

# Good News for All

Reflections on  
the Book of Luke



COVENANT  
PRESBYTERIAN  
CHURCH

Winter 2025

## A Note from Pastor Charlie

The angel said, “Don’t be afraid! Look! I bring good news to you—wonderful, joyous news for all people.”

Luke 2.10 (CEB)

Many studies have shown that we are more attracted to bad news than good news. We tune into and read and click on the stories about chaos and despair, rather than the stories of hope and new life. While it’s vital to know what’s going on in the world, as Christians, we are called to be people of good news.

At Christmas we celebrate the birth of Jesus with the angel’s song—a song of good news for everyone. The theme of “good news” is particularly evident in the gospel according to Luke, which we are reading together to begin 2025. I encourage you to make the commitment to spend a few minutes each day reading the biblical text and reading the devotion written by someone in the Covenant community.

As you read, think ask yourself: what is the good news for me, and what is the good news of the world? In some readings it will be obvious, but other readings will be challenging, even confusing. While we may not understand everything in the gospel, the overall message is about the good news of God’s love for everyone.

Blessings to you in 2025!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Charlie Berthoud". The script is cursive and fluid, with a mix of uppercase and lowercase letters.

Charlie Berthoud  
Pastor/Head of Staff

**Written by Laurie Jones**

**Wednesday, January 1**

But the angel said to him, ‘Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard...’ (v. 12). This story begins earlier than the birth of Jesus: it begins with the foretelling of John the Baptist, born of Zechariah and Elizabeth, two faithful servants of advanced age who couldn’t have a child. Yet one day while he was doing his priestly duties at the temple, an angel of God came unannounced, and Zechariah was paralyzed with fear. The angel told him not to be afraid, that his prayer for a child had been heard and would be answered. As much as Zechariah protested, the angel would not back down. Instead, the angel rendered Zechariah mute until the baby was born.

Now the angel said something to Zechariah that makes me stop and think. In verse 20 the angel says, “Every word I have spoken to you will come true on time—God’s time.” (The Message) You’ll read the rest of the story; the baby was born, and Zechariah’s speech was restored.

Zechariah had firsthand experiences with angels and miracles. Miracles are hard to come by these days, least of all having an angel appear in front of you! Sometimes, if you’re lucky, there are circumstances or coincidences that align that seem to point to a certain way, but nothing as dramatic as an angel. Perhaps these coincidences are the way God is trying to get your attention in 2025. It is up to us to stop and listen to that small voice we hear, to take the time to discern what God is saying to us. And we should never forget that God tells us, “Do not be afraid.”

*Dear Lord, be with us this day as we begin a new year. Keep our hearts and minds open to what you have to say to us. Give us patience as we wait for your time and remind us not to be afraid.*

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## Are We Ready for an Angel? | Luke 1:26-38

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**Written by Jenn Sauer**

**Thursday, January 2**

The angel Gabriel is really working overtime in the first chapter of Luke’s gospel. First, he visits the priest Zechariah with the bombshell that he’ll soon be a geriatric dad; then he heads to Nazareth to tell young Mary that she’s pregnant—and not only that, the child she’s carrying will be called the Son of God. Unsurprisingly, both Zechariah and Mary have follow-up questions. But what startles me is how differently Gabriel responds to them. When Zechariah asks, “How can I be sure of this?” Gabriel quickly reminds him that he’s speaking to a being who lives in the presence of God – and

then he renders Zechariah mute for his disbelief. Contrast that treatment with Gabriel's encouraging response when Mary asks, "How will this be, since I am a virgin?" He explains to her how she will come to be with child, and he further reassures her by telling her that her relative Elizabeth, Zechariah's wife, has been similarly favored by God.

So why the different treatment? Maybe it's because Zechariah should've known better than to respond with abject fear and then outright doubt. After all, he was a priest who had been walking the walk of the religious establishment for a long time, not to mention that he had been praying for this baby. Mary, on the other hand, was barely out of childhood and simply minding her own business when an angel of the Lord paid her a visit; she made no claim to a special relationship with the Almighty. Nevertheless, after Gabriel explained things to her, she had the faith to reply, "I am the Lord's servant; may your word to me be fulfilled."

*God of old priests and young virgins and everyone in between, gift us with the kind of faith that is ready and willing to hear You speaking through Your messengers. Help us to respond like Mary, with open-hearted trust. Amen*

## Mary's Song | Luke 1:39-56

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**Written by Barb Eikenberry**

**Friday, January 3**

As Mary visits her relative Elizabeth, who will give birth to John the Baptist, she sings a beautiful song of praise to God. The words of this song, also called the Magnificat, show Mary's faith and devotion to God. She is amazed that God has chosen her, a humble servant, to be the bearer of the Christ child. She praises God for his deeds and his mercy and says God has remained faithful to his people throughout generations. We don't have the melody to the song, but the poem or lyrics have endured across centuries. Various melodies have been created for the lyrics, and Mary's song is sometimes sung at Christmastime with great reverence for Christ and for Mary.

I can only imagine how beautiful Mary's song was when she sang it. Some songs I've heard are so beautiful that I get goosebumps. I think of a couple of songs by Loreena McKennitt on her album/CD called, "To Drive the Cold Winter Away." She sings songs in cathedrals of Europe, and the acoustics just add to the songs' overall beauty: "Let All That Are To Mirth Inclined" and "Let Us The Infant

Greet.” When I listen to these songs, I get an almost otherworldly feeling and feel a bit of the divine as in Mary’s song so long ago. What songs help you feel a bit of the divine?

*Lord, thank you for the beauty of music that can inspire us and connect us with you and with people around the world and across time.*

John, The Child of Elizabeth and Zachariah | Luke 1:57-80

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**Written by Fern Kanitz**

**Saturday, January 4**

Elizabeth’s pregnancy was unusual, not only because of her age but also because of the direct involvement of the Holy Spirit. According to Luke, Elizabeth and Zachariah were faithful; he was a priest, she a descendent of Aaron. Both were following the rules – righteous, blameless. Gabriel appeared and spoke to Zachariah in person, telling him that he and his wife had a role to play in helping the people of Israel “prepare for the Lord.”

When she delivered a son, Elizabeth’s neighbors and relatives shared her joy. When she and Zachariah, the baby’s father, expressed their trust in God’s plan and prophesied that this baby would play a role in the salvation of God’s people, everybody was talking about it in their part of Judea. Elizabeth and Zachariah nurtured their son and he “grew and became strong in the spirit” (v. 80). They obeyed God, absorbed and reflected to John what Gabriel had said – “you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways,” to give knowledge, to give light to those who sit in darkness, to guide our feet into the way of peace.

John developed, steadied himself, steeping in God’s spirit until it was time for him to reach out, appearing publicly. Like he had a job to do. Like his parents were given him, a son, to raise - not really theirs, but entrusted to them for a time. Maybe that’s the way all parents feel? Or, maybe, this felt so much bigger. Did John know from the beginning that he would be rejected and killed by some; loved, respected and revered by others, deeply moving them to turn toward God and change their lives? Maybe.

*A prayer: Oh, Lord, thank you for giving us this example of faithful parents, of uncertainty, of destiny fulfilled. Thank you that your Spirit is with us every step of the way. Grant us grace to live boldly. In Jesus name, Amen*

**Written by Barb Eikenberry**

**Sunday, January 5**

I love the story of Jesus' birth as told in Luke 2. It gives such wonderful images of his father and mother traveling afar close to the time of his birth, then his birth in a lowly manger, and it tells of the shepherds who were at first terrified of the angel but then went to Bethlehem to see the baby Savior in the manger, just as the angel had foretold. Afterward, the shepherds returned home, glorifying and praising God.

Each year at Christmas, as I set out our nativity figures and other decorations with the familiar manger scene, I feel perhaps some of the joy and hope that the shepherds felt. I think about upcoming celebrations and family gatherings at Christmastime, and I also remember past Christmases. I am glad that we have an annual reminder of sharing this joy and hope with family, friends, and others, especially people in need. We also glorify and praise God with our remembrances and celebrations of this event so long ago.

*Lord, thank you for the incredible gift of your son Jesus. Help us to keep the joy and hope in our hearts throughout the year, and may we act in ways to share your love with everyone around us.*

**Written by Melissa Schmidt**

**Monday, January 6**

Waiting and watching. We are always waiting or watching expectantly for something. Both are natural parts of life. We wait and watch for the light to turn green so we can go. We wait for the laundry to be done so we have pants to wear. We wait for the weekend. The Amazon package. For apologies or forgiveness.

Simeon was waiting and watching too. The Greek word for what Simeon did was *prosdechomenos*, which means to “look for, to wait for, to expect, to receive favorably, to await with confidence or patience,” but do so with endurance. He was looking for the restoration of God’s people—the fulfillment of God’s redemptive work.

It is unclear exactly who Simeon was or what pious things he did, which might be the point. Whoever wrote the Gospel of Luke carefully researched every detail; and if Simeon's background was important, this detail would have been included. The point lies in what God does through Simeon. Other nativity stories involve angels (an angel spoke to Zechariah, Mary, Joseph, and the Shepherds). But with Simeon, it is Godself who showed up. The Holy Spirit rested on Simeon, revealed he would see the Messiah, and guided him to fulfill this promise.

Simeon held our Lord, the Messiah. Not because Simeon was born at the right time or place or because of anything that he did. Simeon simply waited and watched—*prosdechomenos*—and the God the Holy Spirit led him to the Messiah. While many of us might think waiting and watching can feel lonely, God was with Simeon. Maybe this is precisely why he was able to immediately recognize a tiny little newborn was in fact the Savior of the world.

*Prayer: O Lord, waiting is hard. The waiting place can be lonely and confusing. It often feels like the wilderness. But you promise to always be with us, working toward restoration in all areas of our lives. Give us courage and your peace that passes all understanding when we find ourselves in the waiting places. Amen*

## A Tale of Two Dads and One Summer Camp | Luke 2:41-52

**Written by Brad Brown**

**Tuesday, January 7**

Let's start at the end and work our way back to the beginning. In my 20s I spent several summers working as a counselor at a summer camp run by the American Youth Foundation. That organization adopted Luke 2:52 as the foundation of their "four-fold" philosophy of youth development. We used it to measure our success in working with young campers: how did we contribute to their mental, physical, spiritual, and social development? But I never bothered to look up or ponder the story for which this was the "punch line"—the only story in the Bible about Jesus's childhood and adolescence. Why this incident (young Jesus in the temple)? Why this punch line? Some say it's a credibility narrative, intended to demonstrate Jesus's wunderkind intelligence and awareness of his special relationship with God. Others regard it as a clever literary device—a remarkable story to bridge Jesus's spectacular birth story with the equally awesome account of his (adult) ministry. Maybe. But could it nudge us toward something deeper—the realization that all of us have another parent beyond those who gave us birth or provide our daily care? After all, every worship service we

pray, “Our Father, who art in heaven...” What happens when demands of our heavenly and earthly parents’ conflict, as they sort of did for Jesus that time? Does our duty to God supersede our duty to our own parents? As parents, are we careful to avoid a situation that forces our child to choose between obeying us and obeying God? That would certainly seem essential to nurturing the child’s “four-fold” development.

*Lord, help us find ways each day to honor both our heavenly and earthly parents. And help us to guide young people toward healthy development—mentally, physically, socially, and spiritually.*

[New Life](#) | Luke 3:1-20

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**Written by Marilyn Krichko**

**Wednesday, January 8**

In Luke 3 as John the Baptist was preparing the way for the Lord, and crowds were coming to be Baptized by him, he sternly warned them about their own behavior. In verse 3, they responded by asking, “What should we do then?” in Verse 11 John answered, “Anyone who has two shirts should share with the one who has none, and anyone who has food should do the same.”

John is not afraid to speak to the practical side of transformation. He calls the crowd to have compassion and social responsibility for the poor and marginalized by sharing what they have with those who do not have enough. We talked about this at home recently. Specifically, about how each house on our street has a lawn mower, car, snow thrower, rakes, shovels, bikes, furniture and much more. So much in fact, that everyone is cleaning out garages before winter comes so they can get their cars inside. But the text in Luke is not about these types of things. It is about basic things people need to survive like food and clothing.

How many of us, I wonder, have an extra shirt or pair of pants we do not need? How many of us have extra food in our pantries and a freezer that is full? We live in the country with the highest net worth. Yet, in 2023, The River Food Pantry in Dane County served 17,079 people, 7,163 households and had 2,529 new people register for the first time. We do not need as much as we think we do, we cannot eat all the food we have tucked away, and the clothes that no longer fit could be put to better use by someone who really needs them.

When I imagine John the Baptist giving that warning to the crowd, I also image that they did not know the people he was referring to who needed food and clothing. If they did, they would have



helped them already. There are many people we do not know who need help. There are people hoping and praying that someone helps them. So, my prayer is that as the weather gets colder and the holidays grow close, our hearts warm to the idea that we have enough to share. I hope we take the time to clean out things we do not need, to find the extra shirt and pants and can of food that someone else needs more than we do. You might even want to put a little note in the pocket, saying "God loves you," or "you are special" or write a little heart or smiley face on the bottom of a can of food. In sharing what we have and showing that we care, we too prepare the way for the Lord.

*Make your prayer an action – find five things you can donate today.*

## Each of Us Have a Place in God's Plan | Luke 3:21-38

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**Written by John Strikwerda**

**Thursday, January 9**

This passage establishes Jesus' bona fides in two ways. First, by his baptism with the Holy Spirit descending on him and God announcing Jesus' sonship. This is a well-known passage and often referred to. The second bit is rather odd: the genealogy of Joseph, the supposed father of Jesus. Yet, because of the virgin birth, this line of descent is irrelevant. Why not give Mary's genealogy? Why give any at all? But, since we have this odd bit, it's worth examining it to see what we might learn.

This genealogy doesn't agree in many respects with that given in Matthew 1. There the line of descent goes from King David through the kings of Judah. In Luke, the line avoids the kings, going through a minor son of David, one Nathan, of whom there's nothing of note in the Old Testament. By avoiding the royal line, Luke seems to show God working behind the scenes to bring forth his savior.

Both Luke and Matthew lineages include Zerubbabel, who appears after the Exile as a possible leader of Judah under the Persians. But he mysteriously disappears from history without a trace, having done nothing of note. So, after King David, there's no one of importance in this irrelevant genealogy, yet Luke names them as significant in God's plan. For us, I think one message is that though we might feel unimportant as those in this list, we have a place in bringing God's message to our world.

*May we show your love to the world, working to bring your kingdom to this world.*

Written by Tom Hershberger

Friday, January 10

The story of Jesus in the wilderness – forty days without food, alone, and facing temptation – makes me wonder: How did he do it? What amazes me is that Jesus didn't rely on anything supernatural to resist temptation. He simply used the same thing we have today—God's Word.

Jesus was fully human in those moments and shows us that real strength comes from surrendering to God, not from our own abilities.

### My Personal Struggle with Temptation

Looking back, I realize I'm most vulnerable when life is going well. You'd think feeling in control would make me stronger, but it's just the opposite. When I rely on my own strength, that's when I fall short. It's when I feel weak or uncertain that I lean into God. During those times, I spend more time in prayer and reading my Bible, and those moments of weakness turn into strength through Him.

### God's Steady Presence

Whether things are going great or falling apart—God's presence is constant and consistent. His love, grace, and protection are always there, even when I mess up. I don't have to do it all on my own because God's got me, every step of the way.

*Holy God, thank You for being my strength, especially when I forget to rely on You. Help me remember that real power doesn't come from my own abilities but from surrendering to You. Thank You for being with me, no matter what. Amen*

Written by Charlie Berthoud

Saturday, January 11

In Luke, Jesus begins his ministry at his hometown synagogue, proclaiming the good news. But there's a surprise! Jesus says this good news is for the poor, the captives, the blind, the oppressed—all of whom were "outsiders" that were traditionally stigmatized by the religious leaders. Jesus doesn't anything about good news for the political and religious leaders of the day. He goes on to cite to examples from Israel's history when God's surprising mercy was extended to

“outsiders” like the widow in Zarephath and Naaman the Syrian. (Read their stories in 1 Kings 17 and 2 Kings 5.) After hearing this, the hometown crowd get filled with rage and try to drive Jesus off a cliff!

The good news of God’s love is for everyone. We learn this at the birth of Jesus when the angels sang a song of good news of great joy for ALL the people in Luke 2. We learn this in the parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10. We learn this in the story of Zachaeus in Luke 19. We learn this on the cross when Jesus forgives a criminal in Luke 23.

Once we learn that God’s good news is for everyone, our challenge to remember it and live it out. This means God loves: people who voted differently than you, people who say and do mean things, and people who don’t go to church.

*God, help us learn your love and live it.*

## The Power of Love | Luke 4:31-44

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**Written by Betsy Erickson**

**Sunday, January 12**

Jesus demonstrates the transformational power of love in Luke 4:31-44. The passage explains that early in his ministry, Jesus went to Capernaum, among the people, and introduced himself by working healing miracles. First, he cast an evil spirit out of its human host. Then he healed Simon's mother-in-law by rebuking her high fever. Hearing of these incredible transformations, people began to flock to Jesus, who laid his hands on them, healing all manner of ailments. By working these miracles, Jesus directed people's attention to God's power.

How did Jesus channel God's power? By tapping into God's unending love. God's love is strong, substantial stuff that transforms lives. Huey Lewis and the News explained in their song, The Power of Love:

The power of love is a curious thing  
Make a one [person] weep, make another [person] sing  
Change a hawk to a little white dove  
More than a feeling, that's the power of love

When we accept God's love, it transforms us, and we can use God's love to transform our world. The world needs a lot of love, especially now. Channeling God's love is tiring. After Jesus performed healing miracles in Capernaum, Jesus sought solitude, gathering his strength, and then traveled on to preach God's love throughout Judea. May we follow Jesus' example.

*In Jesus' name, we seek to be transformed by God's love, and we seek guidance and strength to channel God's love to others.*

## Contemplation and Action | Luke 5:1-11

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**Written by Eric Girard**

**Monday, January 13**

John 4:42 - At daybreak Jesus went out to a solitary place. The people were looking for him . . . The end of Luke 4 helps me understand the beginning of Luke 5. At the end of Luke 4 Jesus proclaims he has to leave is quiet place of contemplation, venture from Capernaum, and preach the Good News. Luke 5 starts with action when Jesus goes out and calls Simon to be on of his first disciples.

When Jesus called Simon to Fish for People, he was taking one of the first actions in the building of the Church. He moved from temptations and contemplative prayer to actively preaching his message to the masses. Simon leaving everything and following Jesus is one of the first steps in a journey that continues today: Christians taking action and going out into the world.

Luke 5:16, and many other places in the gospel, proclaim that Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed. Reflection on Luke 5 for me is another reminder of the constant balance between contemplative prayer and acting on our faith. Without action, Simon is not brought into the faith. Without prayer and meditation, we lose our personal connection with the divine. If our faith is only our personal relationship with God, and not taking the Word out into the world, is it complete? When we constantly push ourselves actively give to and care for others, but do not slow down and quietly pray, are we truly connected to God?

*Dear Lord, Help us to understand when to step up and take action, and when to step back and contemplate.*

**Written by Polly Guequierre**

**Tuesday, January 14**

There was a man with leprosy, with his face to the ground, begging, “Lord, if you choose, you can make me clean. Then Jesus stretched out his hand, touched him, and said, “I do choose. Be made clean.” Immediately, the leprosy left him.” (Luke 5:12-13)

Amazing. Miraculous. Spellbinding. There are many stories of healing by Jesus in the scriptures that are beautiful and wonderful. As a child, those stories captured my imagination – what would that have been like to witness? As an adult, I wonder how “immediate” those healings actually were. Here’s my thought.

The Bible isn’t a science book, so we can’t expect to know exactly how those healings happened. Let’s start with the “beginning” when God created humanity. God gave us bodies that are “fearfully and wonderfully made” (Ps. 139:14) with sight, hearing, voices, sense of smell and touch. Plus, we possess an immune system of cells, tissue, and organs that protect our bodies from diseases and infections, an immune system created to overcome those diseases and infections.

Jesus was on earth to teach humanity about the power and majesty of God. The leper, no doubt, was healed by his body which was the gift he received from God when he was “knit together in my (his) mother’s womb”. (Ps.139:13). The man may not have been healed instantly. It might have taken days or weeks, but was it any less a miracle, one which Jesus foretold?

*Gracious Lord, Your gifts to us are many, enabling us to live and thrive here on earth. We praise you and thank you for your gifts of healing, and the stories of them in scripture that Jesus shared. Amen*

**Written by Mark Soderberg**

**Wednesday, January 15**

Jesus recruits Levi, the tax collector, to be another disciple. Levi accepts and holds a banquet. Many of Levi’s work buddies are present. John the Baptist and the Pharisees object about a banquet with sinners (tax collectors) and the lack of fasting, a traditional display of piety. Jesus replies with the parables that healthy people do not seek out a physician and you do not place new

wine in old wine skins. That is to say, the faithful are not the ones that need saving, rather the sinners, and those that are convinced that they are faithful and pious (the old wine skins) cannot be filled with a new religion (new wine) for they will rupture with His message.

These parables tell me that we are not all perfect (sinners), Jesus welcomes us at the table. Also, even if we may think we are faithful and pious, we should not be so sure of ourselves. We should always be seeking new ways to serve God and welcome him into our lives.

*Dear Lord, reveal yourself to me in new ways so that I may be a better person and serve You in ways that I never imagined before. Thanks be to God. Amen*

**Sabbath Rest | Luke 6:1:11**

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**Written by Jennifer Morgan**

**Thursday, January 16**

These verses from Luke describe the Pharisees reacting to Jesus allowing his disciples to pluck grain on the Sabbath and Jesus' healing on the Sabbath. They question him and leave the scene furious with him, looking for ways to take Jesus down. Of course, they were likely more concerned with the questioning of their authority, not the actual rule-breaking. Also, it is easy for us in this day and time to say that the Pharisees had taken Sabbath rules too seriously, that God did not intend for his people to go hungry or to suffer when they could be healed.

But this leads me to think about the ways in which we have perhaps taken this idea too far – that we no longer use the Sabbath to actually take a break, to think about God's love and our place in God's world. (I fully admit to being guilty of this any day of the week, not just Sunday!) Life is full of non-Sabbath Sunday activities that take our time and attention. At Covenant we speak of "Learning God's Love" and "Living God's Love." We cannot do either unless we take the time to let our bodies rest, and for our minds to rest in the amazing creation and mystery of God.

One's Sabbath time need not be on Sunday, as that is no longer an option for some people. It could be a different day of the week, or a little time spent each morning or evening. Jesus said that the Sabbath was a gift from God, not an obligation, as the Pharisees saw it. Let us revel in it!

*Lord, thank you for the Sabbath. We want so much to do what you ask. Help us find the time to rest and breath in your love, not as an obligation, but as a willing response to your gift. Amen*

## Who Is My Enemy? | Luke 6:12-49

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**Written by Winfred Byrd**

**Friday, January 17 and Saturday, January 18**

It is easy to read this section of Luke as a kind of "Cliff's Notes" of the Sermon on the Mount for those that don't know their Mosaic law. Resist the temptation to flip back and find the more positive black-and-white treatment of these ideas in Matthew. There is a lesson in Luke's account. Luke was looking forward to a changing world. As the urgency of complying with the letter of the law gave way to Jesus's message of radical love, he reminds us in chapter 6, that those admonitions to love one another extend to our enemies, that we, as a reformed and always reforming community, teach one another how to love our enemies and should do so with integrity, and finally that that integrity is foundationed on faith in God and constructed by living out the goodness God's generosity instills in our hearts.

Put simply: Love your enemies. Model integrity.

Today, whatever opponents we may encounter only want to kiss their children goodnight at day's end and then go to sleep with a belly that isn't empty. You have to give up so little to assume everyone, in good faith, pursues those simple goals the best way they know how. And then, suddenly, it is difficult to look around and find enemies. To keep integrity among all these people so fundamentally like yourself, only remember always that you too are an expression of the care God has for his children. You are what you do.

With these ideas in mind, we pray:

*Lord, we thank you for the foundation you give us with your word. We ask you for the strength to always perform our part and abundant mercy both to comfort us when we fall short of our obligations and to liberally bestow on others who share the same shortcoming. Amen*

**Written by Grady Brown**

**Sunday, January 19**

This passage tells us a pair of stories, in which Jesus heals a servant and a son who had died. And while these stories showcase the miraculous healing powers of Jesus, I think it is the compassion and humility of Jesus that I cling on to after reading these verses.

In both instances, Jesus is confronted by folks he has never met – one who does not see himself as worthy of Jesus’s time and attention; another who is experiencing grief and despair at the loss of her only son. And in both instances, Jesus shows kindness and compassion to these individuals whom he has never met but understands their need for comfort and for empathy.

In today’s world, where it feels like we are fiercely divided – I, admittedly, am writing this following a contentious and intensely emotional election - I wonder if this story of simple can help refocus our role in the community as faithful disciples of Jesus and the lessons he has taught us. There are many individuals we interact with, we read about in the newspaper, or even groups of people we picture in our mind – some of whom we may have intense disagreement with or have different lived experiences and fears – and it can be easy for us to overlook their personal struggles. But I believe Jesus challenges us to first act with humanity and compassion towards others. I think it is this empathy that can showcase our own healing powers.

*Lord, may we find comfort in the compassion of others and give comfort by showing empathy and kindness to those around us.*

## Expectations | Luke 7:18-35

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**Written by Jess Scholten**

**Monday, January 20**

I love the question John’s disciples come with to Jesus. I imagine them highly suspicious and the first part of the question quite slow: “Are **you** the one who is to come?” with the last part coming out in rush: “or are we to wait for another?” with a little sigh of relief on the end of that question – as if, surely, you, Jesus, with your odd ways are not the actual Messiah. Jesus responds for John’s disciples to go back to him with words from Isaiah (35:5 and 61:1): the blind are receiving



their sigh – people are healed – the poor have good news brought to them. What else would you expect?

And then Jesus talks to the crowd around him about John the Baptist. Sure, they thought maybe he would be fancier, more royal – soft robes and a more refined presence. What they got was the Grizzly Adams of the first-century – John out there in the wilderness, covered in itchy camels' hair and shouting about the time to come.

This passage is about expectations – the expectations John and his disciples had of Jesus, the expectations of the crowd for Jesus and John, the expectations of the children in the marketplace. And in every case, these expectations feel unmet by the people. And yet, Jesus assures the crowds, this, this is what we're about. The Son of God is not the king ruling on high you might have expected, but pay attention – people are healed, community is formed, and wisdom has a new hold on the people of God.

*What expectations do you have for Jesus? How have you been surprised in your faith journey by things being different and more amazing than you had imagined?*

[Grace, Compassion, Forgiveness](#) | Luke 7:36-8:3

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**Written by Rosemary Jones**

**Tuesday, January 21**

This reading from Luke has a lot packed into it and is not necessarily comfortable to read. Jesus is invited to a Pharisee's house where he is not greeted by the host with the traditional kiss, or by having his feet washed. Instead, a woman who is known to be a sinner comes into the house with an expensive jar of oil and washes his feet with her tears as she kisses them, and then pours oil on them.

I don't know about you, but I'm sure I would find this intimacy embarrassing to watch. Jesus seems to read the Pharisee's mind as he rebukes him for his lack of a greeting and informs him that this woman is forgiven. He then asks the Pharisee who is more grateful for the forgiveness of debts, the man who owes little, or the man who owes much. There is an implied comparison between the Pharisee who is upright and righteous, and the woman who is a sinner and has

showed her gratitude in such an extravagant way. The grace of forgiveness falls on both those who seem not to need much, and those who need it greatly.

*Jesus, forgive us when we are proud and self-righteous, as well as when we have broken your commandments.*

## Practice Makes Fertile | Luke 8:4-8:21

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**Written by Brie Bradsaw**

**Wednesday, January 22**

Actions can be a sticky subject. On the one hand, we are saved by faith alone (Ephesians 2:8-9) and no matter how many “good acts” you do, you can’t buy your way into Heaven with good deed tokens. On the other hand, it’s clear from passages like this that actions are an integral part of a faithful Christian life. Jesus even goes so far as to say in verse 21: “My mother and brothers are those who hear God’s word and put it into practice.” (NIV) This dichotomy can leave open the question of “Why are actions so important then, if we only need to believe to be saved?” The parable of the sower in Luke 8:4-15 illustrates one version of an answer. Here, Jesus shows us how different hearts can be either fertile soil or barren ground. But, as anyone who has tried to grow a plant knows, it takes work to get the soil just right for planting. Just as the farmer’s work of tilling prepares the soil for sowing, so our work towards being Christlike makes our souls places where the Holy Spirit can flourish. Only then can we be a lamp up on a stand, shining our light onto others.

*Dear God,*

*Thank you for your unconditional grace. Help us to remember that we are lamps designed to shine your good news onto the world. Help us to cultivate lives in which the Holy Spirit can take root through putting your Word into practice, even when life’s worries threaten to choke us out.*

*In your name, Amen*

**Written by Dick Lovell**

**Thursday, January 23**

With apologies to students of the demonic, my tendency to be anxious steered me to the first story of this text, “Jesus Calms a Storm” (rather than the longer second story, “Jesus Heals a Gerasene Demoniac”)

Just saying the word “calm” helps de-stress me. The website titled “Calm” is one of my favorites, especially its 10-minute “Daily Calm” practice.

But difficult circumstances often require a calming presence far greater than any meditation can provide. Enter Jesus, our ultimate, ever-present source of peace in times good and bad. Just as Jesus calmed the raging waters of the Sea of Galilee, so too will His loving presence see us through the most challenging storms of life.

As we prepare to celebrate Jesus’ birth, may we grow in faith and be fully ready to tap into the deep peace and blessed calm He offers.

*Spend time meditating on today's devotion.*

**Written by Dick Rasanen Family**

**Friday, January 24**

Being witness to a healing service where a person has come forward to be prayed over and touched by others’ hands is a blessed experience. Being one of those people who come forward for healing and to be prayed over and touched is so very special. Both are held in our hearts in everlasting ways.

Jesus said to the woman who reached out and touched the Lord’s garment: “Daughter your faith has made you well, go in peace.” This was a wonderful benediction to her. For years, this woman had to stay hidden except for going to her doctor appointments. She so wanted to be well. She was it seemed a tuned to her senses. She had heard about Jesus who healed through his power. She had seen him in the crowd that was surrounding him. She had something that had

persisted and persisted giving such pain and isolation to her. The woman joined the crowd. She was covered with her garments so her condition would not be recognized. She wanted to go unseen. As she approached Jesus, she touched His garment.

Oh, how the power of healing jettisoned through the woman. Jesus had to stop and see who touched his garment. He looked and saw her diligence and boldness. His senses felt the touch. She was seen and healed to live a new life! The woman could go with a powerful sense of health and share the peace of Jesus.

*Jesus, Thank you for your constant attention for us. Help us enter the crowd using our senses. Help us reach out and touch Jesus with our faith that we can receive a new life. Help us help others to join the crowd so that others may go in peace. Amen*

## [The Way of Jesus](#) | Luke 9:1-17

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**Written by Nancy Enderle**

**Saturday, January 25**

A lot is happening in this chapter of Luke. These verses contain two stories grouped together under the headings “Jesus Sends Out the Twelve” and “Jesus Feeds the Five Thousand.” In a Gospel filled with stories and parables that cause the listener to pause and reflect, these teachings are fairly direct. ‘Go and share this new way of being in relation to God and each other, (aka kingdom living) and do some healing when you see any in need.’

In so many ways the Christian Church has at worst, missed the point, and at best, complicated the essence of the Christ message. Put most simply, in the centuries that followed Christianity became about constructing beliefs about Jesus, when he in point of fact, he was inviting people to follow him.

What do we need on this path of kingdom living? Travel light, he says. Don’t get weighed down by distractions and possessions. Stay with others and if they reject you - don’t let the negativity cling to you. Wipe the dust off your feet and get on with it.

Shortly after the twelve receive their instructions, Luke includes the story of the feeding of five thousand. The directions they were given just verses earlier seem to have been forgotten when they

find themselves surrounded by crowds without proper provisions. Their solution? Send the hungry crowds home where someone else will take care of them. Jesus' solution? Feed them. There will be enough.

What can we learn about the way of Jesus from these verses and how can we follow him today? I would suggest that we are invited to examine the many things we carry around with us that slow us down: self-doubt, resentment, prejudice, anger, self-righteousness - to name a few. Also, when we encounter resistance from people who want no part of this path, don't let their negativity derail us. And when we see someone in need, help them. Feed them. Share compassion with them. Let them know about the love that will never let them go. And then love them. The clarity of this path reminds me of a Mark Twain saying, "It ain't those parts of the Bible that I can't understand that bother me, it is the parts that I do understand."

*Holy One, we pray for your guidance as we seek to follow your way. Help us to set aside the props and distractions that keep us from traveling on your path of service. Give us resilience and love to heal those in need and to respond to those we encounter with the power you give us as your disciples. Amen*

## [Jesus as Our Mentor](#) | Luke 9:18-36

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**Written by Ann and Riess Perry**

**Sunday, January 26**

Jesus says, "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will save it. What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit their very self?"

Jesus is challenging us to follow him. Through really following him, we must give up the part of our lives that includes building our own fortunes and possessions that we use for our own gain. The possessions alone do not fulfill us without Jesus as a part of our lives. To follow him is to be giving and love others; therefore giving us a purpose in life. This purpose will lead us to much more gratifying lives that include Jesus. Will we feel happy and fulfilled if Jesus is missing?

He warns that we must not deny God or push him to the side. We should acknowledge him and communicate with him. He will be our teacher and mentor. You can't be selfish and expect the world for your own gain.

*Dear God,*

*Thank you for this message and reminding us to seek purpose in our lives. Please open our ears and hearts to learn from you on how to follow you. Amen*

[The Christian Journey](#) | Luke 9:37-62

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**Written by Melissa Hinz**

**Monday, January 27**

Sometimes I've wondered what it would have been like to live in the time of Jesus, to see him with my own eyes, to listen to his words and watch him heal the sick. I've wondered if I would have been among those who wholeheartedly chose to follow or among those who weren't quite ready to make that commitment. I like to think that I would have been like the one who said, "I will follow you wherever you go," (vs57) and meant it.

Some did choose to follow immediately, and in this passage from chapter 9 of Luke, some said they would, but only after they took care of their own unfinished business. Jesus' response was immediate and strong. He said to one, "Let the dead bury the dead, but as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God." To the other he said, "No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God." The agricultural reference is said to mean that if you start to plow a field and then look behind you, your rows will be crooked because of not being fully focused on the end goal. Both examples refer to the willingness to commit fully to following Christ, of placing personal priorities ahead of God's priorities and God's kingdom.

I call myself a follower of Jesus, and I seek to listen to God’s call in my life, following Jesus’ example and loving and serving others. And I know that I am NOT fully committed to the call of God in my life. I say this not to put myself down, nor to question that I am a beloved and cherished child of God, because I am, as are you. I say this because I know that I am divided in my devotion, prioritizing my own plans rather than offering up my life completely to God. This is the Christian journey for me. Until the day that I leave this earth, knowing that I will consistently fall short, I will seek to commit myself wholeheartedly to follow and to live “proclaiming the kingdom of God.”

*Gracious God, draw me near to you. Give me a heart open to hearing your call and the courage to follow without fear or distraction. I praise you for your goodness and your love. Amen*

## Who Are These Seventy-Two Others? | Luke 10:1-24

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Written by John Strikwerda

Tuesday, January 28

When you enter a house, first say, “Peace to this house!”  
And if anyone shares in peace, your peace will rest on them. Luke 10:5  
Whoever listens to you listens to me. Luke 10:16

This passage reports that Jesus appointed seventy-two ‘others’ and sent them out ahead of him. These ‘others’ appear in this chapter of Luke and that’s it. Where were they before this? Where did they go afterwards?

A similar sending occurs in the gospel of Matthew, where the twelve disciples are sent out. So why the seventy-two here? What’s happening? Some scholars believe the passage is not so much about what Jesus did during his life as it is about what his followers did after his death. The early Jesus movement was sustained by itinerant teachers moving throughout Palestine. This passage in Luke 10 serves to validate their activities. These teachers were received well by some and rejected by others. And they were charged with preparing the way of salvation.

As we end our Sunday services, we affirm that we've learned about God's love and go out to live it. Like the 'others' in this passage, we are sent out to give peace to a world longing for it. So, we are heirs to the seventy-two others. It is both comforting and frightening to know that whoever listens to us, listens to Jesus.

*Dear God, help us bring peace to those around us.*

## [The Good Samaritan and Mary on the Playground](#) | Luke 10:25-42

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**Written by Sherry Hershberger**

**Wednesday, January 29**

Do you remember the old playground favorite, the teeter totter? Now fading from popularity, this piece of equipment typically inspired both fear and excitement. Soaring up high and then breezing back down smoothly was exhilarating. The ride could quickly become painful, however, if your partner jumped off, leaving the teeter totter unbalanced and you crashing to the ground. Today's Bible reading reminds us of the importance of balancing two key elements of our faith: loving God and loving others.

In the first passage (vs 25-37), Jesus uses the story of the Good Samaritan to explain who our neighbors are when we "love our neighbor as ourselves" (vs. 27). In the second story (vs. 38-42), Jesus visits the home of sisters Mary and Martha and gently commends Mary for demonstrating what it means to "love God with all your heart, soul, strength, and mind" (vs. 27).

Like the Samaritan, Mary, and Martha, we all face the challenge of balancing work and service with prayer and worship. We can be so busy with serving our neighbor that we don't have time to connect with God on a personal level. Conversely, we can become so single-minded in our focus on loving God that our devotion to prayer, study, and worship never bears fruit in outward acts of love towards others.



As with the teeter totter, our faith journey becomes nothing short of exhilarating when we skillfully balance daily time with God and stepping out in faith to serve others in love.

*Thank you, God, for the stories in your Word that remind us how to live in close communion with you while also serving others. Please convict us when we become lopsided in our faith and show us how to restore the balance as your Word directs.*

## A Friend in Need | Luke 11:1-13

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**Written by Mark Soderberg**

**Thursday, January 30**

Jesus teaches his disciples the Lord's prayer, "Lord, hallowed be thy name...". But he continues. He teaches, "Ask and it will be given to you, seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened. For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds."

I believe these parables are very transparent. They tell me to be open to Jesus and God. Seek Them out and They will provide. God wishes for us to be part of Them. They welcome us, if we only ask, look, and open ourselves to Them.

*Dear Lord, I open myself to Your teaching. Help me be a better person. Help me to learn Your love. Grant me the grace to live Your love. Amen*

## Still Only Jesus | Luke 11:14-36

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**Written by Dick Rasanen Family**

**Friday, January 31**

This is the gospel scripture that encourages us. It gives us the truth, the way, and the light that shines in us and through us. It starts with who the Pharisees are trying to portray who Jesus is. Jesus proclaims who his is by telling them about who God is and it is by God that the healing came. None other.

Most of this passage in Luke is in Jesus's words, so in a lot of Bibles these words are in red. He describes the filling up of the direction in which God moves. There is love for those being ministered to and those demons that are driven out are replaced by the filling of God. The authority of God.

The Pharisees so wanted to destabilize what was happening with Jesus's presence. They accused him, lied about him, and tried to drive him away so they could have their way. They were decisive. Their hearts were like stone.

But Jesus was obeying God. He spoke God's word. A new day for those who were healed. This was a life of obeying God. This life proclaimed the fullness not the less than or emptiness or vulnerability to have this evil in their lives.

At our house, we have a flashlight in every room, purse, car, jacket pocket. We have lamps that light up the corners of a room. We have lights that pour light out from them. Our grandchildren like the headlamps and flashlights that go in their Christmas stockings and Easter baskets.

Being blind with a thimbleful of light is a tiring challenge every day. But a heart of stone is not a part of every day. "A heart at peace gives life to the body." Proverbs 14:30 Obeying God fills life up, gives life to the body even in exhaustion. This light comes from God, the light of Jesus words, and the Holy Spirit that shines through.

*Dear Lord,*

*Fill me today with whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable.*

*Philippians 4:8-9*

*Amen*

[Jesus' Values Versus Societal Values | Luke 11:37-12:12](#)

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**Written by Katie Barden**

**Saturday, February 1**

What Jesus values and what society values could not be more opposite. Jesus rebukes the Pharisees and lawyers at a gathering calling them 'hypocrites,' 'foolish people' and 'full of greed and wickedness.' If Jesus just received invited to share a meal with the Pharisees, why would he insult his hosts? Jesus observes how the gathering is representative of only those who are perceived as having a high social standing. Their camaraderie among each other is also only based on those with

equal social standing. Jesus recalls that they are all too concerned with their outward appearance (to which in our day would be the absorption of newer cars, newer clothes, bigger homes, and more money) and tells them that they may be clean on the outside, but they are ‘full of greed and wickedness’ on the inside for not following God’s ways such as being generous to the poor which they could easily afford to do with their surplus. Jesus tells them that truly if you were clean on the inside, worrying about your outward appearance would not be a concern as you would be clean both inside and out. But in a society obsessed with image and progress (which is signified by amassing more and in bigger quantities) how are we to strive to be viewed as ‘successful’ in our current society, but also and more importantly, how do we create a world in which our Christian ethic can survive? How can we best make space for God?

*Dear Gracious God,*

*Please help us to live by your words, thoughts and deeds always. We often find ourselves led astray or choose to follow the path well-trodden rather than yours. We give ourselves excuses for following the easier path in terms of social and societal perception which we sometimes value more than your perception of us. Help us to remember that we are all your children and that everyone we come into contact with today and this week are also a child of yours and are always deserving of our care, love and respect. Help to guide and mend our hearts towards your most righteous path rather than the path well-trodden.*

*In Jesus’ name I pray, Amen*

**Where Is My Heart? | Luke 12:13-34**

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**Written by Melissa Hardy**

**Sunday, February 2**

In this passage, Jesus challenges us to “be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of possessions” (12:14). He ends the passage with “For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” echoing Matthew 6:21 from the Sermon on the Mount.

This passage resonated with me not on material possessions, but in where I use my time and talents.

- How am I spending my time? For isn’t that where my treasure is?
- Where do I want my heart to be...and how can I redirect my efforts to live in a way that aligns how I am spending my time with where I want my heart to be?

“One’s life does not consist in the abundance of possessions” is a verse that has stayed with me. I think often of Jesus calling his disciples telling them to “put down their nets and follow me,” essentially asking them to walk away from their livelihood and any material possessions to walk into the unknown based purely on faith.

Could I have done that? Would I have done that? If I am being honest with myself, I wouldn’t have. So, what would have held me back? What is my treasure? What has my heart? What do I seek, work for, collect, value, prioritize, and dedicate my resources towards? I treasure stability, comfort, predictability, and a feeling of control over my life.

Is that where I want my heart to be? No, it isn’t. But this means I need to be comfortable feeling uncomfortable.

I need to put down my net and follow Him to where He leads me. I need to use my time and talents to live God’s love in the world around me.

*God, help me give up control over my time and talents. Help make the treasure I seek be how I can best serve You in the world around me. Give me the strength to put down the net of my possessions and follow You where You lead me.*

**Written by Jan Minardi**

**Monday, February 3**

Jesus warns his disciples that they really don't know what to expect or when things will happen. So, they need to be awake and aware and ready for whatever is required of them. And since they are the disciples, they have great responsibility. They need to be tuned in to what's going on and ready to act, just as they react to weather changes.

Jesus warns that he has come not to bring peace but to set the world ablaze, and bring conflict, even within families. He knows he faces trials, and his disciples have tough times ahead and will need to settle differences and work things out.

This is a time when we see conflicts in our country and in the world, when we want to see peace.

*Our God, Guide us with your love to work toward peace. Let the words of Jesus help us to see ways to reach out to others. Amen*

Wait...Wait...Wait...Now! | Luke 13:1-21

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**Written by Laurie Jones**

**Tuesday, February 4**

Jesus said again, “How can I picture God’s kingdom? It’s like yeast that a woman works into enough dough for three loaves of bread—and waits while the dough rises.” Luke 13:20-21 (The Message)

The parables continue as we read through Luke. The parables are an interesting way to get a point across—or not. They aren’t the most direct outlet for the transfer of information, yet Jesus used them frequently.

I find these parables generally have a theme of wait, wait, wait: ok now. The tree that didn’t bear fruit was about to be cut down, yet it was saved by the gardener who wanted to give it another year and fertilizer. Could that be me when I want to give up on something but find that if I just put in a little more effort and prayer, I find that it worked out despite myself?

Or the parable about the arthritic woman who was hunched over for 18 years being healed on the Sabbath. She was an invalid for 18 years. Eighteen. Years. Wait, wait, wait, then Jesus heals her—

on the Sabbath no less. Sometimes we wait a very long time for good things to happen—I thought that college would never end (and I didn't even go for that long), yet it did, and the result was good.

The final parables were about the pine nut growing into a huge pine tree and yeast making enough bread to share. These are meant to be glimpses of God's Kingdom—that with the right seeds, warmth, care, and time—we will reap great rewards.

*Dear Lord,*

*You ask that we follow you. You ask that we wait. You ask, but sometimes we don't obey. Please remind us that you work behind the scenes to make our lives better. Help us to be patient and know that you are there. Always. Amen*

## Mentor Versus Coach | Luke 13:22-35

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**Written by Nancy McCulley**

**Wednesday, February 5**

Us: "Lord, are only a few people going to be saved?"

Jesus: "Make every effort to enter through the narrow door . . ."

At first, Jesus sounds like a coach. One who helps us improve the skills we need to get through that door. But Jesus doesn't ask how we think we're doing; he doesn't give feedback on our progress; he doesn't suggest specific steps to get us through the door. He has something more powerful than coaching to offer.

Instead, he mentors us by offering advice and support. He shares the wisdom that it will be difficult, and many will fail. He leaves it up to us to take charge of our own development, rather than racing headlong into any door we see. He advises us to be on the lookout for the right door, even if it appears to be too narrow to enter. In doing so, we're encouraged to make decisions that will lead us in the right direction. He reminds us to continuously navigate our growth over the long term, not at just this one practice session.

*We look to you, Holy One, and listen, as you provide us the loving mentoring we need to move forward confidently in your grace. Thank you for that guidance. Continue to remind us to pause and consider the paths we might choose on our way to the doors that we intend to pass through. Amen*

Written by Charlie Berthoud

Thursday, February 6

Food is so prominent in Luke’s gospel that someone wrote a book called, *Eating Your Way Through Luke’s Gospel* (by Luke Karris). From blessing those who are hungry in Luke 6 to recognizing Jesus in the breaking of the bread in Luke 24, the text seems to be reminding us to remember God when we eat and to share our food with hungry people.

Luke 14.1-24 has several meal-related stories. The most striking one concludes with the invitation to invite the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame to a banquet. Once again Luke is showing us that the good news of God’s love is for everyone, not just the influential religious and political leaders.

Jesus repeatedly tears down walls of social, economic, and ethnic divisions, so it seems reasonable for us to do the same. Take a minute right now and think of someone you could invite to lunch or out for coffee. Maybe a co-worker or a neighbor or even a family member—someone with whom you don’t usually talk or connect. Maybe invite some folks to your home. Maybe sit with someone new as you enjoy your Sunday coffee and donut. Ask lots of questions. Look for common ground. Enjoy the time. Pray for that person, even a simple prayer like “Dear God, please bless \_\_\_\_\_.”

*Thank you, God, for feeding us with the bread of life and with your love. Help us feed a world that is hungry for food, for justice, and for love. Amen*



**Written by Brad Brown**

**Friday, February 7**

Remember a month ago (January 7; Luke 2: 41-52), the story about having to serve both our heavenly and earthly parent? Well, buckle up; we're boarding the ride next door. This time, it's Jesus telling the crowds they have to hate their parents, then abandon their almost-full flock or purse to search out a rather detestable lost lamb or errant coin if they want to be a good disciple. Impossible, ridiculous demands, you say? Well, consider three things. First, the Hebrew word translated as "hate" here might have a different meaning. Jesus may not be demanding that we actively dislike our parents as much as that we always put our love of and duty to God ahead of our affection for and allegiance to family. Second, he's addressing a large crowd, many of whom, he senses, may not be up to the awesome demands of discipleship. And third, to drive that point home, he responds to the pharisees' grumblings (about Jesus' tendency to hang out with undesirables) by telling two parables about devotion to finding the lost and celebrating their discovery. Now comes the big question: Are you up for that kind of discipleship? Can you put God before family, friends, life itself? Can you focus your energy on those whom society (and maybe you) dislikes, dismisses? Can you celebrate their repentance and acceptance of the Lord? What are your feelings as you ponder this demanding mission? Keep them in mind as you prepare to consider one of the most famous parables of all (tomorrow).

*God, give us the strength to seek out and serve the lost, the lonely, the least desirable of those with whom we share this world, to help them find their way back to you, and to celebrate their fellowship with us. Give us the courage to do the hard work of discipleship.*

**Under Story | Luke 15:11-32**

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**Written by Tom Bauer**

**Saturday, February 8**

In this Prodigal Son story unconditional love and forgiveness often get the most play. But there is another aspect to this tale that is sometimes overlooked. Has a boss/supervisor ever undervalued your work? Did you grow up in a family where one of your siblings always seemed to "get away with..."? Have you been a diligent committee member who's received little credit? Ever been in a class where a certain student or two got most of the teacher's attention? Are you the reliable Esther or Ezekiel who rarely, if ever, is singled out for praise?

The other son in this story is that type of person. This is likely not the first time his brother has taken advantage of his father. Not the first time the prodigal son has left his brother "holding the bag." Yes, the reliable son's reaction in the story is a little snarky, but he's just fed up with all the shenanigans the prodigal has done over the years. Yes, the father tries to reassure the stay-at-home son with a reminder that the farm will be his someday. That's not what the son is seeking. The reliable, trustworthy son just wants some recognition, appreciation, and an expression of love.

Who are the people in our lives that are easy to overlook? Who are the folks that make our lives easier, but rarely get recognized? Who are the "other" sons or daughters in our lives who could use a little of our love?

*For a prayer: Spend 3 minutes alone in nature observing what God has written/created. If you can't get outside, just look out a window.*

## Faithful with Little | Luke 16:1-18

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Written by Tom Scholten

Sunday, February 9

Some Bibles title this passage, "The Dishonest Manager," while others title it, "The Shrewd Manager." Which is it, I wonder? Either way, in this passage **grace abounds**. Less is required than what was. As we think about our theme for these two months – Good News for All – this feels like pretty good news.

After all, we serve a God of abundant grace. Luke 16:13 in, *The First Nations Version: An Indigenous Translation of the New Testament*, reads, "No one can be loyal to two rival chiefs. He will have to choose between them for either he will hate one chief and love the other, or he will honor one and resent the other. You cannot be loyal to the Great Provider and to possessions at the same time." May we be people who follow the Great Provider, extending grace to the Chief of Grace.

*Great Provider, show me where it is that you want me to extend grace. Where is there love that can triumph over hate? Where is there forgiveness that can help ease shame? Where are you calling me to be light today?*

**Written by Megan Berry**

**Monday, February 10**

Growing up, I heard many stories from my parents and grandmothers. Stories about our family, stories about the world, stories that I'm not even sure were 100% true anymore but had become family legend through many retellings. And these stories taught me many things like how I come from a long line of crafty people, why we should be nice to those around us, or the best ways to catch and kill a chicken on the family farm. These stories not only taught me factual truths about myself and my family, but at the heart of many of them, they reinforced the values that my family holds true. Like loving one another, helping those around you, and generally being a kind person.

As I read our scripture for today, I'm struck by the final verse "if they did not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced even if someone rises from the dead." You see in this scripture we see a rich man who died, and while being tortured in Hades he sees Lazarus up in heaven, and he calls out for his help, though he never helped Lazarus on earth. Abraham and the rich man go back and forth, and Abraham ends the conversation with the final line "if they did not listen..."

It makes me wonder, what have we learned from our ancestors, both our biblical and our familial ancestors? What are our stories that have been passed down that we continue to pass down the generations?

*Prayer: Gracious God, thank you for the lessons from our ancestors, may we continue to learn and grow from them and pass them down to future generations. May we be kind always to those around us. Amen*

**Written by Jess Scholten**

**Tuesday, February 11**

Martin Bell wrote a lovely reflection on this passage in his book, *The Way of the Wolf: The Gospel in New Images*: "Where Are the Nine?" In it, he imagines all sorts of reasons why only one leper comes back to thank Jesus – reasons like being so happy he forgot or being in a hurry to reunite with one's family. Bell speculates that one leper's heart was so hardened by the long-suffering, they

didn't remember how to give thanks; and another had lived with disease so long, he didn't even know how to live into the new identity.

Bell concludes that "God does not heal people and then stand around just waiting for us to say thank you." I like to imagine I'd be the one coming back to Jesus to say thanks, but who knows? I might be just as apt to start planning a party or fill up my calendar with reunions or return to my life without looking back. And maybe those are their own forms of gratitude as well. Imagine being free from what burdens you every day. How do you think you would react? How would you give thanks in the new chapter that is your life healed?

*Great Physician, I pray for healing, especially for those with long-suffering. What relief to be free of illness, pain, judgment. Be a balm in the broken parts of our lives and in the lives of those who are ill that all would know wholeness more fully. I name before you \_\_\_\_\_ and trust them to your care. Amen*

**Written by Doug Poland**

**Wednesday, February 12**

When we turn our minds to the divine call, we do so recognizing that each of us is a beloved child of God, each with our own inherent individual value to our Creator, who has given us free will to exercise in our decision-making and actions. But we also must be mindful that we do not exist by and for ourselves; we are part of the corporate body of Christ, one with God and in God. We can see this in Jesus' teachings on the kingdom of God. One NRSV translation of Luke says that Jesus taught that the kingdom of God is "among us." (Luke 17:21) An alternative translation of the same passage in the NRSV, as well as the Lamsa translation of Luke and the Gospel of Thomas, have Jesus saying the kingdom of God is "within us." The common point in each is that the focus is on "us." One translation of Luke emphasizes us as a community, whereas Thomas and other translations of Luke focus on us as individuals. Read together, the point is that God's kingdom is alive and working within each of us individually and also among us corporately. Or, as Paul puts it: "Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it." (1 Corinthians 12.27) In other words, we are an integral part of God's kingdom on earth, which began to come into being with Jesus' birth, death, and resurrection, but that will come to complete fulfillment only through the participation of each of us individually as disciples, and corporately as a community.

*Gracious God, who calls us to right relationship with you and with one another, bless me and our community of faith so that all we think, say, and do is in service of your kingdom on earth.*

**Written by Melissa Hinz**

**Thursday, February 13**

"Then Jesus told them a parable about their need to pray always and not to lose heart."

(Luke 18:1)

The parable, often called "The Persistent Widow," is the story of a widow who goes before an unjust judge to ask for justice against her accuser. While initially dismissive, the judge eventually chooses to deal with her and grant her justice so that she will stop pestering him. The message of the parable compares this judge to God saying that if even this crooked judge will grant justice, certainly God will grant justice to those who love God and cry out to God in prayer.

We live in a world where sometimes justice seems unattainable, and it is discouraging. We become burdened by the many grievances, injuries and wrongs we see in the world. Yet, in this passage, Jesus is telling us how important it is to continue to pray, to be persistent and to remain hopeful as God is the ultimate judge. This does not mean that we stop working toward equality, unity, and respect for our world and for the people in it, but it does mean that we can rest in the understanding the God's justice will reign – that God is in charge.

So many systems in our world are broken, and it is easy to lose hope. Jesus tells us to persevere in prayer and to keep hope alive. The Matthew 25 tenets offer us ways to direct our prayers. So today, let's choose to join our voices as we cry out to God in prayer.

*Gracious God, we come to you today overwhelmed by the injustices in this world. We pray that you would hear our prayers, lift our burdens and fill us with your peace, knowing that you are ever-present. We ask you to work through us as we seek to dismantle structural racism, eradicate systemic poverty and build a church here on earth full of love, compassion and grace. Grant us the faith to know and the courage to trust that you are God here on earth as in heaven. In Jesus' name. Amen*

## Seeking the Kingdom of God | Luke 18:18-43

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**Written by Frederic Ross**

**Friday, February 14**

Perhaps you, like me, sometimes find yourself puzzling over the concept of the Kingdom of God, which appears in many guises in Christian scripture. What did the Kingdom mean for Jesus or the Gospel writers—and, indeed, what does it mean for us today, 2,000 years removed? When and how might it arrive, and will we even know it if we see it? If the Kingdom was once “at hand,” it hardly seems so now.

In today's Lukan readings (LK 18:18-45) we encounter several references to the Kingdom of God, as Jesus interacts with four different individuals or groups. In one interaction a rich man winds up discouraged; in another Peter seems quizzical, while in the third the Twelve are simply uncomprehending. Finally, an insistent blind man finds his faith rewarded via Jesus' healing. Collectively, these interactions, explicitly or implicitly, seem to have application to the Kingdom of God. Uncovering a common theme, however, is no easy task.

My personal takeaway is that there was uncertainty about the Kingdom 2,000 years ago, just as there is uncertainty today. We, as they, wait for a big bang, but there has been hardly a whimper. Perhaps this is because we have a log in our eye. As scriptural scholar John Dominic Crossan has asked about the Kingdom's 2,000-year hiatus: are we humans to wait for God to act, or is God waiting for us? God is the author of God's Kingdom, but we ourselves must bring it about.

*Almighty God, author of all things, grant us the strength and wisdom to strive for a better world, a world that draws us closer to one another, closer to our better angels and, always, closer to you and your will.*

## [The Wee Little Man](#) | Luke 19:1-27

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**Written by Jane Kolakowski**

**Saturday, February 15**

Read Luke 19:1-10.

According to William Barclay, Jericho was a very wealthy and very important city. Located in the Jordan valley, it had a great palm forest, gardens of roses, and balsam groves that were world-famous and perfumed the air for miles. The Romans carried its famed dates and balsam to worldwide places.

Zaccheus was chief of the tax collectors in this influential city (v.2) which means he was VERY wealthy! He could overtax the citizens and keep the extra money. He was therefore hated by the citizens, Luke tells us. Zaccheus was also of short stature, according to Luke. That's two challenges he had to deal with daily.

This is a "seeing and seeking" story. Zaccheus wanted to "see" Jesus. He was curious about him. The tall crowd blocks short Zaccheus' view so he ran ahead and climbed a leafy sycamore tree to elevate himself. STOP RIGHT THERE! Wealthy, powerful officials in the Middle East then and now do not run nor do they climb trees. They move with dignity, confidence, and a regal bearing. What does this say to us about Zaccheus? He must really have been trying to see "who Jesus was" (v. 3)! What amazing things had he heard about Jesus? Jesus saw Zaccheus in the tree and invites himself to Zaccheus' home. Jesus explains, "For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost" (v.10).

This is also a healing story. Zaccheus did not set out that morning to have his life changed but it was. Jesus, “the seeker”, found someone who was lost and changed his heart from greedy to generous causing Zaccheus to offer restitution to the poor. Now that’s a miracle!

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Song: “Zaccheus was a wee, little man, And a wee, little man was he.  
He climbed up in a sycamore tree, For the Lord he wanted to see, see, see.  
For the Lord he wanted to see.  
And as the Savior came that way, He looked up in the tree,  
And he said, ‘Zaccheus, you come down,’ For I’m going to your house today, day, day.  
For I’m going to your house today.”

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Finish reading Luke 19.

*Lord, help us to joyfully seek you. Like Zaccheus, help us learn your love and live your love. And, like Zaccheus, may we accept your love. Amen*

## Embodying Peace | Luke 19:28-44

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**Written by Judy Von Bergen**

**Sunday, February 16**

I read this familiar Palm Sunday story with beginner's eyes. Instead of seeing only the joyful Passover parade into Jerusalem, I focused on 41-44. When the city came into view, Jesus wept over it. The people did not recognize peace, and their ways would destroy them. He wept over all the men, women, and children who would suffer without peace, the very peace he was offering.

How can we embody the peace he was offering? There is so much violence in our country and the world now, too, yet we need to live in peace to prevent our warring ways from destroying us. In this massive unrest we are experiencing, peace seems almost impossible.

This short reading from Paul Ferrini helped me think about this:

We make the choice between love and fear every moment in our hearts and minds. That is where the peace process begins. Without peace within, peace in the world is an empty wish.... Peace cannot be brought from the world to the heart. It must be brought from each heart to another, and thus to all humankind.



That brings to mind the familiar song, “Let there be peace on earth and let peace begin with me” .... I do believe that is the only place love, the only place peace can incubate.

We, therefore, have the responsibility to foster peace in our individual hearts. Hating ourselves or others does not grow peace, but loving ourselves can help make the shift. After the election, I had to remind myself that hating HATE is still hating! I did not want to fall into that trap. I purposefully nurtured love in my heart. It is work but recognizing what we DO want and who we ARE is where we start on this challenging path. May we ask for and accept God’s help. It is difficult, maybe impossible, for simple humans to do this on our own...and we don't need to. Praise Be!

*Spend time meditating on today's devotion.*

[Resisting or Welcoming?](#) | Luke 19:45-20:26

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**Written by Charlie Berthoud**

**Monday, February 17**

“One day as he was teaching the people in the temple and proclaiming the good news, the chief priests and the scribes came with the elders.... So, they watched him and sent spies who pretended to be honest, in order to trap him by what he said and then to hand him over to the jurisdiction and authority of the governor.” (Luke 20:1,20)

Jesus came with a message of “good news of great joy for all the people.” (Luke 2:10) But the good news which was welcomed by the poor, the oppressed, the forgotten was resisted by the political and religious leaders of the day. So, they challenged Jesus, trying to trick him. Ultimately, they arrested, tried, convicted, and executed him.

Where do we find ourselves in the story of good news? With whom do we identify? Most of us reading this are not poor, oppressed, or forgotten. Instead, we have more political, economic, and social power than most. Perhaps we need to ponder (like Mary in Luke 1:29) what the good news really is for us.

Are we resisting the call to forgive (6:37)? Are we resisting the call to share (6:24)? Are we resisting the call to love our enemies (6:27)? Are we resisting the call to obey Jesus and change (6:46)?

*Dear God, give us the courage to really welcome your good news and the change it brings to us and our world.*

## Those Who Are Considered Wise | Luke 20:27-47

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**Written by Fern Kanitz**

**Tuesday, February 18**

This passage falls within the context of Jesus “teaching the people” in the temple (v. 1); so, publicly taking on the role of one who engages wisely with the ancient scriptures that are the foundation of their belief, culture, tradition. Among the people present were scribes, Sadducees, other priests and leaders considered to be wise.

Scribes, according to a quick look online, were lawyers well-versed in Jewish law and the prophets. They copied manuscripts by hand. They interpreted and taught the law.

When Jesus said, in “this age” people marry and are given in marriage, I wonder if he was speaking to more than just the resurrection question. Was he speaking of inequity in culturally male and female roles? Women were “given” in marriage to men by men. Sometimes they had little to say in the decisions that were made.

Jesus referred to “that age” as an alternative and said that, in the resurrection from the dead, people neither marry nor are given in marriage. Some of the scribes acknowledged his wisdom; what he said was congruent with scripture.

Sadducees didn’t believe in resurrection, spirits, angels or heaven. They were usually priests. They wanted to protect traditional Jewish values and customs. He questions them on their own terms. He asks the Sadducees, how they say the Messiah/the Christ is “David’s son” when David calls him “Lord?” And I think he knew the answer that maybe they would eventually come to. Does it really matter?

Interestingly, Jesus then says to everyone “Beware of the scribes who love honor and deference and power. They will be judged harshly.” (v. 45). He didn’t say “beware of the teachers,” those who

discern and uphold the law. He focused on those whose motives were not to benefit the community but to benefit themselves. To lord it over others. To seek power rather than wisdom and compassion.

*Oh, Creator God, thank you for pointing us toward wisdom and compassion and community. Grant us the grace to be patient with each other and to recognize the ways that you would have us be in this life on earth together. In the name of Christ, Amen*

## Giving from the Heart | Luke 21:1-38

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**Written by Christine Barden**

**Wednesday, February 19**

“Just then he looked up and saw the rich people dropping offerings in the collection plate. Then he saw a poor widow put in two pennies. He said, “The plain truth is that this widow has given by far the largest offering today. All these others made offerings that they’ll never miss; she gave extravagantly what she couldn’t afford - she gave her all!” (V. 1-4)

Jesus held up the poor widow who gave two pennies into the collection box. It was all she had. Those two pennies meant more than the vast wealth given out of abundance. But this isn’t admonition to give all of your assets to the church – it is about something even greater: giving your whole self. Jesus wants all of you, not just a small piece.

Shifting focus, the rest of the verses (5 - 38) are a warning to be prepared for the return of the Messiah. To keep alert and not fall for false prophets, or those claiming to be the messiah. To watch for the signs of destruction, pestilence, but with the caveat that that hardships and terrible things happen but do not necessarily signal “the end.” We’ve been through a pandemic and much violence and even now, worldwide strife, as well as division and turmoil in our own country. But that these things come and go. To keep faith in God and not to be pulled into worry and despair. But to keep alert and smart - to distinguish truth from lies, facts from bluster. Gosh, is this hard to do right now! As we head into a new era in our country that seems to herald impending violence and hard times for the most vulnerable around us, it is difficult to keep this faith. But we must. Now more than ever.

*Heavenly Father, Thank you for the abundance you have shown me. Help me to give you my all. To correctly discern truth from lies, fairness from greed, and not to give into worries that distract me from the hard work that needs to be done. Amen*

## In Remembrance of Me | Luke 22:1-23

**Written by Nan Schaefer**

**Thursday, February 20**

Luke 22:14- 21 Gives us the feast of remembrance: “When the hour came, Jesus took his place at the table, and the apostles with him. <sup>15</sup>He said to them, ‘I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; <sup>16</sup>for I tell you, I will not eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God.’ <sup>17</sup>Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he said, ‘Take this and divide it among yourselves; <sup>18</sup>for I tell you that from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes.’ <sup>19</sup>Then he took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, ‘This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.’ <sup>20</sup>And he did the same with the cup after supper, saying, ‘This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.’”

*Gracious God, we come to you today overwhelmed by the injustices in this world. We pray that you would hear our prayers, lift our burdens and fill us with your peace, knowing that you are ever-present. We ask you to work through us as we seek to dismantle structural racism, eradicate systemic poverty and build a church here on earth full of love, compassion and grace. Grant us the faith to know and the courage to trust that you are God here on earth as in heaven. In Jesus’ name. Amen*

**Written by Rhonda Rohn**

**Friday, February 21**

How many of us have had a dinner conversation end with a dispute at the table? Perhaps family or friends were trying to tell the others at the table that they had the best car, best outfit, best athlete, or whatever exclamation of greatness. When reading today's verses, I pictured the disciples having a somewhat heated argument about their prestige in the kingdom. While the disciples were wasting time on their own concerns, they did not perceive what Jesus had been trying to tell them about his upcoming death and resurrection.

Perhaps in our own lives we have focused on being great. Whether at school, with family, or work. We have taken the focus off what we needed to focus on. Jesus calls us to not be arrogant or selfish, but to lead with a servant's heart. Focus on serving others, loving others, and caring for others. We serve not to show how great we are, but to share our gifts and talents to help our neighbors, our community, and our world.

Also in this passage, Peter denies Jesus. Peter repents and turns back to Jesus. When we falter while leading with a servant's heart, we too can repent and turn back to Jesus and know that we can start anew.

Be great today and spread joy by helping someone in need.

*Loving God, thank you for teaching us what to focus on in our lives. May you continue to guide us as we fight selfishness and spend time serving others. Amen*

**Written by Megan Berry**

**Saturday, February 22**

Jesus and the disciples are both acting very humanly in this passage. Jesus is getting ready for his crucifixion, finding his strength and praying to God about what's to come, and he's wanting the disciples to support him in this. To pray and be there with him.

But the disciples are experiencing some anticipatory grief. They aren't fully sure what's happening next, but Jesus keeps talking about his death, so rightfully they are overwhelmed and filled with

grief about what's to come. In their grief and the unknowns, they fall asleep. When Jesus finds them like this, he is somewhat rightfully upset.

And this is the funny thing about grief, while we all know what it feels like in different forms, it truly affects each one of us a little differently. Jesus in his grief about what's to come is seeking community, reaching out to God in prayer, and making plans. The disciples in their grief are resting together.

Neither of these are the wrong reactions to grief, both are justified in the ways their body is forcing them to experience their grief. But these ways don't necessarily play nicely together, hence Jesus's frustration when he finds the disciples sleeping.

Whether we like it or not, grief demands to be felt and will present itself in different ways to us and to those we love. So, what are you grieving right now? How are you feeling that in your body? Are you making plans, seeking community, or needing rest? What can you do today to give voice to your grief?

*Prayer: Comforting God, we know you are with us through all of life's ups and downs. Be with us today as we listen to our grief and our bodies. Help us navigate these hard feelings with love and grace. Amen*

[Intransigence](#) | Luke 22:66-23:25

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**Written by Nancy McCulley**

**Sunday, February 23**

Have you known someone who is so set in their ways, so sure of their right-ness, that they are unwilling to change their mind, even when confronted with irrefutable evidence? A stubborn refusal to consider another point of view or to be flexible is intransigent behavior.

Today's passage tells us that after being questioned by both Pilate and Herod, the crowds exhibited intransigence. It is, after all, often much easier to follow the crowd than to think for ourselves. Jesus knows that it's fruitless to argue or try to explain. He is turning the other cheek, so to speak, as his accusers continue their attempts to convince their leaders of the untruths they firmly believe.

Though it seems impossible to put ourselves into Jesus's shoes in this situation, we do find ourselves in situations where we are at a loss as to how to explain our opinions to someone who refuses to listen. And sadly, sometimes we are that person – we don't see that our minds are closed to a better idea, a possible solution, or a redemptive action.

*Gracious God, we are flawed. We refuse to believe that there is a better way. We need guidance to open our eyes, ears, and hearts to hear other truths. Forgive us for our stubbornness and provide us with opportunities to re-examine our beliefs and behaviors. Amen*

Love Divine | Luke 23:26-43

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**Written by Eric Wendorff**

**Monday, February 24**

Jesus was loving and compassionate throughout his ministry of healing and teaching. But as he approached his death, he embodied a love that revealed he was more than a prophet and teacher.

Facing a horrible death, Jesus' attention was not on himself – not on his suffering and fate – but on others. He expressed sympathy for the future suffering of the women bewailing his fate. He asked his Father to forgive the brutal, mocking soldiers who had driven nails through his hands and feet. He comforted the criminal hanging on the cross beside him with the promise of reunion in Paradise.

Pain tends to focus one's attention on oneself. Even a bad tooth ache can distract one from everything else. Experiencing excruciating pain and agony, deep distress and spiritual anguish, Jesus' attention was focused not on himself but on others. This pure, other-focused, self-emptying love – divine love – revealed Jesus as the Son of God.

And in our suffering, in our sin, in our guilt, the God revealed in Jesus suffers with us, forgives us, comforts us with his presence.

*“Love divine, all loves excelling, Joy of heaven, to earth come down, fix in us thy humble dwelling.”*

Written by Megan Berry

Tuesday, February 25

This scripture is a hard one to sit with; it's filled with deep grief as Jesus dies, deep indignation as people recognize that Jesus shouldn't have been crucified, and a lot of fear as people wonder what happens next. At this point in our story, we don't know that Jesus will be resurrected, that there will be hope once again. Right now, it's the darkest part of the story, where fears crop up and everything feels meaningless.

In this state of fear and feeling meaningless, I find two things striking. The women watch Joseph start to prepare Jesus' body by wrapping him in a linen cloth and placing him in the tomb. After they watch this happen, they go about preparing the rest of the items needed, spices and ointments, for laying his body to rest. As they are doing this, they enter into the time of Sabbath, so they take a break and observe the Sabbath together as was commanded.

Even though they are filled with all sorts of emotions, they are not giving into fear or throwing away tradition. They're focusing on what they're able to do now, help prepare the body, embrace the sabbath, even if this feels wrong or unjust, that's what they were able to do in this in-between space they're in.

So, despite what you're feeling today, deep gladness or deep sorrow, what is yours to do today? Let go of the what ifs, and should've could've would've thoughts, and really focus on what needs to be done today and let that be your guide as you experience this day.

*Prayer: Holy One, there is so much in the world around us, so much we feel we have to carry alone. Help us to set down the tasks that aren't ours to carry alone and help us to remember what is ours to do today and every day. Amen*

Believing | Luke 24:1-12

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Written by Peg O'Donoghue

Wednesday, February 26

This is the story of the women who went to the tomb where Jesus was laid to rest for the purpose of attending to the corpse. They were greeted by two men (with a description that would indicate



celestial bodies) who questioned: “Why do you look for the living among the dead?” They were told that Jesus had risen from the dead just as he indicated he would. The women went back to the apostles with this news but were not believed.

Believing is a central theme to this story- believing what Jesus had said and then believing what the women observed. This is not the first time in the scriptures where people are called to believe when they are told by others what will happen or what has happened. Another theme is unbelief- the apostles refused to believe the messengers whether it was Jesus or the women. We are called by faith to believe in matters we can't directly observe and when the messengers may not look like us. Perhaps this passage can encourage us to strengthen our belief in matters unseen. Are there people in our life that we don't listen to because they are unlikely messengers?

*May we see clearly and believe what our faith teaches. Amen*

## Believe Them the First Time | Luke 24:13-35

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**Written by Carrie Sanders**

**Thursday, February 27**

Maya Angelou said, “When people show you who they are, believe them the first time.”

I sometimes have difficulty believing people when they show me who they are. The two disciples whom Jesus accompanied from Jerusalem to Emmaus must have struggled with this, too. Though the risen Christ literally rose from the grave and walked with these two on their 7-mile journey to Emmaus, they did not recognize him! Maybe they didn't believe or remember what Jesus had said while he was still in Galilee: that the destiny of the Son of Man would be handed over to sinful men, nailed to a cross, and on the third day would rise again (v. 7). Perhaps these two disciples walking to Emmaus with Jesus did not understand that Jesus is who he had shown himself to be! It wasn't until the two disciples and Jesus were sitting at a table that Jesus broke the bread and thanked God that they realized they had been walking with him.

God must have known that we humans would struggle with our stubborn and “slow-hearted” ways (v. 25). That we, like the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, would struggle to believe that Jesus is “a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people” (v. 19). Although Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and Jesus's mother Mary (v. 8, 9) testified about the empty grave, the disciples

were confused. They sent Peter to verify that the tomb was empty, even though these events were precisely what the prophets (and Jesus) had said would happen.

As I studied these verses, I saw that I could be stubborn like the disciples on the road to Emmaus, too preoccupied to see Jesus working in my life and walking alongside me, even though he has shown me who he is time and time again.

*Dear Lord, thank you for showing me who you are and for always walking alongside me, even when I don't recognize that you are there. I confess I can be stubborn and slow to recognize your work in my life. Help me see your work in my life and give me the courage to be obedient to your call.*

Written by Jess Scholten

Friday, February 28

Luke opens with the story about Zechariah and Elizabeth, where we meet the first of several angel visitations in this Gospel. The angel brings Zechariah good news – their prayer has been heard and answered as they had hoped – they will experience joy and gladness. The many angels in the beginning of Luke are proclaiming good news – to Zechariah, to Mary, to the Shepherds – “good news of great joy for all the people.”

Over these two months, we have read so many pieces of good news – abundant grace, healings, teachings. And here at the end of Luke, after angels have brought good news of the resurrection, the resurrected Jesus comes to his disciples with more good news – the reminder of his presence and peace.

Good news sounds so great, but almost every time these angelic or post-resurrection encounters happen, people first respond with fear – Zechariah, Mary, Joseph, the shepherds, the women at the tomb, the disciples. And every time, instead of something to fear, comes the steady reminder that God’s love is for all people. This time, Jesus proclaims peace. He asks, “Why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts?” We too can be afraid when instead we are called to peace, trust, and loving action on behalf of others. After all, like the disciples, we too are sent to proclaim abundant grace, resurrection power, and the good news for all.

*Jesus, we are so grateful for the reminder of your presence and your hope. Help us, even when we are afraid, to hold firm to trusting you and believing in the power of life over death, of love over tyranny, of your reign above all. May our lives reflect your good news, whatever comes our way. For we pray in the sure and certain hope we have in you. Amen*