



LOST & FOUND

**A Devotional Study Guide for Lent 2020
at First Presbyterian Church Fort Collins**

Welcome to this Lenten study guide for our series: *Lost & Found*

Way back in December we opened the Gospel of Luke to read those treasured Advent and Christmas stories about Mary and Joseph, the angels and the shepherds, and, of course, the baby Jesus! We are continuing a deep study of Luke that will take us through to the Sunday following Easter—April 19. Within these four months, during the season of Lent, we will focus specifically on a set of passages that each explore different questions related to our Lenten theme: Lost & Found.

When I was serving as a Young Adult Volunteer in Northern Ireland years ago, I worked in both Protestant and Catholic communities and was introduced to several Catholic rituals, practices and traditions that were new to me. One of them was the idea of praying to or through saints, especially St. Anthony who is sometimes called the patron saint of lost things. I was curious about the history of this tradition and found this explanation from The Rev. Dr. Alyce M. McKenzie, Professor of Preaching and Worship at Perkins School of Theology:

"If you're not a former Roman Catholic, you may have never heard this prayer: "Tony, Tony, turn around. Something's lost that must be found." I'm a United Methodist, but I had a friend once who told me to try praying it when I had lost my car keys. It's a prayer to St. Anthony of Padua who is believed to be the patron saint of lost items. The 13th-century holy man left a wealthy family to become a poor priest. The tradition of invoking St. Anthony's help in finding lost or stolen things traces back to a scene from his own life.

As the legend goes, Anthony had a book of psalms that, in his eyes, was priceless. There was no printing press yet. Any book had value. This was his book of psalms, his prayer book. Besides, in the margins he'd written all kinds of notes to use in teaching students in his Franciscan Order. A novice who had already grown tired of living a religious life decided to leave the community. Besides going AWOL, he also took Anthony's Psalter! When he went to his room to pray and found it missing, Anthony prayed it would be found and returned to him.

After he prayed this prayer, the thieving novice fleeing through the forest, was met by a demon who told the thief to return the Psalter to Anthony and to return to the Franciscan Order. He did, and was accepted back. Soon after Anthony's death, people began praying through him to find or recover lost and stolen articles. "A Prayer to Christ," written in honor of St. Anthony shortly after his death goes like this:

*The sea obeys and fetters break
And shattered hopes limbs thou dost restore
While treasures lost are found again
When young or old thine aid implore.*

Or, to put it in more contemporary vernacular, “Tony, Tony, turn around. Something's lost that must be found.” While we don't share the same understanding of or practices related to saints as our Catholic neighbors, I confess that there are times when I sure would love some help finding lost things: my keys, my wallet, my phone...my hair! You get the idea and have probably had similar experiences.

More importantly, in our lives of faith, there are many times when we feel like we have lost something important—when we have lost hope, lost faith, lost relationships, lost perspective, lost priorities, lost opportunities, lost health, etc. During this season of Lent, we will dive into stories in Luke in which Jesus explores these places of loss and sheds light on how we can be found again (and help others find their way, too).

I have written this devotional guide for Lent which you can use for personal or group study. There is a lesson for each week which you might want to use ahead of the sermon on Sunday or might choose to study afterwards. There will be a class on Sunday mornings between services at 10:15 a.m. and another on Wednesday evenings at 6:00 p.m. which will use this study guide if you want to join either (*or both?*) of them.

The study guide will take us through Palm/Passion Sunday on April 5. During Holy Week, you are invited to attend midday services at noon, Monday through Friday, when we will be led by local pastors and other leaders exploring scenes from Jesus' final week before his trial and crucifixion. Finally, our Easter Sunday services on April 12 will bring us to a conclusion of the story from Luke's Gospel, though we hope it is only the beginning of the next chapter of our story as God's faithful community.

My prayer is that this season offers you time and space to pause and reflect on your whole life, including your spiritual and emotional well-being, assess where you are and where you might be “lost,” and invite the Holy Spirit to accompany you on a journey with Jesus of being found again as Christ's beloved child.

Peace,
Corey

How to Use this Study Guide

There is no wrong way to use this study guide. It is designed to be used in a study or fellowship group and/or it can also be used for individual study. You could look at parts of the study every day, or you might find yourself looking back after two weeks away.

You are invited to join either the Sunday (10:15 a.m.) or the Wednesday (6:00 p.m.) study group here at the church or you can also use this in another fellowship or study group in which you are currently participating. Being a part of a group will hopefully enhance your own understanding of these stories and help you build and deepen meaningful relationships with others in the congregation. If you join a group, we ask that you:

- join in prayer with and for one another
- welcome one another with hospitality and openness
- respect each other's views and perspectives
- maintain confidentiality and discretion within the group

The **Study Schedule** on the next page provides an overview of the specific passages we will read from the Gospel of Luke. You can see which passage will be the focus of worship each week.

For each of the six lessons that follows, you will find materials to guide your individual or group study. After an opening question or two, I have included "**A Starting Place...**," a reflection from a professor or pastor or church leader. My intention is not that this one perspective will define and then limit the scope of your own study and discernment, but simply provide another (possibly new?) lens through which you can interpret the passage alongside your own experiences and perspectives. The questions that follow are meant to invite you to focus both on the passage itself and then on some possible applications to your daily life. However, they are only meant to be a guide to get you thinking and should not limit your study or discussion. These questions might lead you to other discussions and reflections, which is wonderful! And you certainly do not need to answer every question.

Each study ends with a **prayer**. This prayer could be prayed together in unison, alone in silence or with a leader. And you are certainly welcomed and encouraged to pray for other personal and communal concerns and celebrations on your heart! You might also find these short prayers can become a simple centering exercise to use throughout the week that you can come back to each day. The prayers are adapted from "Feasting on the Word: Worship Companion – Liturgies for Year C, volumes 1 & 2," edited by Kimberly Bracken Long, published by Westminster John Knox Press.

Study Schedule

The Good Samaritan

Luke 10:25-37

Sermon: March 1, 2020 – First Sunday of Lent

The Fruitless Fig Tree

Luke 13:1-9, (*with secondary text, 31-35*)

Sermon: March 8, 2020 – Second Sunday in Lent

The Lost Sons and the Prodigal Father

Luke 15:11-32

Sermon: March 15, 2019 – Third Sunday in Lent

The Rich Man and Lazarus

Luke 16:19-31

Sermon: March 22, 2020 – Fourth Sunday in Lent

A New Attitude for Gratitude

Luke 19:1-10

Sermon: March 29, 2020 – Fifth Sunday in Lent

The Triumphal Entry

Luke 19:28-40

Sermon: April 5, 2020 – Palm Sunday

Study 1: The Good Samaritan

Introductory Questions

When you hear the phrase, “The Good Samaritan,” what particular person or experience from your life do you recall that exemplifies what it means to be a “good Samaritan?”

From what you remember of Jesus’ parable of the good Samaritan, how would you summarize the message or the “moral of the story?”

Read the Story

Luke 10:25-37

A Starting Place...

[When reflecting on this passage,]...painting unnecessarily unattractive portraits of the Priest and the Levite greatly weakens the story. The force of the parable depends very much on its realism and its ability to invite people to identify with characters within it. If the priest and the Levite are presented as ethically dead and totally void of human caring, then no listener will say, “I too behave that way.” While their behavior was certainly not commendable, neither was it without reason. The body on the roadside could have been a plant by robbers to trap a traveler. And certainly contact with a corpse would have defiled the Priest and the Levite and disqualified them from their temple responsibilities. When they saw the victim, theirs was a choice between duty and duty. So understood, many listeners will recall similar situations.

In addition, great care should be given to the search in our culture for analogies to the Samaritan. Often poor analogies trivialize a text. Remember that this man who delayed his own journey, expended great energy, risked danger to himself, spent two days’ wages with the assurance of more, and promised to follow up on his activity was (according to the Jesus’ audience) ceremonially unclean, socially outcast and religiously a heretic. That is a profile not easily matched. Dr. Fred Craddock, the late Bandy Distinguished Professor of Preaching and New Testament Emeritus in the Candler School of Theology at Emory University.

Questions for Reflection

When the lawyer asks, “And who is my neighbor?” in verse 29, what do you think his own answer would have been to the question? Or, put another way, what do you think he was **hoping** Jesus’ answer would be?

As you read the parable, with which character(s) do you most identify? How does that shape your perspective of the text?

In Fred Craddock’s commentary (above) he cautions against portraying the Priest and Levite simply as the “bad guys” allowing us to separate ourselves from them and their choices. The

reality is that we likely have more in common in them than we are eager to admit. Of course none of us have the capacity to respond to every need or person in need that we encounter so we are always faced with making choices. With that in mind:

- Why do you believe the Priest and Levite passed by the victim on the road?
- What criteria do you use to determine when you do or do not stop to meet a need or a person in need that you encounter?
- Is it realistic to stop to meet every need? If not, how do we embody and express what it means to be “neighbor” in situations where we are not stopping to meet a need?
- How does the Holy Spirit guide you in your discernment when making these choices? Are you seeking the guidance of the Holy Spirit?

In our contemporary setting, we lose the shock value that Jesus’ audience would have experienced when it was the “foreigner,” the “unholy” or “irreverent” one who is the hero of the story rather than someone “like us” (a faithful Jew, in this case). What additional point(s) do you think Jesus is making by placing the outsider in the role of the hero? How could our interpretation of the “moral of the story” be reshaped if it is the outsider who is being a good Samaritan (a good neighbor) to us rather than our being a good Samaritan to someone else?

Through this study, what previous ideas or assumptions about compassion and “who is my neighbor?” have now been “lost” and replaced with new ideas or perspectives which have been “found?”

Prayer

Holy God, you call us to live out your justice and righteousness. Help us to walk in your footsteps, so that we never lose our way. Enable us to live and love in the way that you have taught us, so that we can act in grace, even with those we consider our enemies.

Give your church, O God, the grace to serve you with courage, that our lives may be a witness to your compassion and our actions a testimony to your mercy. Through Jesus Christ our Lord, by the power of the Holy Spirit, we pray. Amen.

Study 2: The Fruitless Fig Tree

Introductory Questions

Reflect on a recent time in which something negative happened to you for reasons which were totally your own fault ... that you deserved. How did you feel?

Reflect on another time when something bad happened to you through no fault of your own ... it was totally undeserved. How did you feel? ... and was it different from the your answer to the first question?

Read the Story

Luke 13:1-9, (verses 31-35 may possibly be included in the sermon, but not this study)

A Starting Place...

In commenting on the death of the Galileans in the temple and the eighteen people at Siloam, Jesus raises the connection between sin and suffering. ...Here, Jesus rejects the simplistic worldview that obedience brings blessings and disobedience brings a curse. A person's righteousness or lack of it has nothing to do with any evil that may befall that person. The lesson that Jesus draws from the two unfortunate events is the necessity of repentance. The untimely deaths of the Galileans and the people crushed by the town at Siloam ought to remind people that it is a serious mistake to put off repentance. Jesus is calling people to respond positively to his message before it is too late.

Jesus underscores his message that a day of reckoning is coming with the parable of the Fruitless Fig Tree. The twist that Jesus gives...is his emphasis on divine forbearance. Three years should have been enough time for the fig tree to be productive. The logical course of action is to uproot the unproductive tree so that it does not take up valuable ground that could be used to nourish a fruit-bearing tree. Jesus has the person responsible for the vineyard doing something that simply does not make sense under the circumstances, but the extravagant nature of God's mercy is an important motif in Luke's Gospel. Still, people need to respond to God's mercy. The fig tree may be given another year to demonstrate its ability to produce fruit, but if it fails to do so, it will be cut down. Dr. Leslie J. Hoppe, Distinguished Professor of Old Testament Studies, Catholic Theological Union, Chicago, Illinois.

Questions for Reflection

Jesus is told about and then adds another example himself of people who have died tragically. His response is not to offer a reason or rationale for their deaths, but to call people to repentance. Why do you think Jesus responds in this way?

Like the people present, do you want an explanation for why these people and not others experienced this tragedy? What answer would you have given?

The verb for repentance in the Greek New Testament is *metanoēō* which has the sense of changing one's mind or changing one's direction. Do you agree with Dr. Hoppe's perspective in the first paragraph above regarding the necessity for repentance?

The parable of the fruitless fig tree seems to reveal something about God's grace or divine forbearance as Dr. Hoppe puts it. Why does Jesus tell this parable immediately following his call to repentance?

One of the historic tensions in our life of faith is our struggle to understand the intersection of God's grace and our response. Ephesians 2:8 says, "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God." However, while God's gift of grace meets us where we are, God's love doesn't leave us where we are, but calls us to repent or to turn away from a self-centered life and towards a Christ-centered life. In other words, grace compels a response from us. How does this passage shape your understanding of the intersection of God's grace and our response—especially our response of ?

Through this study, what previous ideas or assumptions about your understanding of suffering and repentance have now been "lost" and replaced with new ideas or perspectives which have been "found?"

Prayer (*for this week, both a 'morning prayer' and an 'evening prayer' are offered*)

Morning: Gracious God, this new day carries the potential for growth and new life. Help me to attend to those things in me that need care and attention. Sow your word in me that I may grow in faithfulness and understanding. Shake me out of dull routines, so that I may take part in the good news you continue to tell urgently and passionately, in Christ's name. Amen.

Evening: As I lie down this night in the shadow of your wings, God of my life, I know that you will be with me even as you have helped me through this day. Whether I am weary from the day, or whether the day has been a rich feast of blessings, I give thanks for your power and glory, which are present in every circumstance. As I give myself over to rest and sleep, I remember that your steadfast love is better than life. So, I pray, surround me with your love tonight and always. In the peace of Christ I pray. Amen.

Study 3: The Lost Sons and the Prodigal Father

Introductory Questions

In what ways did you and your siblings (or cousins?) compete with each other?

Who among you was the favorite child ... the difficult child ... the clown ... the trouble maker?

Read the Story

Luke 15:11-32

A Starting Place...

Luke 15:1-2 establishes the setting (for this parable) in a single, clear sentence: “Now the tax collectors and sinner were coming near to listen to him. And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, “This fellow welcomes sinner and eats with them.” Jesus responds with a defense of table fellowship with outcasts, and this time his strategy is to tell a story. His narrative grabs us because stories like these are the everyday stuff of our lives. Such stories are sacred because they are how we come to understand who we are in relation to ourselves, others, and God.

...In the portraits of the prodigal son and the compassionate father, the tax collectors and sinner hear a confirmation of the reconciliation that they have already found in Jesus’ ministry to them. The scribes and Pharisees are invited to contemplate an image of themselves in the figure of the eldest son, who has completely misread his filial relationship as one of slavery [obligation, duty].

Reconciliation in this parable means to be given more than one deserves, especially by God, who flings wide the gates of generosity. Indeed, our whole notion of karma and quid pro quo—of reaping exactly what we sow—is thrown open. In relation to the God of incarnation whom Jesus proclaims and embodies we can fall from justice; we can fall from faith; we can fall from righteousness; but we cannot fall from grace. This is the context of Luke’s parable and of all our actions of compassion and of our experiences of joy at the open table. Dr. J. William Harkins, Senior Lecturer of Pastoral Theology and Care, Columbia Theological Seminary, Decatur, Georgia.

Questions for Reflection

Why do you think the younger son decides to strike out on his own rather than stay at home with his family? Why does the father allow it and even finance this decision?

Presbyterian pastor and author, John Ortberg, says, “One of the hardest things in the world is to stop being the prodigal son without turning into the elder brother.” What do you imagine the older brother has been thinking and feeling in response to his younger brothers decisions?

How might these feelings over time explain his response to the younger brother's return and his father's welcome?

The adjective "prodigal" (which is not in the text, but we have added later) means spending money or resources freely and recklessly, wastefully extravagant, or having or giving something on a lavish scale. With that in mind, who in the story is acting in a prodigal way and who is not?

Examining each character in the parable, reflect on the times in your life when you have been more like the younger son, more like the older son ... and even when you have both been the recipient of the father's welcome and embrace and when you, like the father, have extended a welcome and embrace to someone who was "lost" and is now "found."

As Dr. Harkins suggests above, Jesus' parable conveys a message to the scribes and Pharisees. Do you think they received that message more as a rebuke or as an invitation? In the end, do you receive this parable today more as a rebuke or as an invitation...or both?

Through this study, what previous ideas or assumptions about mercy, grace and reconciliation have now been "lost" and replaced with new ideas or perspectives which have been "found?"

Prayer

Merciful God, we confess that we have strayed from your ways. Like the Prodigal, we have wasted our inheritance. You gave us the earth for our home, but we squander earth's resources and hoard its bounty. You gave us neighbors to love, but we pursue selfish ambitions. You gave us the commandments that lead to human flourishing, but we break your law and forsake your love.

Forgive us our sin and bring us back to repentance. Draw us back to your loving embrace. Restore us to our inheritance as your daughters and sons and reconcile our hearts to you, that we may be ambassadors of your reconciling love to all the world. Through Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit we pray. Amen.

Study 4: The Rich Man and Lazarus

Introductory Questions

It seems that most people are uncomfortable talking about how much money they have or they earn. If that is true, why do you think we have this social norm? What potential discomfort are we avoiding?

How did/does your own family talk about or refrain from talking about money?

Read the Story

Luke 16:19-31

Background and Contextual Information

With its vivid journey to the afterlife, and its exaggerated imagery of contrast, this parable fits the form of an apocalypse. An apocalypse serves as a wake-up call, pulling back a curtain to open our eyes to something we urgently need to see before it is too late... like the dream sequences of Ebenezer Scrooge in Charles Dickens' A Christmas Carol. If this parable is an apocalypse, then Luke is situating the audience not so much in the role of either Lazarus or the rich man, but in the role of the five siblings who are still alive. (The Greek word adelphoi in verse 28 translated as "brothers" can also be translated "siblings" – and intend to include sisters as well as brothers.)

The five siblings who are still alive have time to open their eyes. They have time to see the poor people at their gates, before the chasm becomes permanent. "Send Lazarus to them, that he might warn them," cries the rich man on behalf of his brothers and sisters, "so that they do not come to this place of torment." The terrifyingly vivid apocalyptic journey to Hades awakens a sense of urgency on the part of Luke's audience.

We are those five siblings of the rich man. We who are still alive have been warned about our urgent situation, the parable makes clear. We have Moses and the prophets; we have the scriptures; we have the manna lessons of God's economy, about God's care for the poor and hungry. We even have someone who has risen from the dead. The question is: Will we—the five sisters and brothers—see? Will we heed the warning, before it is too late? Dr. Barbara Rossing, Professor of New Testament, Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, Illinois.

Questions for Reflection

Notice the evocative details that are used to describe the rich man and Lazarus. How do these details contribute to the impact or tone of this parable? Do these descriptions make it easier or more difficult for you to relate to the message?

What do you believe Jesus is trying to communicate about God's view of material wealth? Is there a difference between God's view of possessing wealth versus how we utilize wealth?

In Jesus' parable of the dishonest manager, immediately preceding this passage (verses 1-13), Jesus concludes by saying, "No slave can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth." Picking up on this language, is there a distinction between having wealth (however we define that on a local, national or global scale) and "serving" wealth?

Dr. Rossing, above, suggests that the primary message within the parable is to the siblings of the rich man. Jesus is sounding an alarm for those of us on this side of eternity that we should amend our ways sooner rather later. In this season of Lent and in this parable, what values or actions are you being led to choose to live more faithfully as a disciple of Christ?

Through this study, what previous ideas or assumptions about your attitudes towards wealth and poverty have now been "lost" and replaced with new ideas or perspectives which have been "found?"

Prayer

Lord, we call to you, our refuge – provide your safe space.

We call to you, our fortress – provide your strength.

We call to you, our trust – provide your vision.

We call to you, our deliverer – provide your promise.

We call to you, our cover – provide your gentleness.

We call to you, our faithful – provide your presence.

We call to you, our shield – provide your defense.

We call to you, our bunker – provide your confidence.

We call to you, our protector – provide your future.

We call to you, our rescuer – provide your breath.

We call to you, our satisfaction – provide your peace.

We call to you, our savior – provide your grace. Amen.

Study 5: A New Attitude for Gratitude

Introductory Questions

What rituals or habits have you had or do you have for practicing gratitude?

Are there things in your life for which you are more often consciously grateful and things that you more often take for granted?

Read the Story

Luke 19:1-10

A Starting Place...

*NOTE: This week, I am exploring a significantly different interpretation of this text as presented by scholar and author, Diana Butler Bass. In order to offer some context, I'm including a longer "starting place" written about her work so that you can get a sense of her interpretation.

*In her book, **Grateful: The Subversive Practice of Giving Thanks**, Diana Butler Bass talks about two different structures of gratitude. There was a time when gratitude was Law – a pyramid of gratitude. A ruler would offer protection, employment to the people, the people would, in turn, be expected to give back to the ruler. Ancient Rome & Egypt are examples of this structure of Transactional Gratitude: Pharaoh & Caesar owned everything and distributed gifts and favors at will. The response of the people was "gratia" in the form of loyalty, taxes, tributes and service. Failure to fulfill your obligation made you an ingrate, punishable by the seizure of property, prison, exile or execution. It's transactional gratitude based on "quid pro quo" tit for tat – "I do something for you, so you must do something for me." Obligation, reciprocity. "I have to. I must." It has little to do with authentic feelings of joy, love, or appreciation.*

I learned the story of Zacchaeus when I was a kid. "Zacchaeus was a wee little man, a wee little man was he. He climbed up in a sycamore tree for the Lord he wanted to see. And when the Savior passed that way He looked up in the tree, And he said, 'Zacchaeus, you come down! For I'm going to your house today!" The lyrics emphasize his height, but the story is about a rich man who colluded with Roman authorities, the only way a Jewish person, not a Roman citizen could get rich. It's a political story – Jesus revealed a critique of the oppressive Roman system of "gratitude as quid pro quo". The Romans offered political positions to locals in places where they had conquered. Tax Collectors were the main agents of the patronage system. While Pax Romana ensured peace and prosperity flowed down from the emperor, tax collector's made sure that loyalty and gratitude in the form of taxes and cash came up from the provinces to pay the military and enrich those at the top of the pyramid. Tax collectors could buy their way to higher status in this Roman system by skimming profit off the top. Those beneath you hated you, and those above you distrusted you.

Zacchaeus knew how to play the game. Butler Bass, in her exegesis of this story, calls him quite literally “a climber.” Zacchaeus wanted to see this man who might inspire rebellion and cut off his ‘cash flow’ or threaten his position. Or Perhaps he was spiritually curious. Or both. Zacchaeus thought that gratitude was a political structure of benefactors and beneficiaries that he could manipulate. Jesus said, stop climbing. Come to the table. Come and sit. I’m coming to your house where, in the presence of Jesus, it’s hard to know who is the host and who is the guest. Jesus invited him to come down from his old life, to stop participating in a corrupt system of gratitude that oppressed his own people. Jesus asks, Tree or table? Do you want to continue Climbing the pyramid to get ahead or recline with friends at table?

Out of this new understanding of gratitude, Zacchaeus promises to give away half of his wealth to the poor and pay back those whom he defrauded four times as much. He basically resigns, choosing to extricate himself from the Roman hierarchical structure of quid pro quo, gratitude as debt and duty, obligation.

Diana Butler Bass asks, Who wants to be part of a system of gratitude based on hierarchy and pyramids? Perpetuating a system that rewards privilege and is held together by those who are indebted? A structure where people cheated to get there? ...Jesus envisioned a different structure of gratitude – as hospitality & table fellowship, of mutuality and relationship.

How do we move into this structure of gratitude, when Transactional gratitude still exists, though not in a legal sense. People sometimes find authentic gratitude difficult because they may think of it in terms of beneficiaries of a gift, where you’re in debt. We often hear this phrase: “I owe you a debt of gratitude.” We’re in debt to the benefactor until we fulfill that debt by...giving a return gift, sending a thank-you note, doing a favor in return, closing the loop.

The Latin word gratia, meaning “favor, regard, goodwill” is a direct translation of the Greek word kharis. Kharis was one of three goddesses, who were known as the Kharites – the Three Graces. The Kharities gave their gifts without discrimination and they were the embodiment of gratitude and benevolence in the ancient world. Kharis, is also a word found in the gospel meaning everything from beauty to joy, delight, kindness, good will, grace, favor, benefit, charm, gracefulness, pleasure, wit, gratitude, thankfulness. It is the word we translate as grace—unmerited favor and blessing.

Grace is God’s love poured out and given to us in ways completely beyond our control. Something we can never repay. This kind of gratitude invites us to step away from transactional gratitude, to a place of simply receiving and authentically feeling thank you. It is from this grace that calls forth our response of authentic gratitude where we have the capacity to respond with greater goodness and love. The structure the Bible puts on gratitude is about abundance, enough for all, It’s about table fellowship and the sharing of gifts for free without expectation of return. Rev. Lindsay Armstrong, Director of New Church Development for the Presbytery of Greater Atlanta

Questions for Reflection

In the beginning of this passage, how do you think Zacchaeus views himself? How would others view him? Where would he experience community or belonging?

While there are some suggestions offered above, why do you believe Zacchaeus was eager to see Jesus? What was his motive? His hope?

How does Jesus' statement that he is going to dine with Zacchaeus at his house (notice that Jesus doesn't ask ... he invites himself) shape the dynamic between the two of them? Who is the host and who is the guest...or are they each a little of both?

How do you understand Zacchaeus' immediate change of heart—and action—in response to Jesus? What do you imagine Zacchaeus' life is like following his encounter with Jesus?

Turning to Diana Butler Bass' interpretation above, in what ways have you experienced expressions or systems of gratitude that seemed obligatory?

After reading Butler Bass and this passage, how would you contrast the difference between transactional gratitude and gratitude that she describes as being based in hospitality and table fellowship, mutuality and relationship?

Through this study, what previous ideas or assumptions about gratitude and hospitality have now been "lost" and replaced with new ideas or perspectives which have been "found?"

Prayer

It's a tough thing for us to learn, Jesus, how you hide in the most unlikely places; how you beckon us into life and compassion by disguising yourself in broken humanity. But, when our eyes are opened, we discover that we are never far from your heart, from your kingdom. And so we ask you to show yourself to us again, and lead us into prayerful action. Teach us to welcome you by welcoming those in whom your image is hidden and by working, in our small worlds, to make visible your kingdom where all are welcomed. Amen.

Study 6: Palm/Passion Sunday – Jesus Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem

Introductory Questions

What is the most exciting parade or large public event you've attended? What made it exciting? Did you get caught up in the enthusiasm of the crowd?

Read the Story

Luke 19:28-40

A Starting Place...

Who is this? Is this not the question of the day we somewhat confusedly call both Palm Sunday and the Sunday of the Passion? Who is this one hailed by peasants and lepers and cripples and prostitutes and day laborers as messiah? Who is this who, though every inch a country hick and peasant, yet rides into the city like a king? Who is this whose devoted followers soon turn on him, as the disciples disperse, his friend denies, and the crowds accuse? Who is this who is tried by both religious and political elite and found, not just wanting, but also threatening, an enemy to the establishment? Who is this who is dragged through the streets of Jerusalem and hauled to the execution grounds? Who is this who is hung on a cross abandoned and forsaken?

There is nothing about Jesus -- his entry into the city, his confrontation with authority, his brutal and lonely death -- that would inspire anyone to devotion. He comes not in power but in weakness, not in might but vulnerability, not in judgment but in mercy, not in vengeance but in love. Nothing about him conforms to the expectations of a world that has come to believe above all things that might makes right or, at the very least, that might wins.

Who is this? This is Jesus, the One we confess died not in order to make it possible for God to love us but rather to demonstrate that God already does love us and that God's love is our only hope. This is Jesus, the one we proclaim each week as messiah and lord, source of hope and healing. This is Jesus, the paradigm of God's action in the world, whose story comes to a climax this week in order that our story might begin anew and afresh with the hope and promise of a good ending. Rev. David Lose, Pastor of Mount Olivet Lutheran Church in Minneapolis

Questions for Reflection

Why do you think Jesus rode into town on a donkey? Would he have had other options? Why did he not just walk? What was Jesus doing? What did it symbolize? Was it confrontational?

What were the expectations of the crowd?

We often imagine the crowd gathered and the spectacle it must have been to see the branches waving and hear the crowd cheering. But what if we try to zoom in on particular people and imagine what they were thinking. What if some of the people we have met during our Lenten series, either actual persons or characters in parables, were standing by the roadside that day. What might each one be feeling and thinking as Jesus rode by:

- The one who asked, “Who is my neighbor” and heard the story of the good Samaritan
- The ones called to repent, but also told the story of the fruitless fig tree’s second chance.
- The younger brother and the older brother from the “prodigal son” parable.
- The siblings of the “rich man” who ignored the plight of Lazarus.
- Zacchaeus, the tax collector, who dined with Jesus and pledged to change his ways.

This gathered crowd is excited for Jesus to enter the city. They praise him and exclaim “Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord” as they welcome him into Jerusalem. When Jesus tells the Pharisees that if the crowd were silent then even the stones would shout out, what does that tell us about our call to praise and proclaim the good news?

However, this is the same crowd that will turn on Jesus just one week later. How can that be? In what ways are we quick to turn our backs on the invitation to follow Jesus? What aspects of following are hardest to accept or to live into?

As you now reflect back on the previous lessons in this study, are there values, ideas or actions that you have decided to “lose” and others that you have “found?” In what way(s) have you become aware of places in your life that you are or have been lost and are now found?

Prayer

Gracious and Loving God, we give you thanks for these stories in Luke’s Gospel that teach us how you love us and how you want us to love one another. We are so grateful that you came to live among us so that we might know you better and so that you would wash away our sin. Thank you for this season of Lent and for the chance to grow closer to you through worship and study. We know you love us no matter where we are on our journey and no matter how close we gather or far we run. We proclaim “Hallelujah” as you enter the gates of Jerusalem even as we look ahead to the grief and lament of Good Friday and then the joy and wonder of Easter. Praise to you, our God! Amen.



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