to stoop humbly
To promote other siblings to shine?
Are you able, my child, to long suffer
Staying faithful and trusting in me?
Are you able, my child, to hold steady
Despite raging chaos of seas?
Are you able to bear your cross meekly
To stand silent when being accused?
Are you able to lie in death peaceful
Until your resurrection I prove?

NOTES

MONDAY, JULY 18TH - WEEK 34, DAY 1

Jesus Heals the Blind

☐ Read Matthew 20:29-34, Mark 10:46-52, Luke 18:35-43

DEVOTIONAL

"What do you want me to do for you?"

This is the question Jesus asked Bartimaeus (in Mark) and his friend (in Matthew) as the two blind men shouted loudly, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on us!" Jesus looked at them and said, "What do you want me to do for you?"

It seems like a silly question. The men were blind, and therefor forced to beg for an existence. But it is a good question, for them and for all of us. Blindness was their excuse. Sight would be their responsibility.

"What do you want me to do for you?" This does not allow us to passively wait for Jesus to do whatever He wishes in our lives. We have to name the blessings we desire, then take responsibility to live out of those blessings.

"What do you want me to do for you?"

I want to see.
I want to be healed.
I want forgiveness.
I want to be able to forgive.
I want freedom.
I want purpose.
I want to learn how to make disciples.
I want to be trusted with resources to be generous.
I want to help the poor.
I want to share my faith.

Warning: receiving what you ask for will move you from excuse to responsibility. So how do you answer Jesus' question, "What do you want me to do for you?"

POEM

I Want

Jesus asked the Blind Man,
"What do you want from me?"

I want a life that's free from strife
I want attention, full love life
I want to hear just kindly things
I want to feel a special being
I want no conflict only peace
I want no pain, I want release
I want to travel where it's safe
I want real beauty, scenes of grace
I want experiences, fun
I want the ocean, feel the sun
I want mountain view, no hard climb
I want cool valleys lush, sublime
I want rich gourmet food to eat
I want a figure, athletic, sleek
I want to think wise thoughts and clever
I want each day to count, be better
I want my family without a care
I want great health, great hair
I want some recognition, prize
I want to always feel alive
I want the latest trendy ware
I want all days sunny, mild and fair
I want to eat and drink, be merry
I want good help to never tarry
I want a job I like to do
I want a home that has a view
I want fresh water, organic fare
I want great freedom everywhere
But first of all, I want to see
Could you please give that to me?

NOTES

TUESDAY, JULY 19TH - WEEK 34, DAY 2

Jesus Offers Salvation to Zacchaeus

☐ Read Luke 19:1-10

DEVOTIONAL

In Jesus' day, it was one thing for the people Israel to have to put up with the occupying Roman presence in their land. Roman officials and soldiers looked and sounded like Romans. They were the hated enemy, but they were in power. What was anybody going to do about it?

But tax collectors were another story. They looked and sounded like Jews, because that is what they were. One of their own. But they had sold themselves out to line their pockets. They were worse than the enemy. They were traitors.

Zacchaeus was one of these Jews who got rich by being a chief tax collector. This made him the worst of sinners. But Jesus saw beyond the reputation and into the heart of a true seeker. When Jesus treated him with great respect, he repented in a costly way, giving up half his wealth to the poor and a large chunk of the rest for quadruple restitution.

Jesus declared that salvation had come to the house of Zacchaeus, then summed up His own mission by saying, "For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost" (v. 10). This is one of my favorite verses to understand the mission of Jesus, and by extension, the mission of the Church. There is always a pressure to make the faith about the honest, patriotic, middle class citizens of the community. But Zacchaeus was a dishonest traitor who became filthy rich at the expense of the working poor. Yet Jesus didn't see him as untouchable. He viewed him as a friend.

As with Jesus, it is the Church's mission not only to save the lost, but to actively seek them. No one is beyond reach, no one is too far gone, and no one is unlovable by God and His Church.

Dear Jesus, make us like You, seeing others as friends and followers in the making, even those who are alone and up the wrong tree!

POEM

Headline News:
"Small Treasure Returned!"

I saw Heaven's headline today:
"Small Treasure Returned!"
It seemed this valued gem
Had been stolen away
Misused, abused, dirtied, lost
Thrown in the dirt

But there was One
On the case
Aware of the crime
Of the stolen treasure
Seeking, searching along the path
For the diamond in the rough

Upon discovery
Restoration began
Celebrations were planned
Feasting commenced
A heavenly gala of rejoicing
"Small Treasure Returned"

When the detective was interviewed
When his investigation challenged
He proclaimed,
"This is what I do
Seek, refurbish, return what is valued
Restoring the stolen beautifully
To its Rightful Owner."

NOTES

WEDNESDAY, JULY 20TH - WEEK 34, DAY 3

The Parable of the Ten Minas

☐ Read Luke 19:11-27

DEVOTIONAL

There is a great deal going on in this parable of Jesus. A nobleman goes away to be named king of his homeland. Risk-taking and profitable investors are rewarded with whole cities to govern. Fearful and unprofitable investors are stripped of what they had. Enemies who did not want the man to be king are killed in front of him.

Verse 11 tells us that Jesus told this parable, "because he was near Jerusalem and the people thought that the kingdom of God was going to appear at once." Not long after this Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey amidst shouts of Hosanna. They thought Jesus was establishing an earthly kingdom right now.

But He didn't. Jesus died, rose, then ascended back to heaven. Indeed, Jesus is the man who has gone away to a distant country (heaven) where He has been appointed our king. One day He will return.

We live in the "between times," between Jesus ascension to heaven and His return to earth. While we wait, He expects us to get busy, take risks, and grow His kingdom! Philippians 3:20 says, "our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ." As we wait, Jesus has little tolerance for believing in Him but sitting on our hands as we do so.

Here's the hard truth: there are some who will face eternal death in hell because they have refused to acknowledge King Jesus as the Son of God and Savior of the world. It is on us to take risks with our faith and ministry to add them to His followers. Burying our spiritual gifts won't get it done.

Who in your life needs you to step outside your safe comfort zone? A neighbor? Co-worker? Classmate? Friend? Family member? Acquaintance? Perhaps Jesus has entrusted them to you. What will you do about it?

POEM

To Embrace the Risk

To Embrace:
To hold closely
To take hold with affection
To clutch and seize
To welcome and accept
To receive enthusiastically
To wholeheartedly take up
And into one's heart

The Risk
The possibility of danger
The likelihood of peril
The chance, the uncertainty
The possible peril
The unstable and possible financial loss
The exposure
And failing consequences

But O, The Reward
O, the prize
O, the achievement
O, the gain
O, the honor
O, the award
O, the gift
Well done, good and faithful one

NOTES

THURSDAY, JULY 21ST - WEEK 34, DAY 4

Jesus' Brothers Don't Believe in Him

☐ Read John 7:1-9

DEVOTIONAL

The struggle over the identity of Jesus was always a hot mess. Early in Jesus' ministry, Mark 3:11 states, "Whenever the impure spirits saw Him, they fell down before him and cried out, 'You are the Son of God.'" Yet the religious scholars of the day said, "He is possessed by Beelzebul! By the prince of demons he is driving out demons" (Mark 3:22).

This might have been tolerable had His hometown neighbors not tried to shove Him off a cliff (see Luke 4) and His own family not said, "He is out of His mind" (Mark 3:21). Now, even after Jesus spent so much time performing miracles, teaching about God's kingdom, and acknowledging that He was the Son of God, we see that "even his own brothers did not believe in him" (John 7:5). Why?

Perhaps the answer lies within Jesus' statement to His brothers, "The world cannot hate you, but it hates me because I testify that its works are evil" (John 7:7). Nobody loves a truth teller who points out the obvious. Today the popular thing is to avoid talking of evil, hell, sin, and other bits of tough truths. But Jesus addressed it head on, knowing it would cost Him His life.

I wonder if part of the answer is that Jesus was just too familiar to his family members and hometown neighbors. They just couldn't see his real identity. Could that be true for us as well? We each have our own caricature of Jesus, based upon which portions of His life are rehearsed most in our churches and personal devotional lives. Most of us don't have John 7:7 as our life verse.

In this year-long immersion into the life of Jesus, we are reading and meditating on every word of the four gospels. Some are comforting; some are disturbing. How has your understanding of Jesus changed thus far? How would you answer the question, "Who is Jesus?"

POEM

My Own Little Jesus

When I think of Jesus
His manner, his ways
I shape Him and fashion--
Depends on the day
Of course His skin color
Exactly like mine
And countenance toward me
Is always full shine

When I think of Jesus
(My idol you see)
His marionette limbs
Always dancing for me
He answers my questions
In ways that give ease
He fashions my path
In the way I would please

When I think of Jesus
He cuts me full slack
Expects very little
Carries me on His back
Yes, my own little Jesus
Is servant to me
My own little genie
Whom I referee

NOTES

FRIDAY, JULY 22ND - WEEK 34, DAY 5

Jesus Teaches at the Temple Amidst Tension

☐ Read John 7:10-31

DEVOTIONAL

The confusion over the identity of Jesus was reaching a fevered pitch. Here is what people were saying about Him:

⇒ "He is a good man" (v. 12a)
⇒ "He deceives the people" (v. 12b)
⇒ "How did this man get such learning without having been taught?" (v. 15)
⇒ "You are demon-possessed... Who is trying to kill you?" (v. 20)
⇒ "Isn't this the man they are trying to kill?" (v. 25)
⇒ "Have the authorities really concluded that he is the Messiah?" (v. 26)
⇒ "But we know where this man is from; when the Messiah comes, no one will know where he is from." (v. 27)
⇒ "Many in the crowd believed in him" (v. 31)
⇒ "Surely this man is the Prophet" (v. 40)
⇒ "He is the Messiah" (v. 41)

Even Jesus Himself couldn't get a consensus about His identity. No wonder it is so hard to convince the world today. Most people today believe something about Jesus, but their opinions vary. Some think He was a good man, some a prophet, some the Son of God. But most do not dedicate their lives to "know, love, and obey" Him with complete abandon.

It seems that for some Jesus is the ultimate "Get out of Hell free" card. In nearly four decades of officiating funerals, every time I have been told that the deceased is "in a better place," regardless of what they believed or how they lived. Perhaps some see Jesus kind of like a genie to be kept hidden throughout life, and expected to deliver a miracle in a crisis and eternity upon death.

POEM

Like Vultures

Like vultures they circle
Like lions they prowl
How shall we destroy him?
What does law allow?

Let's plot ruse at midnight
Let's scheme and let's plan
Just when is our chance
To get rid of this man?

Surely we can trick him
Catch him in a trap
We must all agree on
The hour of attack

It must be in secret
Cloak, dagger, kiss, too
How can we now tell lies
His truth to construe?

They say he's Messiah
That should be enough
To hang, crucify him
And have him shut up

NOTES

MONDAY, JULY 25TH - WEEK 35, DAY 1

The Pharisees Try to Arrest Jesus

☐ Read John 7:32-53

DEVOTIONAL

I was raised in Stick City, Indiana. Correction: I was raised in the suburbs of Stick City. Let me explain. Stick City is a neighborhood of ten houses on a half-mile long elbow shaped road (called Stick City Road) off of Old State Highway 3 in Delaware County. But our house wasn't in the "city." It was across Old 3, in the "suburbs." We had cows to the south, corn fields to the north, nothing to the east and Stick City Road across the highway to the west. I was raised in the sticks.

Throughout Jesus' three years of public ministry, he had to keep dealing with the fact that he was raised in the sticks. Early on, Nathanael doubted that Jesus of Nazareth could be anything special by declaring, "Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?" (John 1:46). Nazareth was a sleepy town in Israel's northern region of Galilee.

Now, toward the end of Jesus' ministry, people were beginning to believe that Jesus was the Messiah. But some of the people doubted, saying, "How can the Messiah come from Galilee?" (John 7:41). The religious scholars doubled down, flatly proclaiming, "Look into it, and you will find that a prophet does not come out of Galilee" (v. 52).

Nazareth in Galilee sounds a lot like Stick City in Indiana. I feel your pain, Jesus. The big difference is that I am the son of a trucker, while Jesus is the Son of God, the Savior of the world, the Messiah. The religious community and leaders just couldn't get past His humble origin.

What is your origin story? Where did you grow up? What was your family like? Any tough times? Any skeletons in the closet? Any painful memories? What does it mean to you that Jesus was raised in such an inconsequential place by such insignificant parents with such inauspicious neighbors?

POEM

Hide and Go Seek

Where is the prophet
Who speaks just for God?
Where is Messiah, Anointed One?
Where is God's wisdom?
God's power? God's plan?
Hidden?
In plain sight?
What say you?

What are you seeking?
Are you thirsty for God?
Are you quenched by your
own daily plans?
Where's living water?
In Rock or in cistern?
Your jar
Are you carrying it?
What say you?

From whence comes Messiah?
A non-descript town?
A small home in Galilee hidden?
What do the scrolls say?
The crowd?
A toss-up conundrum--
What say you?

How does one go seeking
If already blinded
By hard hearts and stony
traditions?
Can one find the Savior
If searching
For the wrong thing?
What say you?

Who are you, God?
And how will I know you?
Through my thoughts and my
ways unswerving?
Are you in the known places
Where I've hidden before?
Or not to be found?
What say you?

NOTES

TUESDAY, JULY 26TH - WEEK 35, DAY 2

Jesus Forgives an Adulterous Woman

☐ Read John 8:1-11

DEVOTIONAL

Immediately after the Pharisees' attempt to arrest Jesus was thwarted, He went back to the Mount of Olives to sleep for the night. So much would happen at that place: peace, rest, prayer, betrayal, and His arrest. I wonder if Jesus already knew what would take place there in the near future.

The next morning Jesus went back to the temple and began to teach the crowds. Since the Pharisees couldn't outwit His teaching, they tried to trap Him with a decision about what to do with a woman caught in the act of adultery (which begs the question, why didn't they grab the guy too?). Jesus made three bold statements regarding this woman.

1. "Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her." Jesus declared a zone of righteousness, and all the religious elite had to leave that circle. Only Jesus was left with the woman.
2. "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?... then neither do I condemn you." Jesus gave her complete forgiveness with zero condemnation. She was now worthy to be in the zone of righteousness with Jesus.
3. "Go now and leave your life of sin." She could not live her life on the grounds of the temple courts. She had to leave Jesus' zone of righteousness. But Jesus called her to take her new righteousness with her to shape her life. She was truly free from sexual sin.

Jesus is saying the same to you. There is nobody to condemn you for your sinful behavior if you accept forgiveness and a new way of life from Jesus. Receive His words: "Neither do I condemn you. Go now and leave your life of sin."

++

POEM

Dirt
Dirt
Mud
Filthy whore
Caught you in your sin

Rank
Smell
Pouring forth
From adult'rous den

Grab
Scream
Naked, bared
Drag her through the streets

Throw
Spit
Pick up stones
Conversation piece

Planned
Trick
Teacher say
Interpret now the law

Shall
Will
Rocks be flung
Empty anger's craw?

Stoop
Bow
Down he kneels
Finger in the dirt

Dirt?
Pure?
Free from sin?
Be first one to hurt

Red
Face
Turn away
Drop the stone in hand

Who's
Left?
Cowering
Frightened nude woman

Where
Are
Witnesses?
Has the court abated?

Yes
Lord
They are gone
She then silent waited

Me
I
Condemn not
Go on your way now

One
Thing
Sin no more
Old life disavow

WEDNESDAY, JULY 27TH - WEEK 35, DAY 3

Jesus Says, "I Am the Light of the World"

☐ Read John 8:12-20

DEVOTIONAL

Again the debate over the identity of Jesus is heating up, continuing throughout John 8 and beyond. Here He refers to Himself as the light of the world. Throughout the Gospel and Epistles of John opened, he regularly writes about this theme as Jesus, the light of a dark world:

In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. (John 1:4-5)

The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. (John 1:9)

This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. 20 Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that their deeds will be exposed. 21 But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what they have done has been done in the sight of God. (John 3:19-21)

5 This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. 6 If we claim to have fellowship with him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live out the truth. 7 But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin. (1 John 1:5-7)

9 Anyone who claims to be in the light but hates a brother or sister is still in the darkness. 10 Anyone who loves their brother and sister lives in the light, and there is nothing in them to make them stumble. (1 John 2:9-10)

How is Jesus inviting you to live in His light?

POEM

You Know

It's not like I'd really like to get to know you
Because I'm just not sure what
that would mean
I'd like to creep or stalk your Facebook
page first
View your profile
Check out your posts
From a distance
You know

How about if I send you an emoji, Jesus
A thumbs up or a smile, perhaps a wink
I'd feel more comfortable if you'd make the
first move
Start the conversation
Let me judge
From a distance
You know

Ok. I'll open up a little bit, but nothing deep
or personal
I'll let you know me on the surface
I don't really trust you with more than that
I've been hurt before
So I like to keep you
At a distance
You know

You'd like to meet me in person?
At a Starbucks, you say? Just for coffee?
Pleasant surface conversation?
Check each other out?
Exchange numbers?
Keep the distance?
You know

Coffee moved to lunch then dinner
You held my hand, I felt a thrill
And yet afraid because I'm not sure
You like me?
You love me?
Narrow the distance?
You know?

Just who are you, Jesus? As you light up
my world
You want me to meet your Father?
Isn't it too soon? You give me your
word?
Can I trust it?
So you say
No more distance?
You know?

You scare me, Jesus,
as you call me out
of malaise
Into love, healing, joy,
to live intimately
with you
You say I can trust you?
You say I can
believe you
As you say
I am who I am
In for the distance?
You know

THURSDAY, JULY 28TH - WEEK 35, DAY 4

Jesus Says He is Not of this World

☐ Read John 8:21-30

DEVOTIONAL

People just couldn't figure out Jesus. He had just told them that He was the light of the world (v. 12) and that His testimony came straight from the heavenly Father (v. 18-19). Then, He made a somewhat cryptic statement about His return to heaven (v. 21). The upshot is that some of them thought He was a suicidal crackpot (v. 22).

So Jesus made it a bit more plain, saying, "You are from below; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world. I told you that you would die in your sins; if you do not believe that I am he, you will indeed die in your sins" (v. 23-24). Finally, some of them were brave enough to ask, "Who are you?"

It's a good question to ask Jesus. Take a few minutes right now and write down the answer to that question from what you have learned. At the top, write, "Jesus, who are you?" Then start scribbling. Go ahead, I'll wait...

What did you remember? What did Jesus say about Himself? What did others say about Him? What do you believe?

This section of Scripture ends with a movement in the faith of some of those listening to Jesus. Initially, "they did not understand that he was telling them about his Father" (v. 27). But this lack of understanding didn't stop Jesus from continuing to speak about His own identity. Verse 30 ends by saying, "Even as he spoke, many believed in him."

Go back to your list. Highlight in different ways the statements you really believe, mostly believe, struggle to believe, and even don't believe. How is Jesus challenging you to a movement in your faith in His identity?

POEM

Explain that Again

Stop speaking in riddles!
You mess with my brain
I don't understand you
Explain that again...

The words sound familiar
But meaning's not plain
Can't follow your thinking
Explain that again...

Another world vision?
I live the mundane?
You are who you are?
Explain that again...

NOTES

FRIDAY, JULY 29TH - WEEK 35, DAY 5

Jesus Teaches about True Disciples

☐ Read John 8:31-47

DEVOTIONAL

The truth will set you free.

Jesus was gaining new believers who needed some direction. So He told them, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (v. 31-32).

The truth will set you free.

Free from what, you might ask. Jesus cleared it up, saying, "everyone who sins is a slave to sin" (v. 34). Uggh. That means you and me. Everyone has sinned. So everyone is a slave to sin, not a child of the Father. Sin is a set of shackles. Sin is a wall of bars. Sin is a prison, barring us from the presence of the sinlessness of our perfect God. Sin is slavery.

When Jesus was first announced to His earthly father Joseph, the angel said about Mary, "She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins" (Matt. 1:21). Thirty years later, when Jesus began His public ministry, John the Baptist said of Him, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29).

Now, Jesus announces this same truth about Himself: "So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed" (John 8:36)

Satan is a liar.

Jesus is the truth.

The truth will set you free.

POEM

Daughter, I

I was born into bondage
A slave's daughter, I
The boundaries of my life
Narrow
Constrained
Guarded
By fearful predators
Snarling hounds
Foreman's guns

I was raised into degradation
A slave's daughter, I
Used to the feel of the boot
Kicking
Stepping
Grinding
My self worth
Mixing mud
Disgrace's face

I was bought by a Master
A slave's daughter, I
Highest price beyond my worth
Washed
Robed
Jeweled
The truth told
Amazing grace
Sweet Jesus

I now live in freedom
The King's daughter, I
With access to the treasury
Valued heir
Royal priestess
Holy resident
Knowing the truth
Which sets me free
Eternal life

NOTES

MONDAY, AUGUST 1ST - WEEK 36, DAY 1

Jesus Says He is the Eternal "I AM"

☐ Read John 8:48-59

DEVOTIONAL

The debate over the identity of Jesus reached a boiling point. Jesus had just confronted the Jewish religious authorities by telling them, "You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desires... for he is a liar and the father of lies" (John 8:44). Now, they turned the table on Jesus, saying to Him, "you are demon-possessed" (v. 48, 52). It was a spiritual showdown of magnificent proportions.

Jesus shot back, boldly proclaiming to be God's Son, saying, "My Father, whom you claim as your God, is the one who glorifies me" (v. 54). But Jesus didn't stop with a mere assertion to be God's Son. He went on with a declaration to be God Himself, saying, "Before Abraham was born, I am!" (v. 58). This is a clear reference to God who revealed His name as "I Am Who I Am" (see Exodus 3:14), and an audacious assertion to have existed prior to Abraham, whose story began in Genesis 11 over 2000 years earlier.

So they tried to kill Jesus right on the spot.

We are once again at the question: Who is Jesus? It is so important to get our Christology right. Many people see Jesus somewhere on the continuum between demon-possessed and God Himself. Perhaps that is the less controversial, more moderate, tolerance-friendly understanding of His identity. But Jesus does not give us that option. He either is who He said He is, or He isn't. He is either the Great I Am, or He is a big deceiver. He is either God in the flesh, or He is not.

Take a moment to write down the identity of Jesus as it is revealed in Scripture. After you have finished, look at your list. What is it about His identity that made others kill Him? What is it about His identity that made Him the perfect sacrifice for our sins? What is it about His identity that gives you hope?

POEM

True Perspective

We march along
Our time bound days
Dimensions, clouded sight, narrow
The past, remembered
Fainting, fading
The present, only noted
Partially
The future, planned
By foolish pride
But hidden, unknown
A mystery

The brightest ones
They vie for press
And argue 'truth' and science
The past, corrected
Redacting, correcting
The present, lab tested
Pridefully certain
The future, skewed
Trajectory off
Missing the mark
Distorted

Beyond the veil
Of time and space
Observes, directs, full knowing
The past, I AM's 'Today'
Full disclosure
The present, I AM's 'Today'
Under Sovereignty
The future, I AM's 'Today'
No mystery
God's perfect will
Working out
True Perspective

NOTES

TUESDAY, AUGUST 2ND - WEEK 36, DAY 2

Jesus Heals a Man Who Was Born Blind

☐ Read John 9:1-12

DEVOTIONAL

Whose fault is it? It's a question we ask whenever something bad happens. We want to know who is the blame for tension at work, problems in the family, or repeated sin in ourselves (we often give our parents credit for this one).

Things were no different for this poor man who everybody thought was going from womb to tomb completely blind. This time, it was Jesus' own disciples who posed the query: "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" (v. 2). It's got to be somebody's fault.

But Jesus would have none of it. Rather, He restored the man's sight "so that the works of God might be displayed in him" (v. 3). More importantly, Jesus used the metaphor of blindness and sight to reveal His identity as light in a dark world.

It is interesting that the man's neighbors weren't sure that the man who "came home seeing" was really the same guy. Come on. They were his neighbors! But that is the way it often is. We see people by their defining weakness, and just can't envision them beyond that weakness.

How about you? What is your defining weakness? Something physical? Emotional? Spiritual? A fear? A worry? If Jesus miraculously turned that into defining strength, what would your friends, family, classmates and coworkers say? Would they believe it was you?

Spend some time in prayer. Offer up to Jesus your defining weakness. Know that He doesn't care whose fault it is. He simply wants you to be defined by your defining strength. And just wait to see what the neighbors say!

POEM

What Do You See?

Close your eyes.
What do you see?
No shapes
No color
No light
The black of your lids
Might come to view
But darkness is
The present

Open your eyes
What do you see?
Another's speck
Another's sin
Another's vulnerability
The black of your pride
Might come to view
But darkness in
The pointing

Come blind to Jesus
What do you see?
A life of groping
A life of darkness
A life of blindness
The black of your soul
Might come to view
But darkness is
The reality

Be healed by Jesus
What do you see?
What God can do!
What glory shows!
What joy unknown!
The black of your past
Might come to view
But darkness is
Full Light

NOTES

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 3RD - WEEK 36, DAY 3

The Man Sees with Eyes of Faith

☐ Read John 9:13-41

DEVOTIONAL

Everybody had something to say about the blind man whose sight Jesus restored. The disciples wanted to know whose fault it was. The neighbors wanted to know if He was an imposter. The Pharisees became divided over whether Jesus was a sinner for healing (a work of God) on the Sabbath (a work against God). The man's parents distanced themselves from their healed son, placing their fear of being expelled from the synagogue over their joy that their baby could see them for the first time in his life. In the end, the man himself was thrown out of the synagogue, just as alone as when he was a blind beggar.

When Jesus heard about it, He found the man He had healed and asked, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" or as some manuscripts read, "Do you believe in the Son of God?" (v. 35). Already healed of physical blindness, he was now being offered a way out of spiritual blindness. He jumped at the chance and said, "Lord, I believe," then started worshipping Jesus.

Apparently, Jesus allowed the man to worship Him. Expelled from the synagogue just moments before he could see it for the first time, this man found a greater place of worship. Rejected by the Pharisees, abandoned by his parents, ignored by his neighbors, misunderstood by the disciples, this man finally found a friend in Jesus.

This man could not "see" better than the religious scholars of the day. He saw who Jesus really was, right on the heels of the Pharisees trying to stone Him for claiming to be the "I Am" (John 8:58). Perhaps the man would be all alone in his life to come, but his new sight and insight would give him "vision" for real life.

As the great hymn proclaims, "Open my eyes that I may see glimpses of truth thou hast for me." Ask God to give you vision for His purpose for you!

POEM

What Will I Say?

When those in power
Notice the Change
And march me in front of
The Accuser
The Skeptics
And point to me
And demand
"Who healed you?
Who is He?
Where is He?
Tell us now!"
And then stare with
Bloodied arrows in
Their grasp
And breathe
Foul death in
My face
And stink of
Terror's sweat
In their souls
What will I say?
Will I hedge?
Will I theologize?
Will I lie?
Will I deny?
What will I say?
All that I know?
I once was blind?
Now I see!
Master, I believe...

NOTES

THURSDAY, AUGUST 4TH - WEEK 36, DAY 4

Jesus Says, "I Am the Good Shepherd"

☐ Read John 10:1-21

DEVOTIONAL

Not long before this, the Pharisees proclaimed Jesus to be demon-possessed (John 8:48, 52). Now, after His teaching on being the gate to salvation and the Good Shepherd of the sheep, the Pharisees once again declared Him to be demon-possessed, as well as raving mad (v. 20). Yes, C.S. Lewis was correct in his book, Mere Christianity. Jesus was either the truth-telling God, or a deceptive demon, or a delusional nut job (or, as Lewis put it, "Lord, liar, or lunatic").

Jesus stood His ground. He drew the line clearly between Himself and Satan, saying, "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full" (v. 10). In this and previous verses, Jesus revealed Satan's true nature as a liar and thief, as a murderer and destroyer. By contrast, Jesus is "the way and the truth and the life" (John 14:6).

Even today, many people simply see Jesus as a good man, a wise teacher, or a holy prophet. Jesus doesn't leave us that wiggle room. He clearly points to Himself as the Son of God, the Great I Am, God Himself. From the time of Jesus until now, the debate over His true identity still rages on.

Indeed, some see Jesus as a false prophet, a misguided wannabe messiah, or even a figment of Christianity's collective imagination. The religious scholars of His day have much in common with the secular humanists of ours. They see Jesus as either a big liar or a delusional lunatic.

What do you say? Was Jesus stark raving mad? Was He a demonic deceiver? Or was Jesus the truth-telling Lord that He claimed He was?

How does your answer affect how you see Him, know Him, and follow Him?

POEM

Shepherd's Sheep

The first things I felt on the day I was born
Were the hands of the Shepherd
Rough, pierced from the thorns

His voice whispered to me; it crooned in my ears
As my bleating He soothed still
Abating my fears

The scent from His robes soon my compass became
While rough ground we covered
List'ning for my name

I tasted the green grass, fresh wheat from His word
My sores He anointed
By Spirit's oil poured

Though others tried call me, their voice I knew not
I ran from them, scattered
Relied on His rod

His staff is my safety; His fold is my home
Though tempted to wander
May I never roam

He is my Good Shepherd; I want not another
He willing lays down
His life for my cover

NOTES

FRIDAY, AUGUST 5TH - WEEK 36, DAY 5

Jesus Says, "I Am the Son of God"

☐ Read John 10:22-42

DEVOTIONAL

Amid all the controversy, Jesus went even further to reveal His true identity:

- "I did tell you" that I was the Messiah (v. 24-25)
- "I give… eternal life" (v. 28)
- "I and the Father are one" (v. 30)
- "I am God's Son" (v. 36)
- "The Father is in me, and I in the Father" (v. 38)

This outraged the Pharisees, who picked up stones to kill Him, saying to Him, "We are not stoning you for any good work… but for blasphemy, because you, a mere man, claim to be God" (v. 33).

There it is. Jesus does not leave us the option for us to think of Him as a mere man, a good man, or even a great man. He was the God-man, God in the flesh. For this He was crucified. By this we are saved. Praise be to God the Son!

After Jesus escaped from the religious elite, He went back to the area near where He and others had been baptized by John the Baptist. The Scripture says that "many people came to Him… and in that place many believed in Jesus" (v. 41-42). In response to the claims of Jesus to be God, some people tried to kill Him, while others submitted their lives to Him.

Truthfully, Jesus didn't have much tolerance for fence sitters. Following Him is either all-in or nothing. Romans 12:2 says, "Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will." Are you all-in with Jesus? If not, what needs to change in your life to follow Him in complete adoration, transformation, and obedience?

POEM

The Fence

A pastoral scene each day I knew
At my Grandma and
Grandpa's home
A midst rolling hills
Cattle grazed
Laid down
Chewing cud
Bellowing in contentment
As their jaws munched
To and fro
To and fro

I'd watch from my side of the fence
At my Grandma and
Grandpa's home
A midst brother's company
Summer laze
Safe and sound
Chewing hay-stalk
Mellowing in contentment
As my foot lifted to the fence rail
Scraping mud
Scraping mud

We climbed to the top rail
At my Grandma and
Grandpa's home
A midst warnings of care
Courageous craze
High and bold
Tottering seat
Hello-ing large beasts
As my legs dangled
Straddling fence
Straddling fence

We jumped to the field side
At my Grandma and
Grandpa's home
A midst greener pasture
Suddenly dazed
Bull's head down
Snorting breath
Yellowing in cowardice
As we ran to the gate
Panting fear
Panting fear

How quickly we learned safety
At my Grandma and
Grandpa's home
A midst the wild beast and threats
Seeing prey
"Lie down"
Shaking shoes
Tottering on the fence
As our faith wavers
Silenced and afraid
Silenced and afraid

MONDAY, AUGUST 8TH - WEEK 37, DAY 1

Jesus Hears that His Friend Lazarus has Died

☐ Read John 11:1-16

DEVOTIONAL

For the next several days we will explore the events surrounding the death of a man named Lazarus. The story picks up with a simple statement that Lazarus was sick. We see throughout this episode and elsewhere in the Gospels that Jesus was close friends with Lazarus and his sisters, Mary and Martha. Verse five even tells us that he loved them. How do you imagine Jesus was feeling when he heard the news?

Recall that Jesus was in hiding away from Judea, having escaped the murderous clutches of the Pharisees. Perhaps when He stayed where He was two more days, the disciples assumed it was because He was afraid for His life. Who could blame Him?

But after those two days, He said to His disciples, "Let's go back to Judea." Somebody from the Twelve spoke up, "But Rabbi… a short while ago the Jews there tried to stone you, and yet you are going back?" Bethany was only two miles from Jerusalem, where they had tried to stone Jesus. Imagine what these guys were thinking. They were worried for Jesus' life. No doubt they were worried for their own lives. Certainly the people who wanted to eliminate Jesus would also go after His closest followers.

We see that Jesus didn't stay in hiding to avert His own death, but that He stayed to wait for Lazarus' death. His followers had already seen Him heal people and raise them to new life. But they had never seen Him raise somebody who had been dead for four days (v. 17). Apparently Lazarus was already dead when Jesus got the news of his sickness, which He knew by divine wisdom. "So then he told them plainly, 'Lazarus is dead, [15] and for your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him'" (v. 14-15). Jesus was more interested in their faith than their lives. And the same is true for you too!

POEM

Lazarus Life

I am sick
Sheer agony
My bones ache deep
Parched mouth sores be
Skin clings pale taut
For death I plead
I am sick
Sheer agony

He is sick
I am afraid
By bed I sit
Despite my aid
He shivers hot
His breath decayed
He is sick
I am afraid

He is sick
My prayers are spent
Despite my faith
My hope relents
For the Savior
I have sent
He is sick
My prayers are spent

He is sick
Let's wait awhile
Before I go
To Heaven's Child
Though some may scoff
Even revile
He is sick
Let's wait awhile

He is dead
My tears won't stop
His body bathe
I then anoint
Wrap myrrh around
In linen cloth
He is dead
My tears won't stop

He is dead
Where were you, God?
Could you not
Traverse this sod
His hand to hold
Grave to defraud?
He is dead
Where were you, God?

I am here
Tears down my face
There's resurrection
Room for grace
My timing's perfect
In this space
I am here
Tears down my face

You are here
But you are late
Why did you
Your friend forsake?
I am here
For Glory's sake
You are here
But you are late

You are alive
He calls to me
In dreams unknown
I hear him speak
Come forth, he says
Out of death deep
You are alive
He calls to me

He is alive
I gawk in awe
Unwrap him now
Death's horrid law
No longer binds
Him, this you saw
He is alive
I gawk in awe

TUESDAY, AUGUST 9TH - WEEK 37, DAY 2

Jesus Says, "I Am the Resurrection & Life"

☐ Read John 11:17-37

DEVOTIONAL

Earlier in this passage, Jesus referred to Himself as "God's Son" (v. 4). Martha echoed this, proclaiming to Him, "I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, who is to come into the world" (v. 27).

This was in response to Jesus' statement, "I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?" (v. 25-26).

Do you believe this?

What a great question. Jesus didn't force Himself upon anyone. He simply stated His identity and purpose, then asked, "Do you believe this?"

We are now 70% of the way through the Life of Jesus study. You have learned much about the life, teachings, and works of Jesus. You have read about who He says He is, and what He does for us. You have studied Him up close and personal. Now the question...

Do you believe this?

Recall our working definition of a disciple.

A disciple is someone who knows, loves, and obeys Jesus,
and helps others do the same.

Do you believe this?

POEM

Really, Really

Master, the one you love is very sick
Really, really
Fever high, stabbing pain, sunken eyes
Drawing skin, ragged breath
O, Resurrection and Life
Can you come?

Master, the one you love is very dead
Really, really
Heart beat silenced, body stiff, blue tinged
Four days buried, rotting flesh
O, Resurrection and Life
Where were you?

Master, the ones you love are very grieved
Really, really
Mournful wails, beating breasts, silenced prayers
Dam-breaking tears, wavering faith
O, Resurrection and Life
Will you weep?

My child, the one you love is resting, sleep
Really, really
Safe in love, chariot-ing home, peace at last
No more tears, waiting still
I Am Resurrection and Life
Do you believe?

Master, the one you love is walking forth!
Really, really
From the tomb, now unbound, fresh and clean
Now alive, displaying glory!
Resurrected and Alive!
How deeply you love!

NOTES

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 10TH - WEEK 37, DAY 3

Jesus Raises Lazarus from the Dead

☐ Read John 11:38-44

DEVOTIONAL

In this passage, both the full humanity and full divinity of Jesus are on full display. When He was being led to the tomb of his friend Lazarus, verse 35 simply says, "Jesus wept." Then, when he arrived at the tomb, we again see that Jesus was, "once more deeply moved." Like any human, Jesus experienced grief, hunger, temptations, and rejection. Isaiah prophesied that He would be "a man of suffering, and familiar with pain" (Isaiah 53:3). Jesus was fully human.

And Jesus was fully God. With just a few brief words, He spoke to a rotting corpse through a solid stone covering the opening in a rock-hewn tomb. And the corpse came out, still wrapped in his grave clothes. Nobody was more startled than Lazarus himself! Jesus was fully God and fully man.

The words of the Nicene Creed, which have guided the Christian Church since the 300's A.D., affirm this understanding of Jesus. Speak these words out loud as you confess your faith in God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit!

The Nicene Creed

We believe in one God,
the Father, the Almighty,
maker of heaven and earth,
of all that is, seen and unseen.
We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ,
the only Son of God,
eternally begotten of the Father,
God from God, Light from Light,
true God from true God,
begotten, not made,
of one Being with the Father;
through him all things were made.
For us and for our salvation
he came down from heaven,
was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and
the Virgin Mary
and became truly human.
For our sake he was crucified under
Pontius Pilate;
he suffered death and was buried.
On the third day he rose again
In accordance with the Scriptures;
he ascended into heaven
and is seated at the right hand of the
Father.
He will come again in glory
to judge the living and the dead,
and his kingdom will have no end.
We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord,
the giver of life,
who proceeds from the Father and
the Son,
who with the Father and the Son
is worshiped and glorified,
who has spoken through the prophets.
We believe in one holy catholic and*
apostolic church.
We acknowledge one baptism
for the forgiveness of sins.
We look for the resurrection of the
dead, and the life of the world to
come. Amen.

**here the word catholic means universal*

POEM

Where?

Where have you laid him, your brother, your love?
Upon what Rock does he sleep?
Where is your bowl of prayers?
Where is your vial of tears?
Where does your heart repose?

Where have you put these worries of yours?
Upon who's Yoke are you leaning?
Where is your place of rest?
Where is the succor breast?
Where does your Sabbath reside?

Where have you put this hope of yours?
Upon what is your Foundation built?
Where if your treasure stored?
Where is your life's reward?
Where does your faith reside?

NOTES

THURSDAY, AUGUST 11TH - WEEK 37, DAY 4

Caiaphas & the Sanhedrin Seek to Kill Jesus

☐ Read John 11:45-57

DEVOTIONAL

As a result of raising Lazarus from the dead, many people went to see it for themselves. When they saw the dead man walking and talking, many people believed in Jesus. This stoked the already hot fires of the Pharisees hatred for Jesus.

So they called a meeting of the Sanhedrin, the Jewish council which had authority over the religious beliefs and practices of the day. Their conclusion: "If we let [Jesus] go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and then the Romans will come and take away both our temple and our nation" (v. 48). Never mind that dead people are raised to life. They only cared about their religious traditions and political power. So sad.

Enter Caiaphas, the high priest who would later play a pivotal role in the crucifixion of Jesus. Using twisted words, Caiaphas convinced the Sanhedrin that killing Jesus would actually unify the Jewish people who lived in Israel as well as those who were scattered in other nations. The result is that Jesus and His disciples went into deeper hiding, away from the religious mob.

But Jesus didn't stay away for long. By verse 55 He was back in Jerusalem for what would be His final Passover celebration. It is the beginning of the end. The religious leaders thought they were going to bring unity to the Jews by killing Jesus. They underestimated. They didn't realize that they were actually going to bring forgiveness to the entire world through His death.

Remember the words of Jesus from earlier in this chapter: "I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me w-ill never die. Do you believe this?"

POEM

Kill Joy

My day's interrupted despite scheduled plan
A herald most urgent—compassion demand
God calls me to deviate, step off my road
To enter a mission where grace is bestowed

There's darkness around me and foul smell of death
There's crying and mourning, Anxiety's breath
But I bear the Kingdom of God in my breast
I speak, and life comes forth, oppression addressed

Rejoicing bursts forth from the ones who once knew
The sorrow, the sadness and hopelessness too
But some in the background can't join in the dance
They whisper, they plot offring Sin's nasty glance

"Just what do we do now as His power grows?
This man keeps on doing things;
God's miracles show
Our pow'r and our privilege will be destroyed
We must have a plan which will fin'lly Kill Joy."

And so to their asp nest they slither, they crawl
They reproduce lies and they plan how to maul
The Joy of the Father, The One and True King
Is traded, betrayed and replaced with Death's sting

NOTES

FRIDAY, AUGUST 12TH - WEEK 37, DAY 5

A Second Woman Anoints Jesus

☐ Read John 12:1-11

DEVOTIONAL

Jesus was at a dinner given in His honor, because He had brought Lazarus back to life. The two sisters, Mary and Martha, were present at their home along with their brother Lazarus. In Luke 10:38-42 (see Week 27, Day 2), Jesus was at the same home when Martha complained that she was doing all the serving while her sister Mary was just sitting and listening to Jesus talk.

Here again, Martha was running around serving all the guests, when her sister took a pint of expensive perfume and anointed Jesus' feet. Judas Iscariot objected, saying the perfume was worth a year's wages and could have been given to the poor. John added a commentary, saying that Judas really wanted the money for himself.

The whole scene drew a large crowd of curious onlookers who wanted to see Jesus and the guy that He raised from the dead. Many of them believed in Jesus. So the religious power brokers decided to kill Lazarus again. The poor guy.

This whole scene raises some questions:

- Would you offer a year's wages just to bless Jesus?
- Would you embarrass yourself for Jesus in front of others like Mary did?
- What would it look like for you to be that thankful to Jesus?
- What is the most extravagant way you could imagine showing your love to Jesus?
- How willing are you to do brave things for Jesus, even when other religious people question it?
- Are you willing to risk your life – even twice – to be with Jesus?
- Are there any hypocritical ways in you, like Judas wanting the money for himself, but pretending he wanted it for the poor?

POEM

Mary's Sacrament

Discern floral smell wafting
up from the hill?
With eyes full blindfolded,
I'd recognize still
The scent of the grapes hanging ripe
on strong vines
It's Bethany's vineyard
Providing joy's wine

The waves of the ocean in
wheat field now hear
The harvest is plentiful,
gleaners bend near
There's barley in springtime and
wheat in the fall
It's Israel's valley
Bread torn, shared with all

And just over there with the great
millstone rolling
Oil pours forth from olives,
pure filtered anointing
The rich grassy quality oil stored in urns
Gethsemane's oil press
Expressing call's berm

Now up in the hills, shepherds
watch over sheep
Their voices in canyons,
the ewes loudly bleat
They both call to lambs raised
for sacrifice, meat
It's Bethlehem's pastures
Forgiveness complete

The richness of my land,
the finest of wares
Yet in all Jerusalem nothing
compares
To Messiah who comes bringing
treasures for life
It's God's only Son
My dead soul to revive

So I bring to this table
my costly perfume
My gratitude flowing
ignores the full room
This, my dowry offering,
I willing bring
To Christ, Precious Altar,
My love song to sing

NOTES

MONDAY, AUGUST 15TH - WEEK 38, DAY 1

Jesus Rides into Jerusalem on a Donkey

☐ Read Matthew 21:1-11, Mark 11:1-11, Luke 19:28-40, John 12:12-19

DEVOTIONAL

There is an iconic photo of a sailor kissing a woman in New York's Times Square in celebration of the news that World War 2 was over. Ticker tape parades and spontaneous celebrations are part of a culture's way to commemorate athletic achievement, political attainment, and cultural accomplishment.

When Jesus entered Jerusalem for the final time, that was what was going on. Huge crowds were aroused by the news that He had raised Lazarus from the dead. They and "the whole crowd of disciples" laid their clothes and palm branches on the road, rolling out the red carpet for Him like royalty, shouting, "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!" (Luke 8:38).

This fulfilled the prophecy in Zechariah 9:9 written over 500 years earlier. Israel's long-awaited king had arrived, ready to take back the nation from the corrupt Pharisees and Sadducees and the oppressive Roman Caesar and soldiers. Jesus the king would bring justice and freedom! "Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David! Hosanna in the highest heaven!" (Mark 11:10).

How disappointed they must have been when it became clear that Jesus was not going to lead a religious and political coup, but instead would be arrested as a heretic and insurrectionist. Many of those who shouted, "Hosanna!" would soon be shouting "Crucify Him!"

For many, Jesus just doesn't live up to the expectations we have placed on Him. When we want Him to fix our finances or heal our hurts or correct our causes, and He doesn't do it in the way we expected, we often distance ourselves or even turn against Him. What has Jesus done for you? What is left undone? What does that tell you about who He is and who you are?

POEM

Who Is This?

Who is this asking for a colt?
Who said you could untie them?
Who borrows saying, "I've a need,"
Who thinks he can just ride him?

Who wants an ass and not a mount
More worthy of his station?
Who humbly enters city gates
While crowds sing jubilation?

Who answers Zion's daughters' prayers?
Whose face is fanned with branches?
Who really knows what's going on
While loud "Hosanna" chant is?

Who strides into the temple, brave,
As if he owns all places?
Who has the guts to swing the cords
While shouting loud disgraces?

Who is the one who bravely speaks
Against the ones in power?
Who is this man who swings the ax
Against the proud man's tower?

Why does he curse unfruitfulness
Yet spends his time with beggars?
How can he stand the lepers' stench
And cast out perfumed sages?

Just who is he, who comes
and goes,
Without a statement letter?
Who calls first, last and
broken, whole,
And humble all the better?

Who is this one who sees
straight through
And names the core that's rotten?
Who talks about the Father's will
And how its been forgotten?

Is he a prophet on the list
Of those who kill for own gain?
Is he the Master of the house
Who servants will disdain?

From me, just what will he require?
A donkey? Praise? Or cleansing?
Will he expect some fruitfulness?
My will to his will bending?

O, please, let him my Healer be
Who cleanses my behavior
Who overthrows Rebellion's heart
My Truthful Prince, my Savior!

TUESDAY, AUGUST 16TH - WEEK 38, DAY 2

Jesus Grieves Over Jerusalem Again

☐ Read Luke 19:41-44

DEVOTIONAL

Previously in Luke 13:31-35 we saw Jesus grieving over Jerusalem, when He said, "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets… you will not see me again until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.' (see Week 29, Day 5). In yesterday's reading, when Jesus triumphantly rode back into Jerusalem, the crowd shouted, "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!" Jesus was back in the city that He proclaimed killed the prophets.

Just as He had done when He heard that Lazarus had died, Jesus wept. He cried not because He feared His impending crucifixion, but because He grieved over the Jerusalem. The city had been the epicenter of God's activity among His chosen people for over a millennium. Kings and priests and prophets had succeeded and failed, prophesied and blasphemed, obeyed and dishonored God in His holy city.

So with tears, Jesus looked over the city and said, "If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace." They thought they would get peace through religious reform and political protest. Not so. He told them that they missed their opportunity for true peace, "because you did not recognize the time of God's coming to you."

Philippians 4:7 teaches us that, "the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." And in John 14:27, Jesus promised his worried disciples, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid."

In what areas of your life are you longing for peace? How will you get it?

POEM

My Tears Ever– Flowing

My pillow is damp with
My tears ever-flowing
My grief and my anguish
My sorrow, my love
Just where is the key to
Unlock Myst'ry's shackles
To remedy sin's curse
Rebellion destroy
Dear Father, collect them
These tears that I spill
Remember them, precious,
As I seek Your will
My people, Your children
My tears ever-flowing
My grief and my anguish
My sorrow, my love

NOTES

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 17TH - WEEK 38, DAY 3

Jesus Clears the Temple Again

☐ Read Matthew 21:12-17, Mark 11:15-19, Luke 19:45-48

DEVOTIONAL

Early in Jesus' ministry, during a different Passover, Jesus cleansed the temple, proclaiming "Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days" (See Week 7, Day 2, John 2:19). John tells us that "the temple he had spoken of was his body" (John 2:21).

Now we are near the end of Jesus' earthly ministry. It was time for His body to be destroyed and raised again in three days. The time had come to cleanse the Jewish temple again, as a lasting reminder that God desires authentic worship.

Jesus' actions were a direct confrontation of the corrupt religious system in place. It is no wonder that the religious leaders were "indignant" (Matt. 21:15) and began "looking for a way to kill him" (Mark 11:18; Luke 19:47). The donkey ride into Jerusalem set Him against the Roman authorities (as a king making a triumphal entry), as well as against the religious establishment, with shouts from children, "Hosanna to the Son of David," (a clear reference to Him as the Messiah).

The cleansing of the temple was fuel to their fire. But the moment was not right for His adversaries, because "all the people hung on his words… [and] the whole crowd was amazed at his teaching" (Luke 19:48; Mark 11:18). All that would change very soon.

1 Corinthians 6:19 says, "Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies." What part of your temple needs cleansing by Jesus?

POEM

Angry!
I came to my house of peace
Only to find robbers a-spilling
I came to my house of prayer
Only to find wolves a-killing
My sheep

My anger rose up in my breast
A three corded weapon contriving
My anger rose up in my strength
To throw out the evil a-driving
My flock

My beautiful temple--my treasure
The Body of Mine sustaining
My beautiful temple--my pleasure
This Body of Mine maintaining
My glory

NOTES

THURSDAY, AUGUST 18TH - WEEK 38, DAY 4

Jesus Tells Why He Must Die

☐ Read John 12:20-36

DEVOTIONAL

One of Jesus' very first acts of ministry was to tell Philip to follow Him. The first thing Philip did was to invite his skeptical Jewish friend Nathanael to "Come and see" for himself who Jesus was (see John 1:43-51). Here, at the end of Jesus' three-year ministry, Philip is approached by some non-Jewish Greek people with the request, "we would like to see Jesus." Philip must have had the reputation as the "Come and see" disciple.

When Philip took this request to Jesus, He responded by saying that it was time for Him to die. Perhaps the time for meeting new people was over. That would fall to His disciples after His death, resurrection and ascension. Indeed, according to tradition, Philip ministered to Greek-speaking people after Jesus gave them the Great Commission.

But at the moment, Jesus said, "The hour has come." His death was imminent and necessary. Jesus clarified this by saying, ""Now my soul is troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour" (v. 27). Jesus, the Lamb of God, would die for the sins of the world, including Jewish skeptics and non-Jewish seekers!

His death was like a buried seed, which would produce spiritual seed-bearing plants.

His death was like a hidden light, which would reveal hidden darkness in us.

His death was that of a crucified Son, which offered us eternal life with the Father in heaven.

For this very reason Jesus came to this hour.

POEM

The Hour

God sat on his throne
And looked at his watch
The ticking and tocking
As seconds marched
The hour is coming

Christ sat at the table
And looked at his loves
The breaking and tearing
As dusk descended
The hour is upon us

Priests sat in their council
And looked at the numbers
The growing and threatening
As darkness gathered
The hour is soon

Disciples sat on the ground
And looked at their Master
The praying and groaning
As blood pulsed
The hour is upon us

Pilate sat meting judgment
And looked at the crowd
The bargaining and washing
As time melted
The hour is here

Soldiers sat at the cross
And looked at the prize
The gambling and mocking
As hands stretched
The hour has come

NOTES

FRIDAY, AUGUST 19TH - WEEK 38, DAY 5

Most People Don't Believe, or Believe Secretly

☐ Read John 12:37-50

DEVOTIONAL

At the end of Jesus' life and ministry, there were several responses to Him:

Committed Followers – The disciples and others who believed in Jesus and followed Him wherever He went.

New Believers – As Jesus continued to preach, teach and heal, many people put their faith in Him.

Non-Believers – John 12:37 states it succinctly: "Even after Jesus had performed so many signs in their presence, they still would not believe in him." Even the Son of God did not make everyone believe that Jesus was the Son of God.

Secret Believers – This is sad. "Yet at the same time many even among the leaders believed in him. But because of the Pharisees they would not openly acknowledge their faith for fear they would be put out of the synagogue; for they loved human praise more than praise from God" (John 12:42-43).

Scattered among them were skeptics, nominal believers, those who were indifferent or didn't care, and a host of others. 2 Peter 3:9 says, "The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance."

Here is the good news: God is waiting patiently for you. He will never force you to embrace Him. But He is extending His arms to receive you if you are willing. To repent means to confess your sinfulness, receive His salvation, and change your way of thinking and way of living. God is longing for you to become a committed follower of Jesus!

POEM

There'll Be A Change in You

My feet are a tapping
I'm dancing the dance
Of
Do-do-wah-do-do
My life in the trance
Of
Busy-so-busy
Just look at me
See?
I'm working, I'm doing
Buzz-buzz-flighty
Bee

This do-do-wah stepping
The beat of my life
Keeps
Moving me forward
With worry and strife
To
Gain recognition
A disco light, see
Of
Sparkle reflecting
La-la-land, that's
Me

No way will I stop
A wallflower on chair
I
Keep up my stepping
Convinced to declare
My
Worth and perfection
I'll hoard from the crowd
But
Follow God's leading?
No-nah-not
Allowed

NOTES

MONDAY, AUGUST 22ND - WEEK 39, DAY 1

Jesus Curses a Fig Tree

☐ Read Matthew 21:18-22, Mark 11:12-14, 20-25

DEVOTIONAL

I must admit, this is a strange episode in the life of Jesus. On the one hand, Jesus curses a tree (which has no ability to change its circumstances) which was not bearing fruit (even though it was too early in the season for fruit) just because He was hungry (couldn't He have gotten food from somewhere else?). On this level, Jesus seems to have lost self-control and logic.

On the other hand, Jesus was teaching His disciples about faith, simply using the fig tree as a giant object lesson. He knew that in a matter of days He would be gone. His followers would become the movement leaders. They would need mountain-moving faith in order to expand the fledgling Church into a persecution-soaked empire. When faced with impossible odds, they would remember the withered fig tree, and know that the words and person of Jesus have ultimate authority!

This living parable was less about Jesus unfulfilled hunger than His fulfilled words. Prayer should be a doubt-free, faith-filled relationship with the Father. Jesus said, if you believe it you will receive it. I have trouble with name it and claim it theology, but there is a deep truth to discover here. Too often we have doubt-filled prayers, such as, "Dear God, do this only if you want to, and if not let us accept it..."

It is good to have humility in our walk with God. But it is also good to walk in the confident power of His Holy Spirit. Lord, teach us to pray! Set us free to believe! Make us bold to follow! Send us out to minister!

As Jesus said in verse 22, "Have faith in God!"

POEM

Why We Were Created

Our eyes were created for seeing
To bring information to light
To cast visions forth for transforming
To bring God's faith people
new sight

Our ears were created for hearing
To listen completely then do
To heed the commands of
our Master
To usher in Spirit's renewal

Our mouths were created
for speaking
To comfort, exhort and to bless
To preach the Good News
of salvation
To bring hope to those in distress

Our taste buds created
to savor
Enjoy the full goodness of God
To marvel, explore the
assortment
To savor, remember our Lord

Our hearts were created for
mercy
To pray for the downcast and
crushed
To notice when called to do
justice
To truly discern and to trust

Our hands and feet ready
for service
To answer the Spirit's
commands
To love God and neighbor
superbly
To witness God's kingdom
expand

NOTES

TUESDAY, AUGUST 23RD - WEEK 39, DAY 2

Jesus Defends His Authority

☐ Read Matthew 21:23-27, Mark 11:27-33, Luke 20:1-8

DEVOTIONAL

Authority is an important word in the Gospels.

- Jesus "taught as one who had authority" (Matt. 7:29; Mark 1:22)
- "the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins" (Matt 9:6; Mark 2:10; Luke 5:24)
- Jesus sent out the twelve disciples "two by two and gave them authority over impure spirits" (Matt 10:1; Mark 6:7; Luke 9:1)
- Jesus sent out seventy-two followers saying, "I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you" (Luke 10:19)
- The resurrected Jesus said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." (Matt. 28:18-20)
- "Fear him who, after your body has been killed, has authority to throw you into hell" (Luke 12:5)
- God has given His Son "authority to judge because he is the Son of Man" (John 5:27)
- And this prayer to God: "For you granted [Jesus] authority over all people that he might give eternal life to all those you have given him" (John 17:2)

And the religious scholars came to Jesus. "By what authority are you doing these things?" they asked. "And who gave you this authority?" Jesus answered their question with a question which contained the answer: Heaven!

POEM

Credentials?

Would you ask Mr. Rembrandt's
credentials?
Is such a request an essential?
Or is viewing his art
Enough for your heart
To assent a great master is present?

Would you dare challenge
Bocelli's competence?
Asking teachers and
schooling to reference?
Or would you just bask
As a song he unmasks
Bringing beauty unknown to your
hearing?

About Mr. Frank Lloyd's
design?
If he offered a plan,
you'd decline?
Then you'd be a fool
To reject such a jewel
Your stupidity to all displaying.

So why, when the Master's
before you
Would you question if his
words were all true?
From his mouth came creation
Yet evaluation
Of authority plain in your sight?

NOTES

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 24TH - WEEK 39, DAY 3

The Parable of the Two Sons

☐ Read Matthew 21:28-32

DEVOTIONAL

This parable is tied to the previous passage where the religious leaders challenged the authority of Jesus. He answered them, saying, "John's baptism—where did it come from? Was it from heaven, or of human origin?" (John 21:25).

Now he told them, "Truly I tell you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you. For John came to you to show you the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes did. And even after you saw this, you did not repent and believe him" (v. 31-32). The "sinners" believed while the "religious" refused.

Jesus laid it out plainly. This refusal to believe, repent, and follow has eternal consequences. Perhaps He was saying that the rich and righteous are too self-sufficient to truly yield to the authority of God, or anyone else for that matter. This parable of the two sons is a rebuke to the religious authorities, saying that obedience to the Father is more important than privilege or position.

Jesus was now in the hottest of water, telling the purveyors of righteousness that they needed to become more like repentant prostitutes.

In your spiritual journey, in what ways are you like the first son, who told the father, "I will not," but later changed his mind and obeyed?

In what ways are you like the second son, who told the father, "I will," but ended up not obeying?

What will you do about it?

POEM

Shoving Spirit

Shoving Spirit, push me through
All temptations back to You

Butt me up against the wall
Until all resistance falls

Bend the bars of my own prison
Coach in me the gifts You've giv'n

Strong Tornado turn me 'round
Pick me up then set me down

Windy Gust then drive me on
To the call where I belong

Nudge me on the loving way
Prod me always to obey

Agitate new life in me
Widen what my eyes can see

Hold me to the Cornerstone
Wing me on to heights unknown

NOTES

THURSDAY, AUGUST 25TH - WEEK 39, DAY 4

The Parable of the Wicked Tenants

☐ Read Matthew 21:33-46, Mark 12:1-12, Luke 20:9-19

DEVOTIONAL

This story gives insight to the heart of God. He is like a landowner who gave the Promised Land to His chosen people. He gave them everything they needed, including His covenant to provide for them and expect from them the way of righteousness. He sent them priests and prophets, kings and angels, but they turned their backs on them and rejected God Himself.

Finally, He sent His Son, saying, "They will respect my son." But alas, they treated Him the same way, putting Him to death so that they could grasp away His inheritance. The rejected Son will become a cornerstone of faith to those who follow and obey, but a stumbling stone to those who refuse. In fact, the kingdom of God will be taken away from the disobedient and given to those who will do something with it!

This little parable did not set well with the religious leaders. They knew that Jesus was calling them disobedient, privileged, and self-centered. Now they were more ready than ever to arrest Him and have Him crucified. But "they were afraid of the crowd because the people held that he was a prophet" (Matt. 21:46).

Read through this parable a few more times, replacing your name with different characters in the story. Go ahead. I'll wait....

How did this make you feel?

What is your reaction?

What is your responsibility?

POEM

Out of the Stall—Bumbled

Beloved Son
The only true One
To the Father's vineyard sent
Attending

Beloved Son
By the laborers shunned
Disregarded, discarded
Unyielding

Beloved Son
On the wall there now hung
In pain crying out and
Bleeding

Beloved Son
By cruelty undone
From the cross to the grave
Descending

Beloved Son
New creation begun
By the rising from tomb
Ascending

Beloved Son
Now the victory won
For your siblings, once
dead, now
Rejoicing

NOTES

FRIDAY, AUGUST 26TH - WEEK 39, DAY 5

The Parable of the Wedding Banquet

☐ Read Matthew 22:1-14

DEVOTIONAL

The Parable of the Tenants (see yesterday) and the Parable of the Wedding Banquet have similar themes: a person of power sends servants with a message that is rejected by the recipients, who in turn are rejected by the powerful man. The blessing is taken from those recipients and given to others:

- "the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit" (Matt. 21:43)

- "So go to the street corners and invite to the banquet anyone you find" (Matt. 22:9)

This concept is also found in the Parable of the Great Banquet, where the person of power said,

- "Go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame" (Luke 14:21).

The invitation to be in the kingdom of God can be rejected by those who would seem to have an inside track.

Today in the U.S. we suffer from what I call, "functional universalism," whereby people believe they will end up in a better place just by being born in America. But discipleship is much more than privilege. It's about surrender of self to the Lordship of Christ. Whether bad or good, rich or poor, healthy or not, Jesus calls on those who "will produce fruit."

Kingdom living on earth leads to the kingdom of heaven. Let us strive to disciple people who live, love and look like Jesus.

POEM

Grabbing

Why do we always want to grab and hold onto
That which does not belong to us?
Why do we always want to steal and take
That which is not meant for us?

Why do we always covet and long for
That which has been restricted from us?
Instead of waiting and longing and craving
That for which we have been created
The deepest desire of our hearts
The only thing which will satisfy
Our longing

Why are we not
Grabbing
For intimacy
With
God?

NOTES

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