



Lenten Devotional 2023

Adapted from Adam Hamilton's Luke: Jesus and the Outsiders, Outcasts and Outlaws Grow, Pray and Study Guide (GPS) devotional.

Week #1

Preparing for Lent: Read Luke 1:1 – 3:22

**WEDNESDAY 2.22.23 (Ash Wednesday) Turn off voices that draw you away from God
Trying to derail the Messiah**

Luke 3:23-4:13

Unlike Matthew (cf. [Matthew 1:1-17](#)), Luke took Jesus' list of ancestors all the way back to "Adam, the son of God." That showed Jesus as the Savior for all people. All of the temptations tried to get Jesus to make his life easier by matching popular hopes of what the Messiah would do. But Jesus refused the urge to prove his identity in self-serving ways.

- Our culture often toys with the medieval idea of an ugly, horned devil. Would a figure like that have actually appealed to Jesus? Are you tempted, not by a dark "devil" figure, but by an inner whisper urging you to ignore God's way? How can embracing your identity as God's child help you resist that whisper?
- In Luke 4:10-11, the tempter quoted Psalm 91. Jesus didn't say, "A Bible verse? Must be right." Scholar Scot McKnight said we cannot "read the Bible as a collection of...sanctified morsels of truth." * How can you, like Jesus, learn the Bible's core principles to guide your life? How can it be spiritually unsafe to follow isolated Bible verses, as the tempter urged Jesus to do?

Prayer: Loving God, remind me to hear and apply the Bible's big principles to my life. Let me learn, not just fragments, but the Bible's overall message to empower me to resist temptation. Amen.

THURSDAY 2.23.23 Learning from early experiences

Early returns: some amazed, others furious

Luke 4:14-44

Jesus defined his mission with the healing, liberating action words of Isaiah 61. In Nazareth, he met rejection and anger. The people in Capernaum wanted him to stay (verse 42). Jesus did not let either human rejection or popularity decide his actions, but steadily followed the course he and God chose.

- Jesus claimed Isaiah 61:1-2 as his "job description." He later said doing what he did is the call for all his followers (cf. [John 14:12, 20:21](#)). Re-read Luke 4:18-19. Which parts of this work are you most passionate about? Will you accept Jesus' "job offer" and join him in actively carrying out God's mission in our hurting world?
- Jesus was the ultimate "servant leader." That included intentional soul care. In verse 42 (again in [Luke 5:16](#)), Luke said Jesus made a point of praying in solitary places. Solitude—just you and God—can be hard. How could you create some alone time on purpose each day? How could you find longer periods of solitude with God as needed?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, rejected or praised, you steadily lived out God's purpose for your life. Guide me in nurturing the inner springs of life so that I, too, can live out your purpose for me. Amen.

FRIDAY 2.24.23 How we continue Jesus' mission

Calling, healing, and forgiving

Luke 5:1-26

Luke (likely Paul's friend, "the dearly loved physician" of [Colossians 4:14](#)) listed many of the ills Jesus healed. Awe-inspiring spiritual power was clearly at work in Jesus (verse 26). And because many people in that day saw all illness as a sign of God's curse, Jesus' healing powerfully showed God's forgiveness and love, not just raw power.

- At Resurrection, we define the spiritual gift of healing as "the divine ability to bring wholeness— physical, emotional or spiritual—to others." * Do Luke's stories suggest that Jesus healed in all these ways? In which way(s) do you most need healing? How can you more fully open yourself to Jesus' healing power?
- Sadly, many religious leaders watched Jesus with a critical spirit (verses 17-21). They didn't like him helping "sinners." Scholar Hans Küng wrote, "The Church must always dissociate itself from sin, but it can never have any excuse for keeping any sinner at a distance." ** Are you fully aware that only a church that, like Jesus, welcomes "sinners" can truly welcome you?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, thank you for offering me your healing, restorative power. Guard my heart against ever thinking I am "too good" to associate with any of your beloved children. Amen.

SATURDAY 2.25.23 Surprise a neighbor

A growing issue: "to save life or to destroy it?" Luke 5:27-6:11

Jesus' challenge to the *status quo* made the religious leaders afraid and angry. Luke 5:36 was the first of 14 uses of the word "parable" in Luke. People in Palestine often used goatskins to hold wine and other fluids. As new wine fermented, it would burst a rigid old skin. Jesus said God's new ways of working in the world would burst old cultural norms. The response to Jesus' Sabbath healing was one sign of how his work and his message stretched old, rigid spiritual ideas to the breaking point.

- Old ways are neither necessarily bad nor necessarily good. In the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, God was setting up new ways to pursue his eternal mission to bless the whole world. Israel had 12 tribes. Jesus chose, not 8 or 10, but 12 people as "apostles," a word that meant "an emissary of God...with special authority and status in Christ for the sake of the gospel." * It was a clear sign that his followers would embody God's original mission for Israel (cf. [Genesis 12:1-3](#)). How has God transformed you from old ways of living to new ways? How does living out God's mission to the whole world shape Resurrection's international mission work?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, help me to respect and value all that is good in tradition. And guide me to also value and respect the newness and fresh energy you keep bringing to human life. Amen.

Week #2

February 26, 2023, Simon, Do You See This Woman?

Scripture: Luke 7:36-39 and Luke 8:1-3 (CEB)

One of the Pharisees invited Jesus to eat with him. After he entered the Pharisee's home, he took his place at the table. Meanwhile, a woman from the city, a sinner, discovered that Jesus was dining in the Pharisee's house. She brought perfumed oil in a vase made of alabaster.

Standing behind him at his feet and crying, she began to wet his feet with her tears. She wiped them with her hair, kissed them, and poured the oil on them. When the Pharisee who had invited Jesus saw what was happening, he said to himself, if this man were a prophet, he would know what kind of woman is touching him. He would know that she is a sinner. Jesus traveled through the cities and villages, preaching and proclaiming the good news of God's kingdom. The Twelve were with him, along with some women who had been healed of evil spirits and sicknesses. Among them were Mary Magdalene (from whom seven demons had been thrown out), Joanna (the wife of Herod's servant Chuza), Susanna, and many others who provided for them out of their resources.

MONDAY 2.27.23 Praying for others

The "Sermon on the Plain"

Luke 6:12-38

Jesus chose the Twelve, then laid out his kingdom's principles. This passage in Luke is similar (but not identical) to "The Sermon on the Mount" (cf. [Matthew 5-7](#)). This was likely a different "version." Scholar William Barclay said the verb "taught" in Matthew 5:2 meant "repeated, habitual action....the Sermon on the Mount is...the essence of all that Jesus continuously...taught his disciples." *

- Like Mary's song in [Luke 1:46-55](#), this sermon offered God's favor and comfort to people we see as unfortunate, and warned those we see as particularly favored. Which parts of his sermon most challenge our culture's wisdom on how to "succeed"? Which of Jesus' promises in this sermon mean the most to you?
- The Scriptures at times reflected our natural human response to people who hurt us (e.g., [Psalm 139:21](#)). Jesus taught, very clearly (if uncomfortably), "Love your enemies. Do good to those who hate you" (Luke 6:27). How can you recognize and deal with hurt and anger in ways that allow you to pray for, and seek the good of, people who offend or hurt you?

Prayer: King Jesus, rule over my life. Imprint the great principles of your kingdom deeply on my mind and heart and shape me into the person you want me to be. Amen.

TUESDAY 2.28.23 What your words say about you

A Roman soldier who did what Jesus taught

Luke 6:39-7:10

In *The Message* paraphrase, Jesus asked, "Why are you...always saying 'Yes, sir,' and 'That's right, sir,' but never doing a thing I tell you? These....are words to build a life on" (Luke 6:46). * We may see all Roman soldiers as personally hostile to Jesus. But like American troops in Iraq, many just did their job in a strange, hostile land. When a humble Roman officer trusted Jesus to help his valued servant, Jesus willingly did.

- From Francis of Assisi to Pope Francis, from Martin Luther King, Jr. to Mother Teresa, many of Christ's followers have stood with the oppressed. John Wesley began the Methodist movement, in part, because his day's leading church seemed to cater to the powerful and ignore the poor. How are you (and your church) building your life on Jesus' values?
- The Roman centurion sensed, as many do not, that space or time cannot limit God's power the way they do ours. How did he apply his own experience of authority to help him realize the reach of Jesus' power? Which of your experiences help you better grasp and trust God's power?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, your mission reached an amazing range of people and needs. Help me see the world more as you see it and use my gifts to play a part in your mission. Amen.

WEDNESDAY 3.1.23 Who needs your support?

A widow rescued; John the Baptist called to trust Luke 7:11-35

“To lose a child is among the most painful of human experiences.... [As] the woman Jesus met in Nain...walked with her community in sorrow, Jesus had compassion for her.” * In prison (Luke 3:19- 20), brave John the Baptist faced doubt. “Jesus’ reported acts (v. 18) were praiseworthy but differed from the expected baptizing in fire (Luke 3:16-17).” ** If Jesus was “the one,” as John had said, when would he deal with evil Herod? John sent the question directly to Jesus.

- In Jesus' day, losing an only son was an utter disaster for a widow. Only through a male relative could she legally own property or funds. Jesus saved the widow, not just from emotional loss, but likely from poverty and marginalization. What has Jesus saved you from? In what ways can trusting his loving power give you strength and comfort for each day?
- John the Baptist wished Jesus would free him from Herod's prison and wipe out that corrupt line. He saw no signs that Jesus intended such an assault. So, he asked. How does John's story show you that it's okay to ask God any questions you have? How did Jesus' caring answer echo his quote of Isaiah in Luke 4:18-21 to show that he was “the one,” but with God's timing and means?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, thank you that whether I'm full of thanks like the widow or filled with questions like John, I always find in you the loving person who truly was “the one.” Amen.

THURSDAY 3.2.23 Plant something

Receptive and unreceptive hearts

Luke 7:36-8:15

The woman who “crashed” Simon's feast had already met Jesus, and he'd forgiven her “many sins” (Luke 7:47). Self-righteous Simon (who felt no need for mercy) was in greater spiritual danger than the grateful woman. Jesus (maybe seeing a farmer hand-tossing seeds) told a parable about four types of soil. It asked his hearers (and us) to ponder what kind of soil heaven's seed finds in our hearts.

- Jesus asked Simon a pointed question: “Do you see this woman?” “Simon only saw sin, but Jesus saw the woman and her lavish display of humility, nurture, generosity and love.” * How did Jesus' pointed contrast in verses 41-47 show the spiritual emptiness of Simon's pious front, fed in part by his culture's beliefs in male superiority?
- What kind of soil are you, how receptive to God's transforming grace? Maybe it's better to ask: as you read Jesus' description of the four kinds of soil, which aspects of each type can you identify in yourself? In what ways does Jesus' story challenge you to become more open to God's work in and through you?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, you keep sowing the seed of your kingdom even though I don't always respond to it. Help me always keep the soil of my heart receptive to you. Amen.

FRIDAY 3.3.23 Wonder at God's greatness

Jesus calmed outer and inner storms

Luke 8:16-39

The Sea of Galilee sat in a geologic “bowl,” and was subject to sudden, severe storms. You can see the kind of boat Jesus was in, found in the Sea of Galilee

(www.jesusboat.com/boat.php). Jesus calmed a storm and amazed his disciples. Yet he showed a different, even greater type of power as he calmed the inner demons tormenting a frightening, disturbing man.

- The small wooden boats used in Jesus' day, powered only by a sail or oars, must have seemed terribly inadequate in a violent storm. Do your human resources seem insufficient to deal with any “storms” you face? How can you open yourself to Jesus' loving power, letting him give you peace as you face those storms?
- The man Jesus met was clearly a danger to himself and others. Yet Jesus didn't try to isolate or avoid him, but to help and restore. What may have looked hopeless at first led to a beautifully healing result. In Bible times, “mental illness” or the influence of evil beings were all called “demon possession.” How did Jesus' focus on healing and helping lead to restoring the man's life?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, in this troubled world, storms come in so many different forms and intensities. I thank you that you've promised that I don't ever have to face any of them on my own. Amen.

SATURDAY 3.4.23

Affirm the gift of your body Heaven's power at work on earth

Luke 8:40-9:9

Synagogue leaders often opposed Jesus (cf. [Luke 6:6-11](#), [13:10-14](#)). But he didn't hesitate to serve a synagogue leader who begged him to help his gravely ill daughter. He also served a woman who had suffered for 12 years. His power healed her when, hoping he wouldn't notice, she stealthily touched his robe. And he sent his followers out to carry out the same core principle of his kingdom: serve and heal by sharing God's love.

- To the trembling woman, who'd spent 12 years hearing that her health problem meant God had cursed her, Jesus said “Go in peace” (8:48). To Jairus, the pleading, anguished father, he said “Don't be afraid; just keep trusting” (8:50). Are there experiences or attitudes that make it harder for you to trust in Jesus's love and care? In which parts of your life today do you need to accept Jesus' invitation to “just keep trusting”?

Prayer: Compassionate Jesus, help my fearful, skeptical heart to be able to take in, and then to share with others, your calming, healing presence. Amen.

Week #3

March 5, 2023, *Parables from the Underside*

Scripture: Luke 18:9-14

Jesus told this parable to certain people who had convinced themselves that they were righteous and who looked on everyone else with disgust: “Two people went up to the temple to pray. One was a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and prayed about himself with these words, ‘God, I thank you that I'm not like everyone else—crooks, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week. I give a tenth of everything I receive.’ But the tax collector stood at a distance. He wouldn't even lift his eyes to look toward heaven. Rather, he struck his chest and said, ‘God, show mercy to me, a sinner.’ I tell you, this person went down to his home justified rather than the Pharisee. All who lift themselves up will be brought low, and those who make themselves low will be lifted up.”

MONDAY 3.6.23 Ask for help

Feeding and being fed

Luke 9:10-36

Jesus had the 12 help him feed 5,000 people. Jesus' probing question led Peter to say Jesus was the Christ (Greek for "anointed one," like the Hebrew "Messiah"). Yes, said Jesus, but bluntly added that being the Christ meant a path of suffering, for him and his followers. Yet Moses, Elijah, a flash of light, and God's voice said he was the anointed one, despite his counterintuitive vision of what that meant.

- Facing a large, hungry crowd, the disciples were prudent: "Send the crowd away so that they can go to the nearby villages and countryside and find lodging and food." Jesus jolted them with, "YOU give them something to eat" (9:13). Does Jesus still call us to be a means for his power to help others? Why do we need to rely on Jesus' power, not our own, to achieve God's purposes?
- What a scene: Jesus' face and clothes flashed like lightning, Moses and Elijah appeared, and God's presence in a cloud overshadowed Peter, John, and James. God's voice said of Jesus, "This is my Son, my chosen one. Listen to him!" What does it mean for you to listen to Jesus? Are you willing to do it?

Prayer: Humble Jesus, Peter said you are "the Christ sent from God." You reminded him that serving a king like you is not always easy and comfortable. Build in me the backbone to serve you faithfully. Amen.

TUESDAY 3.7.23 Become more childlike

Much to do, but "he determined to go to Jerusalem" Luke 9:37-62

From Luke 9:51 on, Jesus was purposefully going to Jerusalem. (He arrived in [Luke 19:28-30](#), on what we call Palm Sunday.) For Luke, this framed every event to follow: Jesus was going to Jerusalem and the cross. But that didn't alter his basic mission: he continued to help, to heal, to humbly show mercy while calling for serious commitment.

- Luke 9:57-62 (like [Luke 8:19-21](#)) may trouble you. Jesus honored family loyalty and love (e.g. [Luke 2:51-52](#), [John 19:26-27](#)). He did say that the kingdom is "even more important than the claims of family, which are themselves the most important normal claims a person can have." * Has any loyalty (e.g., family, company, school, etc.) ever tugged you to ignore your loyalty to God? If that happens, which loyalty will you choose?
- The disciples squabbled about which of them was greatest. They tried to stop a person who wasn't "one of them" from using Jesus' power against evil. Yet Jesus said they needed to become like a child (verses 47-48). What's the difference between a trusting, childlike faith, and the kinds of childish behaviors the disciples were showing?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, you knew where you were going, and you knew why. Give me an inner compass that discerns the course you are calling me to follow with my life. Amen.

WEDNESDAY 3.8.23 How would you share your faith? Jesus' confidence: evil's kingdom is falling Luke 10:1-24

Yesterday we read that Luke said Jesus "determined to go to Jerusalem" (Luke 9:51). He told his disciples he was "about to be delivered into human hands" (Luke 9:44). But he made this choice, not in defeat, but as a victorious march into his enemies' stronghold. On his way to

Jerusalem and the cross, Jesus said, “I saw Satan fall from heaven like lightning,” and “overflowed with joy.”

- Jesus talked with the seventy-two (or “seventy”—ancient copies of Luke differ on this minor point) after their mission ended. Their outward, visible success thrilled them. Jesus re-directed their thoughts. In 10:20, how did he turn their eyes to the true basis for Christian assurance in the future, regardless of outward appearances?
- “It’s too easy for Christians to make the mistake of thinking [Jesus] sailed through life with ease.... Jesus’ task is to...win the decisive victory which will open the way to God’s new creation.” * Jesus faced evil’s all-out assault, from the temptation (cf. [Luke 4:1-13](#)) to its peak in Jerusalem (cf. [Luke 22:52-53](#)), with assured joy. How can you share Jesus’ trust and joy even when evil seems in control?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, you didn’t try to avoid pain and evil, but robbed it of power by absorbing the worst of it and coming out victorious. Teach me the difficult wisdom of your path to victory. Amen.

THURSDAY 3.9.23 How would you share your faith?

Surprises: a neighbor, a woman learner, a generous father

Luke 10:25 – 11:13

As Jesus chose “to go to Jerusalem” (9:51), he met more and more legal experts and Pharisees testing him with questions that sought to trap him. He answered the tricky question in 10:29 with a story showing vividly what it means to love your neighbor as yourself. He told his friend Martha it was vital to make him her first priority, and he taught his disciples how to pray—and why.

- The Samaritan (in Israel today he’d be a “Palestinian”) in Jesus’ story put the injured man on “his own donkey” (i.e., he walked), took him to an inn, cared for him, paid two days wages, and offered to pay more if needed on his return. How did that story reflect God’s vast generosity to us? How can knowing God’s been generous to you make you more generous to your neighbors?
- After the Lord’s Prayer, Jesus gave insight into “answered prayer” (11:11-13). He said God’s gift of the Holy Spirit to any who ask is like the “good gifts” parents give children. But we often don’t ask for the Holy Spirit. What are you praying for today? If God gives you the Holy Spirit, will you thank God for that or complain that you didn’t receive the specific thing you asked for?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, give me the bread I need for today. And give me your presence, too, because, in the words of the song, “this is my daily bread.” * Amen.

FRIDAY 3.10.23 Light a candle

The changes that let in the light

Luke 11:14-36

The self-righteous religious leaders claimed Jesus freed people from the effects of evil only because he was in league with the ruler of demons! Jesus’ forceful response pointed out the illogical nature of that argument. “Attributing the Holy Spirit’s work to an impure spirit is

roughly tantamount to calling God Satan.” * Equating his message with evil was like calling sunlight “darkness.”

- Sometimes our efforts to “clean up our life” by sheer human determination and willpower don’t work, Jesus said in verses 24-26. It does little good to just to clear out the bad, with nothing in its place. What are some positive ways you have learned to allow God to fill your soul with divine purpose and love?
- Verses 34-35 urged hearers to examine the health of our eyes (not mainly physical, but spiritual). Jesus’ enemies blinded themselves spiritually by refusing to consider any evidence that didn’t fit what they wanted to be true. In what ways has God brought new light to your mind, your ways of thinking, over the last year?

Prayer: Lord God, open my inner eyes. Let me soak in the light of your love and grace, so that it may beam out of me to lighten the lives of all who come in contact with me. Amen.

SATURDAY 3.11.23 Share God’s forgiveness with yourself

God seeks a clean heart, not a pious exterior

Luke 11:37 – 12:7

As Jesus moved steadily toward Jerusalem, the tension between the *status quo* and God’s kingdom kept building. Jesus challenged religious and political leaders who fixated on washing for ritual purity (not for hygiene—they didn’t yet know about viruses). Their only response was to plot against him. Jesus gave a wide-ranging set of warnings against a “mismatch between...hearts and lives” (12:1). He knew that faithfulness and trust flow from the inside out.

- With powerful people plotting against him, we might think Jesus would be afraid. But he defined “security” very differently than humans typically do. Scholar N. T. Wright summed up his teaching: “One should recognize who the ultimate enemy is. In this picture, God is not the enemy to be feared; he is one to trust, the one who values his children more highly than a whole flock of sparrows, who has the very hairs of our head all numbered.” * How does Jesus’ teaching challenge our culture’s messages about how to attain true security?

Prayer: King Jesus, it’s hard for me to make the inside of me match the outside sometimes. Help me desire your kingdom of eternal security and fulfillment above all else. Amen.

Week #4

March 12, 2023, *The Journey to Jerusalem*

Scripture: Luke 19:1-10 (NRSV)

He entered Jericho and was passing through it. A man was there named Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was rich. He was trying to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was short in stature. So, he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree to see him, because he was going to pass that way. When Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, “Zacchaeus, hurry and come down; for I must stay at your house today.” So, he hurried down and was happy to welcome him. All who saw it began to grumble and said, “He has gone to be the guest of one who is a sinner.” Zacchaeus stood there and said to the Lord, “Look, half of my possessions, Lord, I will give to the poor; and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will pay back four times as much.” Then Jesus said to him, “Today salvation has come to this house, because he too is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost.”

MONDAY 3.13.23 Be intentional about your worries

Trusting in God's sufficiency

Luke 12:8-34

Jesus used a simple, sobering parable to get his listeners (and us) to consider how far ahead our plans reach. For the rich fool hoarding his large crop, the sad answer was, "Not nearly far enough." Jesus no doubt appalled some hearers by saying, "One's life isn't determined by one's possessions." This life, and the material goods we enjoy in it, will end. Only God can (and does) offer us eternity.

- Jesus spoke sadly of "those who hoard things for themselves and aren't rich toward God." His story said what we work (maybe even fight) so hard for does us no good when we die. Has your desire for material goods ever damaged your relationships with people or God? What helps you make sensible material plans without letting the stuff you think you "own" actually "own" you?
- When Jesus called his followers a "little flock," they were. That wasn't cause to fear. God liberally "delights" in giving them (and us, a much larger "flock") the gift of God's eternal kingdom. That's why Jesus said we don't need to worry. How does worry differ from wise foresight or planning? Instead of worrying, what are more useful ways to meet life's demands?

Prayer: Loving God, in fall foliage or spring flowers, every morning and every evening, you delight in giving to me. Keep my generosity growing, even though it will never match the scale of yours. Amen.

TUESDAY 3.14.23 Limit distractions today

About spiritual readiness

Luke 12:35-59

Few of us want to be earthly "servants," but Jesus used that image for our relationship to God. Good servants were always ready to respond to their master. Bad ones lost their jobs (or, in Roman times, even worse). Jesus didn't endorse Roman cruelty. He simply made the point that choosing to serve God is a matter of eternal life or death.

- Jesus' words about bringing division rather than peace (12:51-53) may strike us as odd. Isn't Jesus "the prince of peace" (cf. [Isaiah 9:6](#))? Yes—but he knew his kingdom's principles (including peace) were so unlike the world's that at times they'd cause division. Have family members, friends or co-workers ever misread or criticized choices rooted in your loyalty to God?
- In verse 41, Peter asked, "Lord, are you telling this parable for us or for everyone?" Jesus seemed to say that the parable was for all who wish to be "faithful and wise managers," which invited Peter (and us) to take it seriously. As we keep reading Luke, how can you ask about each passage you read, "Lord, what do you want me to hear in this passage"?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, thank you for equipping and calling me to serve. Make me a "faithful and wise manager," valuing myself and who you made me to be. Amen.

WEDNESDAY 3.15.23 What are you still holding back from God?

How God reverses human judgments

Luke 13:1-30

Speaking to the tragedy of Roman soldiers killing Galileans, Jesus rebutted the idea that bad things always showed God's wrath. He told a strange parable, one that left hearers to think about how the story might end. He relieved a woman's 18 years of suffering "at once," but

upset the synagogue leader by doing it on the Sabbath. He defied the spirit that loved rules above people and kept moving toward Jerusalem (verse 22).

- We could call Jesus' story (13:6-9) "The Unfinished Parable." The gardener pleaded for one more year to help the tree bear fruit—but Jesus never said if the tree responded or not. 13:5 showed what kind of "fruit-bearing" was on his mind. What about you—how will you finish the unfinished parable?
- To an abstract question—"Lord, will only a few be saved?" (13:23)—Jesus' gave a personal reply. In *The Message*,* it reads, "Whether few or many is none of your business. Put your mind on your life with God. The way to life—to God!—is vigorous and requires your total attention." Which (if any) Lenten practices have most helped you move past abstract ideas to God's personal love?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, you dig up the soil around me, water and fertilize, and watch eagerly for my life to show your fruit. Help me to respond so that my life may indeed bear fruit to your glory. Amen.

THURSDAY 3.16.23 Seek out voices you haven't heard In God's world, everyone is invited in!

Luke 13:31 – 14:24

Jesus spoke four "laments" in Luke over Jerusalem (verses 33-35; cf. also 19:41-44, 21:20-24 and 23:27-31.) Jesus "spoiled" a Sabbath dinner by healing—again. Pharisees loved to imagine God's end-time feast (verse 15, an image from *Isaiah 25:6-10*). Isaiah said it would be for "the whole earth;" the religious leaders limited it to their own people. But Jesus said since the chosen didn't come God invited street people!

- Preacher Brennan Manning wrote, "After reading the entire Gospel of Luke for the first time, a post-Valley girl said: 'Wow! Like Jesus has this totally intense thing for ragamuffins.'" * We are all spiritually "poor, crippled, blind and lame." God's grace gives us seats at the "banquet." Can you see the ways that, before God, you are a "ragamuffin" who desperately, gratefully needs grace?
- Have you ever known (maybe even been) a person like the ones Jesus noticed who aggressively "sought out the best seats at the table"? In what ways can that attitude show itself in school, the workplace, family, even church? What's the difference between healthy boldness to make your gifts available to bless others, and the kind of self-promotion Jesus warned against?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, yes! I want to be a guest at your great end-time feast. Give me a heart that will rejoice in being there even if some of the other guests might surprise me at first. Amen.

FRIDAY 3.17.23 Imagine how much God loves you Joy when the lost are found

Luke 14:25 – 15:32

One of the "costs" of following Jesus was hearing pious people grumble, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them." Jesus didn't even try to deny it. In three vivid stories, he told how finding a lost sheep, a lost coin and a lost boy set off big parties, "joy in heaven." In the last

story, he pointedly added a recognizable older son who thought it was wrong to welcome the lost son home.

- The Pharisees thought “bad people” don’t change. Jesus saw people much more as “lost” (like the sheep, coin or boy), and said God tirelessly seeks hearts gone off course. When have you lost your way spiritually and needed finding? Jesus said God rejoiced at every return. What has most helped you see God as more eager to welcome you home than to punish you for getting lost?
- Jesus left the older son’s story open, like that of the fig tree (cf. [Luke 13:6-9](#)). The father begged: “We had to celebrate and be glad because this brother of yours was dead and is alive. He was lost and is found.” But most “older brothers” who heard Jesus didn’t want to welcome “sinners” home. It’s your turn at the party of faith. How does the Father’s appeal to welcome lost ones home shape your heart?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, you always had “friends in low places.” But you always sought to draw them to higher ground. Give me the heart and the wisdom to live out your redemptive example. Amen.

SATURDAY 3.18.23 Help provide for those who need it Uncomfortable stories for comfortable people

Luke 16:1-31

Jesus told of a crook deftly buying off “friends” to help him when he lost his job. Jesus didn’t favor fraud, but asked, “If that rogue could plan ahead, shouldn’t you plan for eternity, not just earthly gain?” Then he told a parable about a rich man and Lazarus, a beggar. (The poor man, not the rich, got the dignity of a personal name.) The “rich man” ignored Lazarus “at his gate.” Jesus pictured the beggar with virtuous Abraham, while the wretched rich man (within shouting distance) begged him to warn his brothers to avoid his sad fate. Jesus wasn’t so much describing a literal afterlife as urging us to change our values in this life.

- Jesus said no one can serve two masters—it is impossible to serve both God and wealth (verse 13). Which “master” has your deepest allegiance? In his second story, Jesus said “Moses and the prophets” could show the rich man’s brothers (and the sneering, money-loving Pharisees—verse 14) a better way. What influences help you to build your values and actions (social, financial, and spiritual) on the principles of Moses and the prophets—and Jesus?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, deliver me from all the other masters that try to lure me to make them supreme in my heart. I surrender my life to your gracious and loving rulership forever. Amen.

Week #5

March 19, 2023, *Five Days Before the Crucifixion*

Scripture: Luke 19:35-38 (CEB) and 22:24-27 (NRSV)

They brought [the colt] to Jesus, threw their clothes on the colt, and lifted Jesus onto it. As Jesus rode along, they spread their clothes on the road. As Jesus approached the road leading down from the Mount of Olives, the whole throng of his disciples began rejoicing. They praised God with a loud voice because of all the mighty things they had seen. They said, “Blessings on the king who comes in the name of the Lord. Peace in heaven and glory in the highest heavens.”

[At the Last Supper] a dispute also arose among them as to which one of them was to be regarded as the greatest. But he said to them, “The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them;

and those in authority over them are called benefactors. But not so with you; rather the greatest among you must become like the youngest, and the leader like one who serves. For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one at the table? But I am among you as one who serves.

MONDAY 3.20.23 Thank people and God

Humility and gratitude

Luke 17:1-19

Jesus told his disciples they must forgive “even if someone sins against you seven times in one day” (Verse 4; [Matthew 18:21-22](#) said either “seventy-seven times” or “seventy times seven”). In any form, that’s a lot more forgiving than we do innately! “Increase our faith!” the disciples gasped. Jesus said faith isn’t a matter of quantity. He healed ten men of skin diseases when they showed just a little faith.

- Do you ever fear that Jesus’ words about forgiveness meant you should be a docile “door mat”?

They didn’t. The gospels show Jesus firmly confronting his foes (e.g., driving money changers from the Temple—[Luke 19:45-46](#)). How can God (and wise human therapists) help us deal with hurt or betrayal in healthier ways than refusing to forgive (which harms us more than others)?

- On his way to Jerusalem, somewhere near the border between Galilee and Samaria, Jesus met the ten outcasts with skin diseases. Jesus healed and delivered them all, yet only one of those, a “bad” Samaritan, praised God. What experiences or inner obstacles make it harder for you to feel gratitude? Are there things you have forgotten or neglected to thank God for?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, forgive me for times when I hurt you, or another person, without knowing what I was doing. And forgive me for the times when I’ve defied you, or hurt someone else, knowing exactly what I was doing. By your grace keep me forgiven and forgiving. Amen.

TUESDAY 3.21.23 Pray for the persecuted

God’s kingdom: here, and still to fully arrive

Luke 17:20 – 18:8

When Pharisees asked a speculative question about when (in the future) God’s Kingdom would come, Jesus instead spoke of the need to trust God now to be ready for any trial that might come. Then he told a parable that contrasted God with an unjust human judge. The issue, he said, was not if we can trust God, but whether God can trust us (18:8).

- In 17:21, Luke used the Greek words *entōs humōn*, which could mean either that God’s kingdom is “among you” or “within you” (or, perhaps, both). What different significance do you find in the two possible meanings? To what extent does each of them ring true to your experience of living in the Kingdom of God that Jesus preached?
- In 18:1-8 Jesus used a “how much more” question, as rabbis often did. In effect he asked, “If even an unjust judge will do justice if pressed, how much more can we trust God to do justice?” But, he asked, will I find faithfulness on earth? Can you keep faithfully trusting God to do justice even when there seem to be letdowns or delays? How do you answer Jesus’ question about faith?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, I have questions about the future in your kingdom. Help me focus on your presence right now among us, and within me, and trust you to take care of the future. Amen.

**WEDNESDAY 3.22.23 Take the “Jesus’ prayer” with you
Confounding human expectations**

Luke 18:9-34

“We are going up to Jerusalem,” Jesus said in 18:31, and he was nearly there. His culture didn’t value tax collectors or children. Jesus said those “nobodies” were more apt to receive God’s favor than an arrogant Pharisee or a ruler who loved his wealth more than God. “Then who can be saved?” his startled hearers asked. Anyone, Jesus implied. “What is impossible for humans is possible for God.”

- When the young ruler whose riches “owned” him turned away, Jesus said it was very hard for the wealthy to enter God’s kingdom. Yet most people in Jesus’ day equated wealth with God’s favor, so they asked, “Then who can be saved?” Do you trust that whether you are a “somebody” or a “nobody,” your salvation is “possible for God”? How does that shape the way you live each day?
- Luke 18:34 said after three years the disciples still didn’t “get” what Jesus meant about dying and rising. Yet there were other moments when meeting Jesus seemed to reorient a person’s values or thinking quickly and radically. Has God ever changed any part of your life quickly or dramatically? In what areas are you still patiently struggling to grow, even with God’s help?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, preserve me from trusting in my own righteousness or in my bank and retirement accounts. Be the center and source of my life, now and forever. Amen.

**THURSDAY 3.23.23 Connect with someone you’ve been missing More “unworthy”
people accepted and changed**

Luke 18:35 – 19:10

Jericho was the last stop before Jesus reached Jerusalem. “The Jewish historian Josephus (A.D. 37– 93) explained that the first-century [Jericho to Jerusalem] road was...about eighteen miles long.” * In the ancient city of Jericho, Jesus met two men, one physically blind and the other spiritually sightless. At Jesus’ touch on their lives, both men began to see in the way they most needed to.

- Jesus asked the blind man, “What do you want me to do for you?” (18:41). The man clearly stated the need he felt. If Jesus had asked wealthy, healthy Zacchaeus the same question as he sat in that sycamore tree, do you think he could have answered as clearly? Imagine Jesus asking you that question. What need(s) do you sense most clearly?
- Jesus’ mission was “to seek and save the lost.” Scholar William Barclay said, “ ‘Lost’ does not mean damned or doomed. It just means in the wrong place....A lost [person]...has wandered away from God; and is found when once again in the rightful place as an obedient child in the Father’s...family.” ** In what ways has God given you your rightful place in God’s family? When have you been able to help God “find” someone else?

Prayer: Loving Lord, when the grit and dust of this world blinds me to your kingdom values, please restore my inner vision. Let me see you and your purposes in my life more clearly. Amen.

**FRIDAY 3.24.23 Put your God-given gifts to work
The final approach to Jerusalem**

Luke 19:11-28

Jesus’ bold story of a king and his servants taught a lesson about faithful service. This story (Matthew 25 told it a bit differently) showed the master praising and rewarding servants who

went all out to serve him. But it warned against playing it too safe—the king chided the “worthless servant” who was too fearful to risk anything.

(**NOTE:** The story’s violent end matched real events. “Archelaus’s [son of Herod the Great] subjects (cf. 19:12) in fact sent a delegation after him asking that he not be allowed to rule.... Herod, Archelaus, and other rulers often dealt harshly with their political opponents.” *)

- Jesus' hearers would have seen God as the king in Jesus' story and Israel as the servants. God gave Israel a task—to show God’s glory and love to all nations (**Genesis 12:1-3**). How has God gifted you? In what ways do those gifts imply the task(s) God calls you to? Do you ever feel like keeping your gifts safely in a “scarf,” rather than actively using them for God’s work in the world?
- Jesus' story wouldn't have made sense if the servants had all instantly believed they “owned” the large sum of money they received. How easy or hard do you find it to shift from thinking “I OWN all this” to “I’m a steward to whom God has entrusted these things (material possessions or gifts and talents) to use for God’s purposes”?

Prayer: King Jesus, I want to serve you faithfully. Help me to see in what ways you have gifted me and help me use those gifts to serve you boldly and faithfully. Amen.

SATURDAY 3.25.23 Pray for your neighbors and your city

Jesus entered a city that broke his heart

Luke 19:29-48

Jesus' long journey (which began in Luke 9:51) ended as he entered Jerusalem. He very deliberately entered in a way that echoed history (cf. **1 Kings 1:32-39**) and prophecy (**Zechariah 9:9-10**). His entry said he symbolically claimed kingship, but peacefully. He wept over the city, and his tears showed that he loved the city’s people. But he also wept because their heedless leaders did not love him.

- The prophet Zechariah said a righteous king would ride on a donkey’s colt to offer peace and salvation to the people. How did Luke hint that Jesus pre-arranged his ride into Jerusalem to fulfill that prophecy (verses 31-34)? Who sang and praised Jesus (verses 37-39)? Who disliked his entrance into the holy city (verse 47)? Would you more likely have been with “the establishment” who didn’t want their orderly *status quo* upset, or with the upstart rabbi from Galilee?

Prayer: Loving Lord, when you were born, Jerusalem ignored the news. When you came to the city, it’s leaders still didn’t welcome you. Lord, I open my heart—I want to make room for you in my life always. Amen.

Week #6

March 26, 2023, *Crucified with the Outlaws*

Scripture: Luke 23:32-34a, 39-43 (CEB)

They also led two other criminals to be executed with Jesus. When they arrived at the place called The Skull, they crucified him, along with the criminals, one on his right and the other on his left. Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they don’t know what they’re doing.” ...One of the criminals hanging next to Jesus insulted him: “Aren’t you the Christ? Save yourself and us!” Responding, the other criminal spoke harshly to him, “Don’t you fear God, seeing that you’ve also been sentenced to die? We are rightly condemned, for we are receiving the

appropriate sentence for what we did. But this man has done nothing wrong.” Then he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” Jesus replied, “I assure you that today you will be with me in paradise.”

MONDAY 3.27.23 Actively encourage someone

A series of carefully plotted traps for Jesus

Luke 20:1-40

Shielding their high status, Jerusalem’s religious leaders plotted Jesus’ death. They tried hard to build a case for his execution. Maybe they could get him to refuse to pay Roman taxes, or to admit that belief in “resurrection” was absurd. But neither their trick questions nor their show of outward piety fooled Jesus. They fumed (verse 19) when he told a story exposing the murder in their hearts.

- Jesus’ vineyard story drew on a beloved Scripture ([Isaiah 5:1-7](#)), which called Israel God’s vineyard. But he exposed the hate around him during that fateful week ([Luke 19:47, 20:19](#)). We, like the Jerusalem leaders, can have blind spots. Is there anything God’s spirit is nudging you to face honestly in your life? Do you have the courage to face it in the light of Jesus’ “good news”?
- The Sadducee “party” didn’t believe in resurrection, so their hypothetical story (verses 27-33) tried to make the idea sound absurd. Why was it crucially important for Jesus to absolutely trust that death was not the end, that “the worst thing is never the last thing”? Do you share his confidence? If so, in what ways does it shape your day-to-day life for the better?

Prayer: King Jesus, your piercing insight made some powerful people very angry. But your purpose was always to redeem. Give me a measure of your insight, and a large dose of your redemptive heart. Amen.

TUESDAY 3.28.23 Set aside the scary future; stay in the present

When the world falls apart, redemption is near

Luke 20:41 – 21:28

For Jesus, true worth lay in people like the humble widow, whose tiny gift only he saw. And worse lay ahead—the end of the Temple, where devout Jews met God. Great hardship and suffering would follow. It all happened—Rome destroyed the Temple in 70 A.D. Despite this world’s sad state, Jesus urged his listeners to keep faith whatever came. He told them, “Don’t be alarmed...raise your heads, because your redemption is near” (21:9, 28).

- The Covid-19 pandemic did more harm than most of us could have dreamed. To Jesus’ hearers, the Temple’s destruction sounded just that incredible. Jesus told his people to hold to faith even when that happened because their “redemption was near” (verse 28). How can trusting that God is near help you not to “faint from fear,” but hold your head up even in times of pandemic or war?
- Life in a broken world gets tough. Scholar N. T. Wright said, “This is what it’s about: not an exciting battle, with adrenaline flowing and banners flying, but the steady tread, of prayer and hope and scripture and sacrament and witness, day by day and week by week.” * In what ways can you sustain the “steady tread” of your faith journey even through personal or world crises? What models of patient, steady faith can you draw on?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, I want to trust you even when life gets hard. Give me the strength and patience I need to deal with life’s struggles, the ones I am facing now and any others in the future. Amen.

WEDNESDAY 3.29.23 Use a poem to prepare for Easter

Amid betrayal and contention, Jesus remained confident Luke 21:29 – 22:30

The annual weeklong Festival of Unleavened Bread, with the Passover meal, reminded Hebrews of their defining story: God rescuing them from Egypt (cf. [Exodus 12:1-18](#)). Jesus shared the Passover meal with his disciples. With the cross just ahead, Jesus said for them the bread and wine would point to his even greater act of giving himself to rescue us from sin and death.

- Jesus said, “The kings of the Gentiles rule over their subjects, and those in authority over them are called ‘friends of the people.’” But in God’s kingdom, Jesus said, “That’s not the way it will be with you.... the greatest among you must become...like a servant.” Where do you have power (parent, boss, teacher, pastor, public office, etc.)? How can you use your power to serve others?
- Jesus’ shift of Passover into the Lord’s Supper didn’t just look back, but also pointed forward. Scholar Richard Vinson noted that “until it is fulfilled” (verse 16) “is a promise to Luke’s readers that the kingdom truly will come.” * Do you trust that God’s promises offer a future you can count on? How can taking part in Communion (even online) reinforce your trust and hope?

Prayer: Living Lord, I rejoice in your saving acts in the past. But even more, I eagerly look forward to the day when you fully establish your kingdom. Keep me faithfully on track until that day. Amen.

THURSDAY 3.30.23 Stop hiding something

The final storm broke; Peter wilted

Luke 22:31-62

“Lord,” Peter said defiantly, “I’m ready to go with you, both to prison and to death!” Little did he know that he wasn’t at all “ready” for that. Jesus knew him better than he knew himself. After Jesus’ arrest, Peter heatedly denied three times having been with Jesus. Then a rooster crowed, Jesus looked at him, and Peter “went out and cried uncontrollably.”

- Of the disciples, only Peter walked on water ([Matthew 14:28-29](#)). He was first to flatly call Jesus the Messiah ([Luke 9:18-20](#)). He was no villain—just a man subject to fear and pressure. Have you ever felt pressure to hide your loyalty to Jesus? Jesus told those who seized him, “This is your time, when darkness rules.” What might Peter have done to keep the darkness at bay (cf. 22:46)?
- Pastor Hamilton noted that all four gospels tell of Peter’s humiliating failure. Yet when Luke and the others wrote, Peter had been a brave church leader Rome martyred around 64-65 A.D. Peter probably openly told about his failure, and the forgiveness and hope he found in its wake. * When have you grown through facing a failure openly and learning from it by God’s grace?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, like Peter, I keep finding a need to grow even in areas I thought I was done with. Thank you for your ongoing grace, for urging me to grow even when I’m comfortable. Amen.

FRIDAY 3.31.23 Pray for the justice system

Jesus’ judges behaved in ways that condemned them Luke 22:63 – 23:31

Jesus’ enemies had dogged his footsteps through most of his public ministry. They claimed he was a false teacher, even demonic (cf. [Luke 11:14-16](#)). But when they had him in their power, the contrast was striking. The leaders, sure of their “righteousness,” behaved in frenzied, unfair, cruel, hate-filled ways. Jesus remained calm and in control of himself.

- Luke said Jesus' guards taunted and beat him BEFORE his trial (Luke 26:62, 66). This “trial” was like *Alice in Wonderland*— “verdict first, evidence later.” Even Pontius Pilate, a cynical Roman politician, saw through their charges, saying, “I find no legal basis for action against this man” (23:4). Has anyone ever treated you unfairly? How can you grow toward having the spirit with which Jesus met this unfair trial?
- The religious leaders loathed tax collectors for working with Rome. They easily forgot that “principle” to insist that the Roman procurator help kill Jesus. From God’s point of view, who was really on trial—Jesus, or Pilate and the religious leaders unwilling to even consider that Jesus might be who he claimed? When have you seen the use of bad means disgrace a desired goal?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, I wasn’t part of that awful “kangaroo court” trial. But fear or prejudice can blind me, too. Forgive me, cleanse me, give me a clearer vision of how my actions heal or harm. Amen.

SATURDAY 4.1.23 Watch the sun set on Holy Saturday Seeing the light on the darkest day Luke 23:32-56

Events came to their awful ending. Even as God in Jesus absorbed the worst that evil and hate could do (cf. [2 Corinthians 5:14-19](#)), he stayed focused on forgiving others (verses 34, 42). The Roman centurion who oversaw the crucifixion “praised God, saying, ‘It’s really true: this man was righteous.’” That testimony likely meant a lot to a “most honorable” Gentile like Theophilus (cf. [Luke 1:1-4](#)). Joseph of Arimathea, a council member who’d stayed silent at Jesus’ mock trial, at least gave the body a decent burial. And Saturday came. “So far as we know, there has only been one day in the last two thousand years when literally not one person in the world believed Jesus was alive.” *

- Scholar N. T. Wright summed up: “It really happened. It wasn’t a mistake. We didn’t get it wrong. It’s true. You can rely on it. This is the main point of Luke’s account of Jesus’ death and burial. He began his book telling Theophilus he could rely on these facts, and now that the most vital one is before us, he presents his witnesses one by one. The centurion saw....The crowds standing by saw....Jesus’ followers, not least the women, stood at some distance, but they too saw....Then the burial: again, the women saw what happened....Evidence. Eyewitnesses. This is what Luke promised, and this is what he’s now giving us.” ** It was fact—Jesus had really died and been laid in a tomb. Joseph’s act unwittingly made Jesus’ unexpected resurrection more undeniable. Due to Joseph’s gift, Jesus’ friends knew exactly where his body had been laid. That all made Easter a one-of-a-kind event. How different would Jesus’ impact on your life be if he didn’t really die, or if he stayed in that tomb?

Prayer: Dear Jesus, you walked into the most awful prison: the prison of death. But you went there to break those dark doors wide open. Thank you for bringing light into darkness, life out of death. Amen.

Week #7

April 2, 2023 (Palm Sunday) *The Crucified and Resurrected Life*

Scripture: Luke 24:1-11 (CEB)

Very early in the morning on the first day of the week, the women went to the tomb, bringing the fragrant spices they had prepared. They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they went in, they didn't find the body of the Lord Jesus. They didn't know what to make of this. Suddenly, two men were standing beside them in gleaming bright clothing. The women were frightened and bowed their faces toward the ground, but the men said to them, "Why do you look for the living among the dead? He isn't here, but has been raised. Remember what he told you while he was still in Galilee, that the Human One must be handed over to sinners, *be crucified, and on the third day rise again.*" Then they remembered his words. When they returned from the tomb, they reported all these things to the eleven and all the others. It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them who told these things to the apostles. Their words struck the apostles as nonsense, and they didn't believe the women.

News no one expected

MONDAY 4.3.23

Luke 24:1-12

"Early in the morning on the first day of the week" the loyal women went back to where Jesus' body was laid ([Luke 23:55](#)). They went to get his dead body ready for lasting burial, but found no body. Two men in gleaming clothes asked, "Why do you look for the living among the dead? He isn't here, but has been raised." The women shared that, but "their words struck the apostles as nonsense" (true to form for that day). No one expected the Easter event, though Jesus had foretold it (cf. [Luke 9:22](#)).

- When Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, Lazarus' body was wrapped in typical grave cloths.
"Jesus said to them, 'Untie him'" (John 11:44). As Peter peered into Jesus' empty tomb, "he saw only the linen cloth." Grave robbers would never have taken time to unwrap the body and leave the cloth. One sign that Jesus' resurrection was qualitatively unique was that no one had to untie him. That resurrection changed everything for Peter. What effect has it had on you?
- Author Phillip Yancey said how the gospels' told of the resurrection rang true: "Accounts of the discovery of the empty tomb sound breathless and fragmentary....the early reports seem wispy, mysterious, confused. Surely conspirators could have done a neater job of depicting what they would later claim to be the hinge event of history." *
What made the gospel stories' reliability vital to the apostles' faith (and to yours) (cf. [1 Corinthians 15:14-19](#))?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, there was nothing predictable about that stunning, world-changing day when, against all odds, you rose from the dead. Help me take in, and live out, all the ways that day changed everything about how I see the world. Amen.

Disciples discouraged by the cross

TUESDAY 4.4.23

Luke 24:13-24

Luke shared details about Jesus' birth that no other gospel included, and his research ([Luke 1:3](#)) found this unique story about the resurrection day. Jesus, unrecognized, walked with two disciples discussing recent events. They felt disillusioned (“we had hoped”—verse 21), sad about the crucifixion, and stunned that some women said Jesus' body was not in the tomb. Note that these two followers gave no sign that they believed the report—just that it puzzled them.

- Scholar N. T. Wright noted, “It wasn’t simply...that they couldn’t recognize him. This is a strange feature of the resurrection stories, in Matthew ([28:17](#)) and John ([20:14](#); [21:4](#), [12](#)) as well as hereJesus’ body, emerging from the tomb, had been transformed. It was the same, yet different—a mystery we shall perhaps never unravel until we ourselves share the same risen life.” * Do you long to share the gift of that risen life, even the aspects that for now remain puzzling to us?
- Cleopas, like the other disciples, was still in the grip of preconceived ideas of what the Messiah would be and do (cf. [Luke 9:44-45](#)). In what ways can fixed assumptions today make it harder for you to trust the Bible’s testimony? When have you found greater joy and peace after letting God alter or overturn some fixed idea you may have held for years?

Prayer: Loving Lord, when I feel discouraged, disillusioned, or disbelieving, please come and join me on the road. It is at those times, in particular, that I need your living, loving presence with me. Amen.

Puzzled eyes opened

WEDNESDAY 4.5.23

Luke 24:25-32

On the road to Emmaus, Jesus interpreted for his dispirited followers “the things written about himself in all the scriptures, starting with Moses and going through all the Prophets” (verse 27). As he broke and blessed bread for them, they recognized him in a flash of insight and memory. His transformed body disappeared, but they joyfully realized that their hearts were “on fire” as Jesus explained the deep message of the Hebrew Scriptures.

- Scholar William Barclay said this story “tells us of the ability of Jesus to make sense of things.... Jesus came and talked with them, and the meaning of life became clear, and the darkness became light.... It is only in Jesus that, even in the bewildering times, we learn what life means.” * Can you recall any moments when something painful and puzzling suddenly made more sense in the light of Jesus' love and grace?
- The two disciples may well have been husband and wife (cf. [John 19:25](#); “Clopas” and “Cleopas” were likely the same person). They urged their road companion to stay with them, as a married couple would. If they hadn’t, they’d have missed the joy of recognizing the risen Jesus. How do you, individually and as a family, go about inviting Jesus into your life? How have you learned to recognize his presence amid everyday life’s pressures?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, I want you, I need you, to be with me at home and everywhere I go. Like those early disciples, I invite you to join me and stay with me at every meal, and every moment. Amen.

You are witnesses: “It’s really me!”

THURSDAY 4.6.23

Luke 24:33-49

After recognizing Jesus alive, the two disciples rushed to tell the news. As they spoke, Jesus stood in the room. Luke, a first-century physician (cf. [Colossians 4:14](#)), noted details showing Jesus was no ghost, but alive in the flesh. “24:43 *he took it and ate it*. Many Jewish sources doubted that angels ate human food.” * Jesus clarified the Scriptures to all the disciples and appointed them to share his life- changing forgiveness. “You are witnesses,” he said. God would empower them for their mission.

- Jesus’ summary of his message in verse 47 was “the Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and a change of heart and life for the forgiveness of sins must be preached in his name to all nations.” In what ways does believing that Jesus rose from the dead change your heart and life? How does the resurrection make credible for you Jesus’ claim to have the divine authority to forgive your sins?
- Pastor Bruce Larson noted that Luke was “familiar with the Greek philosophy that the body and its appetites were evil. The soul and mind were good. The Greeks believed that in death the mind and spirit were freed from their bondage to the body....Luke, in spite of his Greek background, underscored the Hebrew theology...of the unity of body, mind, and soul.” * Later the Apostles’ Creed said, “I believe in the resurrection of the body.” Do you believe in that, and count on it?

Prayer: King Jesus, I am so grateful that you conquered death and offer me the hope of resurrection! Help me rejoice in that hope and be your witness to share that hope with others. Amen.

Jesus’ story, continued

FRIDAY 4.7.23

Luke 24:50-53, Acts 1:1-8

Luke wrote not one book, but two. Jesus’ story went on directly into “volume 2,” the book of Acts. Jesus charged his followers to witness to him, but not just with their own courage or cleverness. They were to wait for the Holy Spirit’s power. Jesus’ “marching orders” were clear, but they must have felt breathtaking and daunting to the small group of disciples (about 120—cf. [Acts 1:15](#)). They’re still our orders, and still breathtaking: “make disciples of all nations....to the end of the earth.”

- Surely God could have written Jesus’ story in the clouds or spoken it from the skies. But God’s divine wisdom made people (us!) the main means to carry out the mission: “You will be my witnesses.” How did Jesus’ vision make it central for his family of believers to always keep a mission-driven, outward focus for their life together? Whose witness has shaped your life? In what ways can/could you live out Jesus’ commission to be one of his witnesses?
- Jesus ordered his disciples “not to leave Jerusalem but to wait for what the Father had promised.” We Americans often feel driven and impatient. Has it ever been hard for you to remember that Jesus order not to try to do his work on your own, without

God's power, applies to you, too? How could "going it alone" hinder, not advance, God's mission, or hinder your spiritual growth?

Prayer: Jesus, I love your audacity in telling 120 people in a small Roman province to reach "to the end of the earth." I love the Holy Spirit's power that goes with that mission. Fill me with that vision and that Spirit. Amen.

Not an end, but a beginning

SATURDAY 4.8.23

Acts 1:9-14

Luke wanted Theophilus ([Luke 1:1-4](#)) and all future readers to know that Jesus' story didn't end in Jerusalem with the cross, the resurrection, or even the ascension. The risen Jesus told his followers his saving work would keep right on going through the rest of human history. As the risen Lord left earth, two men in white (like the heavenly messengers who announced his resurrection—cf. [Luke 24:4](#)) said this was not the end of Jesus' story—he would return. His followers (including Mary, Jesus' mother—this is the last passage in the Bible that mentioned her) devoted themselves to prayer to prepare for the huge task that now lay before them.

- Verse 14 introduces a theme that runs through the whole story of Acts: "The spirit of unity and the practice of prayer are major features of community life (cf. [Acts 2:1, 42-44; 3:1; 4:23-32; 6:6; 13:1-3; 16:13, 16; 20:36-37; 21:5](#))." Some of this group had argued at the Last Supper about which of them would be the greatest (cf. [Luke 22:24](#)), and they would disagree at times in the years ahead (e.g. [Acts 11:1-3, 15:1-2, 7](#)). What united them in Acts 1? What do you imagine Mary, the eleven apostles (sadly, Judas was no longer with them), Jesus' brothers and the others prayed about? We need that prayerful, worshipful unity to carry out the mission Jesus gave us as much or more as they did. In what ways can you cultivate an overarching spirit of unity with those who join you in serving God, even when there are differences of opinion or approach?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, I get so busy, "devoted" to so many things. Remind me, at least five times a day, how important it is that I devote myself to prayer. Help me keep my connection with you living and active. Amen.