

luke: a movement of love

words & pictures
on the gospel of luke
to be read for the 2021 lenten season



sanctuary +



a quick note:

To everyone who contributed to this year's Lenten Devotional:
THANK YOU! As a student minister beginning my relationship with these two beautiful congregations in a season of physical distance, I've been so thankful for the opportunity to midwife the creation of this document. I am floored by the amount of talent and insight that lives in these two congregations.

I also want to give a special thank you to all of those who joined Ben Jacques and I for our writer's workshops in preparation for this book: Rebecca Ramsay, Aaron Olapade, Sarah Sinclair, ivy tillman, Jessica Sollee, Bob Seiler, and Rev. Wendy.

Curating this book has also provided me an opportunity to introduce the Sanctuary/Hillside community to a few dear friends I've made during my short time in Boston whose insights are beautifully displayed here: Tori Leblanc, Kellen Head-Corliss, Erin Wagner, Br. Anthony Zuba, Kristen Blair, and Michelle Eastman.

& for these incredible covers! Charlene Carle and Julie Roberts deserve all due praise.

& of course a special thanks to Rev. Tom, who allowed me to ride the coat-tails of his inspiration & make it my own.

May these words accompany you in this strange, strange season.

-John Sinclair,
Student Minister
Sanctuary UCC

how this works:

1. grab a bible
2. find a spot for sitting
3. open your devotional to the entry for today's date
4. read the scripture indicated on the bottom of the page & listen for the movement of love in the passage
5. read/contemplate today's reflection
6. go in peace!

[please note]

where possible, i've printed relevant verses of scripture for the given day, so if you don't have a bible handy that is *totally and completely fine!* you can still enjoy this lenten devotional.

also, if you're reading this electronically, the name of each passage will link you to the corresponding scripture verse.



jesus casts out a demon



When an unclean spirit leaves a person, it wanders through dry places looking for a place to rest. But it doesn't find any. Then it says, 'I'll go back to the house I left.'

Luke 11:24

For reflection today:

The spiritual life is not about giving things up. When Jesus makes a way, how do I fill the empty spaces?

ben jacques
-on-
luke 11:14-28

“The Queen of the South...came from the ends of the earth to listen to Solomon’s wisdom...The men of Nineveh...repented at the preaching of Jonah...”

Luke 11:24

It's baffling to me that so many Christians look down on other religions.

I say that because what we see in this passage – and what we see time and again throughout his life – is Jesus pointing to followers of other religions as examples of what his own followers should be doing but aren't!

Jesus recalls how the Queen of Sheba (the title “The Queen of the South” apparently refers to her and not to Dolly Parton) was humble enough to seek out King Solomon's counsel. He likewise recalls how the people of Nineveh were wise enough to heed Jonah's preaching and repented of their sins.

More so than the people who crowded around him to hear his teaching, these devotees of foreign gods actually practiced what Jesus preached!

Why should followers of Jesus have nothing but love and respect for people of other faiths? Because they have much to teach us about our own.

tom hathaway

-ON-

luke 11:29-53 “a wicked generation”

When a crowd of thousands upon thousands had gathered so that they were crushing each other, Jesus began to speak first to his disciples: “Watch out for the yeast of the Pharisees—I mean, the mismatch between their hearts and lives.

Luke 12:2

Mismatched socks, mismatched lovers, mismatched letters jumbled into incoherent words;
a mismatched feast baked into an indigestible pie.

Alone they are steadfast, but together their mismatch lapses into ill-fated disarray.

Mismatched musical notes swiftly shift from transcendent melody to cacophonous mess. Ears jolt.

Therein lies the root of so much discontent, disappointment, fear, and rejection:

The mismatch between hearts and lives.



sarah sinclair

-on-

luke 12:1-12 “warnings and encouragements”

Then Jesus said to them, “Watch out! Guard yourself against all kinds of greed. After all, one’s life isn’t determined by one’s possessions, even when someone is very wealthy.”

Luke 12:15

Our nation is slowly digging out after a four-year administration in which building bigger barns was the daily order of business. Building a gigantic wall to keep brown people from America's abundance, savaging the earth for fossil fuels, changing tax laws to favor fat corporations...It seemed like every day bigger, more bulging barns popped up among the rich while the have-nots were sent empty away. To our great shame, bigger barn building became the nation's single-minded focus.

Yet Jesus' story is a lesson in precisely what not to do with our wealth. "Life is not defined by what you have, even when you have a lot." Storing up stuff, he says, is fruitless. I've always appreciated humorist Erma Bombeck's take. When she looked back on her life she mused that, if she could do it over again, she would have burned that elegant pink candle shaped like a rose which ended up melting in attic storage. That's the kind of thing I do, alas. All the time.

But Jesus isn't just talking about fancy pink candles or even necessarily stuff. We have been given so much! Time, talents, empathy, compassion...How does God want us to respond to this divine abundance? Should we keep it to ourselves? Or should we spread the abun-

dance wide with sharing? God's desire is clear: "Fool! Tonight you die. And your barnful of goods — who gets it?" Then Jesus concludes: "That's what happens when you fill your barn with Self and not with God."

I've always loved how every Sunday morning we declare that we are on a mission to love God and love people. Erecting bigger barns just doesn't cut it as a sign of that love. Bigger barns merely show off our giant, honking Selves. God knows, bigger barns can't fulfill our deepest human longings either. But building bigger community? Linking arms and working together to make a difference in our broken world? There's joy in spreading the gifts of our unique humanity. Such is God's economy: What I have to share and what the world desperately needs mesh. And we both feel good about it.

What do you have in abundance? Maybe you're a whiz in the kitchen or a tireless snow shoveler or you wield a contagious grin. We don't have the power to cure COVID-19. But our world is eternally in dire need of love. You and I have been given the power to build community based on simply that. Love. Love doesn't need bigger barns. God has so liberally poured love into each of us that if we unclench ourselves it should go spilling everywhere! Whatever the day brings, practicing love can drive out meanness and selfishness. It can disarm the fiercest crankiness. I pledge to practice that barn-busting love; it's a beautiful gift I can return to God and to people.

merrie allen

-on-

luke 12:13-21 “the parable of the rich fool

first sunday of lent

2.21.21



Lent

God dresses grass in the field so beautifully, even though it's alive today and tomorrow it's thrown into the furnace, how much more will God do for you...

Luke 12:28

It's kind of like the Rolling Stones' lyrics: "You can't always get what you want, and if you try sometimes you just might find you get what you need." Putting our faith and trust into God doesn't necessarily mean we'll get a pony, a big house, or a Mercedes. Putting our faith and trust into God doesn't necessarily mean we'll find true love or become a millionaire. No, we might not get the pony or the Mercedes, but we will get exactly what we need in each and every moment.

To me this passage is the essence of surrender. To fully let go of control and worry, and to trust that God will take care of each and every one of us. To not worry or chase after what you will eat or what you will wear, but to trust that God will take care of all His children in ways that are maybe not rationally understood, but that are Divinely needed.

In my world this act of surrender is easier said than done. I'm a bit ashamed to admit it, but I find it extremely challenging to let go of the reigns and to put my full faith and trust into the Divine. I still am learning the courageous art of surrender. I want to trust that God will provide, but

monday

it's hard to balance surrender with taking responsibility for myself. I want to surrender, but also feel myself gripping the reigns at the same time. What does surrender sound like, feel like, look like? I'm still learning.

"Don't be afraid, little flock, because your Father delights in giving you the kingdom." I'm trying each and every day to absorb this as truth. To learn how to "let go and let God." I'm sure it is one of the most precious things in the world.

I do not yet know how to surrender, but I trust with time I will learn. Until then, I do believe that you can't always get what you want, but you just might find that you'll get what you need.

Lord, teach me how to trust You and to let go of the wanting; to let go of the illusion of control.

Show me how to surrender fully to You and Your guidance. Teach me how to hear the angels' whispers guiding me to do the service You sent me here to do. May I only be courageous and quiet enough to listen. May I only be so brave to follow the guidance and not to worry. Teach me how to trust in You fully, Lord, and show me the way to Your kingdom.

Amen.

sarah deschenes
-on-
luke 12:22-34 “do not worry”

tuesday

Happy are the servants whom the master finds fulfilling their responsibilities when he comes.

Luke 12:44

The Joint Commission for Accreditation of Hospitals makes surprise visits. They evaluate hospitals using a long list of criteria (focus on safety). At my last hospital, it was a nerve-wracking time for many.

Update policies!

Assure all documentation has the i's dotted and the t's crossed!

Inspect everything—from fire extinguishers to ceiling tiles—

EVERYTHING. Inspect everything!

It was exhausting.

Not any more. Now, in my present hospital, we are always JCAHO ready (pretty much).

Why? Because all that is asked of us is important. It is important for us to always do our work as if JCAHO was in the building. Luke's message to us is to live our lives as if God was in our metaphorical "building".

Jesus tells us to be ready. To be prepared. To always be dressed for service.

kathleen beyerman

-on-

luke 12:35-48 “watchfulness”

"I came to cast fire upon the earth. How I wish that it was already ablaze! I have a baptism I must experience. How I am distressed until it's completed! Do you think that I have come to bring peace to the earth? No, I tell you, I have come instead to bring division.

Luke 12:49-51

division caused by decision



for reflection:

Jesus wants us to make decisions that may divide us from those who choose to live a different Way. From what does Jesus want to separate me?

wendy miller olapade

-on-

luke 12:49-59

Do you think the suffering of these Galileans proves that they were more sinful than all the other Galileans? Do you think that they were more guilty of wrongdoing than everyone else who lives in Jerusalem?

Luke 13:2 & 4

I often choose to share the kind, loving redeemer Jesus when I talk about my relationship with him. Jesus is the One we come to for solace. Jesus is the One I come to for healing. Jesus is the great uniter. However, the reality is that being in relationship with Jesus means more than just the fuzzy stuff. Just like any of our most meaningful relationships, with intimacy and depth comes an accountability that can be painfully honest at times.

In this passage, Jesus is brutal. Jesus is reminding those close to him that we all have parts of our lives that need rooting out. He holds us accountable by telling us not to focus so much on the sins of others.

In today's Scripture, who might the Galileans be? Who might be the people who were killed by the tower of Siloam? Perhaps, those in our criminal justice system who have been typified and sentenced to a life of modern day slavery. Folks who were in the wrong place at the wrong time. People who were pre-judged for not pulling themselves up by the boot-straps they

were never given. But these people might also be those closest to us. Our friends or co-workers that get on our nerves for 'that one thing they do.'

In this passage, Jesus is asking that we inspect our own fig trees, that we hold our own gardens to account. How might you bring new life to the places not bearing fruit? What are you doing to cultivate the soil of your own life? Sometimes I catch myself looking to others' mistakes and shortcomings as a cathartic activity. It is truly fascinating how putting others down can give us some sense of betterment. This season of Lent is about letting Jesus wake us up from these practices in our lives. It is a dark time in which we confront the challenge of following Christ. It is life giving, it is healing and comforting - but it's also difficult, transformative, and painful.

Join me in listening to God's more difficult messages this Lent. Please join me in tending to our own gardens. From the ashes of last week, fertilize your ground because from death comes life. Please join me in letting Jesus transform our hearts and lives in this time.

Peace be with you.

kellen head-corliss

-on-

luke 13:1-9 “repent or perish”

Jesus was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath. A woman was there who had been disabled by a spirit for eighteen years. She was bent over and couldn't stand up straight. When he saw her, Jesus called her to him and said, "Woman, you are set free from your sickness." 13 He placed his hands on her and she straightened up at once and praised God.

Luke 13:10-13

Joan was in her early 60s when I became her pastor. She had been struggling with a plethora of cancers for the past twenty years, seesawing between many scary, harrowing episodes and a few brief periods of remission and relief.

When I first met her, she was in the last stages of her struggle. In just a few days, she had gone from being completely bedridden to comatose.

During those final months, her primary care doctor, a very observant Jewish man who was one of the few doctors who still made "house calls," would come by regularly to check on her and chat with her husband, Charlie.

On the night when Joan died, a time when it was clear she would not live through the night, there was a knock at the door. Her doctor was there.

As Charlie led the doctor to the bedroom, he said: "I didn't expect to see you tonight. It's the Sabbath, and I

assumed you would be at the synagogue.”

At which point the doctor pointed to the bed where Joan lay and said:

“Tonight...this is the holy place!”

An apt commentary on Jesus’ healing on the Sabbath.

The Hebrew word mitzvah is well-known. Basically, it means a commandment. In Jewish theology, there are many erudite interpretations of the word. In common parlance, however, we know it to mean “a deed of kindness”—some word and/or action that helps another person.

The Sabbath is important. The synagogue is important. The church is important. But we must always keep our focus on doing a mitzvah—actually on doing many mitzvoth (the plural). For it is through performing mitzvoth that we convey God’s love.



jerry cook

-on-

luke 13:10-17 “jesus heals on a sabbath”

"It's like a mustard seed that someone took and planted in a garden. It grew and developed into a tree and the birds in the sky nested in its branches."

Luke 13:19

I can recall years ago Reverend Dudley Rose preaching about the first two verses of this passage and making the point that the mustard seed is the tiniest of seeds, but that it can grow into a large tree or bush. In this way our faith in God can start out almost imperceptible but grow into something of great strength.

But what does the yeast simile tell us and why would anyone feel the need to hide it in a bushel of wheat flour? What does it mean for yeast to work its way through the whole? Consulting the website finecooking.com we learn that yeast plays three major roles when combined with flour: (1) yeast makes dough rise to make leavened bread which increases the amount that can be consumed and shared, (2) yeast strengthens dough by creating gluten so that the more you knead or manipulate the dough the more elastic it becomes, and finally (3) yeast causes the dough to ferment which adds flavor to the bread.

So in this way the yeast of God's kingdom, personified by our faith in God, increases the amount of faith we can share with others, strengthens our bounds

with God and others as our faith is manipulated and challenged by life'sv events, and finally adds flavor to all we do!

So why hide the yeast in the bushel of flour? I'd like to interpret this hiding more as a "wink" than a deception. If we "sneakily" place our faith in God at the center of all of sustenance and leave it there, it will work its "magic" in our life and all those who share our life experiences.



shelley scruggs
-on-
luke 13:18-21 “the mustard seed”

the second sunday of lent

2.28.21



My parish ministry began during the heady days of the 60s and 70s. During that era there was enormous societal upheaval and unrest. The Civil Rights movement. The Vietnam War. The uproar at the Democratic Convention. The trial of the Chicago 7. Three terrible assassinations.

Those of us entering the ministry at that time had to decide, in the words that Pete Seeger sang, “Which side are you on?” I, for one, decided that I wanted to be on the side of justice and that the church should be there too.

So when I look at today’s scripture, I see those words about the first and last through the lens of justice and righteousness—as a call to turn things around in the world. The words in today’s scripture echo those of the Magnificat, Mary’s song about reversing the states of “the mighty” and “those of low degree” (Luke 1:46-55). And they echo Jesus’ clear declaration of the purpose of his own ministry (Luke 4:16-21).

Almost fifty years ago I wrote a folk-style song about that declaration for a United Methodist youth curriculum unit: “The Spirit of the Lord.”

[Note: There is some poetic license here. Actually, Jesus is in a synagogue, not the Temple. As a reason for my choice, I offer this (probably apocryphal) story about Paul Simon. Mickey Mantle asked Simon why he didn’t use Mantle’s name instead of Joe DiMaggio in the song “Mrs. Robinson.” Simon simply said: “The meter, Mickey! The meter!”]

jerry cook
-on-
luke 13:22-30 “the narrow door”

The Spirit of the Lord

Words and Music by JERRY O. COOK

CHORUS: with a driving beat (M.M. $\frac{3}{4}$ = ca. 85-90)

CHORUS:

B7 Em C Em C
The Spir - it of the Lord is up - on us, — For he has

Am B B7 Em G D
giv - en his com - mand: — Take good news to the poor, and set the cap-tives

(FINE) (Interlude)
decreas.

Em C D Em —
free, And help the op - pressed in the land. —

VERSES: lighter, more lyrical

A m F G A m
1. Je - sus stood up in the tem - ple one day And read from the
2. Je - sus be - friend - ed the need - y and poor. He healed — the
3. Our world to - day has its need - y and poor, Its vic - tims of

F G C A m
proph - et's word: — The Spir - it of the Lord is up-
blind and the lame. — But much great - er things than these — be
ha - tred and war. — Our mis - sion is clear, and our

G Em F A m B cresc. B7 D.C. al Fine
on me to - day And on all who would call me their Lord!
said we could do If we'd on - ly be - lieve in his name! — The
time is to - day; — So what are we wait - ing for? — }

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At that time, some Pharisees approached Jesus and said, "Go! Get away from here, because Herod wants to kill you."

Jesus said to them, "Go, tell that fox, 'Look, I'm throwing out demons and healing people today and tomorrow, and on the third day I will complete my work...Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those who were sent to you! How often I have wanted to gather your people just as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings. But you didn't want that.

Luke 13:31-34

Almost all of us know of the actor George Clooney. And some of us, especially those of us “of a certain age,” remember his aunt, the singer Rosemary Clooney. Fewer of us know about his father, Nick Clooney, a journalist and TV anchorman, known for his liberal ideas.

Recently I read a story in People magazine about George Clooney and his father; and in a phone call to my daughter Liz, I told her about the story.

George Clooney said that when he was young, he hated going out for dinner with his parents because if his father heard someone at a nearby table making a racist remark or spouting some hateful political statement, he would immediately get up and go to that table and loudly upbraid the offender.

“Gee!” My daughter Liz said. “That must have been embarrassing! I’m glad my father never did anything like that!”

For my two daughters, irony is the lodestar of their lives.

But here is the real irony. Liz was recalling a very few instances when (probably in a fit of anger), I had ruined a family dinner or upset a church meeting by getting into a tiff with someone about race or politics or sexuality; whereas I was reminded of the many more numerous instances when I kept silent, when I bit my tongue, when I let such words and actions go unchallenged!

The picture of Jesus that we see in today’s scripture shows a Jesus who does not let injustice go unchallenged. It shows an aspect of the traditional “gentle Jesus” that we might not want to look at. This is the prophetic Jesus who dared to chase the merchants out of the Temple. This is the Jesus who dares to “speak truth to power.” And, most satisfying to me, this is the Jesus who bravely calls the head of the government a “Fox”!

We parish ministers are sometimes reminded that our mission is “to comfort the afflicted and to afflict the comfortable.” What is at times referred to as the priestly role and the prophetic role. But, as one of my former colleagues liked to point out, many of us end up “making the afflicted more afflicted and the comfortable more comfortable.”

My ministerial colleague's half-joking remark is probably on the harsh side. Speaking up in the presence of prejudice and hatred and oppression is not easy. But it is necessary. And not just for the ordained, but for all of us who are followers of the Christian way.

And such witnessing is especially needed nowadays. In these times when the much-vaunted "American Exceptionalism" has in recent years been revealed to be exceptionally haunted by such original sins as racism, tribalism, and social and financial inequality.

Like Jesus, we need to speak truth to power—and to one another. But also like Jesus, we must do it in love. Even toward those whose politics and policies we abhor. We are called to follow the example of Jesus who, even as he chastised Jerusalem, still could lovingly say: "How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings."

Speaking truth to power. That's a tall order! I'm not sure I'm up to it. How about you?



jerry cook

-on-

luke 13:31-35 “warning concerning herod”

One Sabbath, when Jesus went to share a meal in the home of one of the leaders of the Pharisees, they were watching him closely.

Luke 14:14

lessons on humility & generosity



For reflection:

What do I miss when I am “watching closely”?
Who am I to judge?

sue d'arcy fuller

-on-

luke 11:14-28

Large crowds were traveling with Jesus. Turning to them, he said, "Whoever comes to me and doesn't hate father and mother, spouse and children, and brothers and sisters—yes, even one's own life—cannot be my disciple. Whoever doesn't carry their own cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.

Luke 14:25-27

In these verses, Jesus is demonstrating the opportunity cost of discipleship. Truly it is easier said than done.

In the first two passages Jesus is explaining the emotional cost of becoming a disciple. He challenges His followers saying they have to “hate” their families and lives before they can devote themselves to the ministry. I did not interpret this as actual hate, rather more along the lines of a mindset. Their love and devotion must first be on God and their focus solely on being a disciple of that love. To become a disciple, love for their lives, families and friends is to be channeled into love for God.

Jesus goes on to then explain a more tactical approach to discipleship. That is must be thoroughly executed. A person would not build a house without concise planning and budgeting. Surely it would be an embarrassment and waste of resources if it was only partially completed. Or even His analogy of a king going to war. A war is not spontaneously started,

it is methodically planned and strategized. A king must know everything about his opponent, what the risks are and could be lost.

This passage is a humble reminder that our current day disciples, whether they be political leaders, teachers, pastors and mentors, have taken a selfless vow. They stand for a cause that is above themselves.

I wonder how many of Jesus' followers were there just to be part of the movement? This is relatable to me. Perhaps I am part of a movement because everyone else around me is too. It so easy to get lost as part of the crowd or just sitting on my couch and watching others and say that I'm part of the cause.

What do I really stand for? What are my authentic core values? How can I wholeheartedly focus and commit to God's love? Or am I just a quitter who starts something, but never sees it through to completion?

marietta defini

-on-

luke 14:24-35 “cost of discipleship”

"When he arrives home, he calls together his friends and neighbors, saying to them, 'Celebrate with me because I've found my lost sheep.' In the same way, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who changes both heart and life than over ninety-nine righteous people who have no need to change their hearts and lives."

Luke 15:6-7

I feel that at any given moment in my life, I can simultaneously relate to the Pharisees, the shepherd, and the sheep when reading this parable. This moment is no exception, but I am most relating to being a shepherd for my students. I often think that it is the students who wander off (the refusers, the fighters, the runners, the chronically tardy or absent, the pencil throwers), whom teachers fight for the most and remember the most fondly. Of course we also love the 99 who stay obediently in the field. The 99 who listen to instructions, raise their hands, and do their assignments make it possible for us to search for the ones who are lost. They bring the comfort of predictability to us, keep the conversation going, and the classroom humming. Their adherence to expectations give us the freedom to spend more time with the ones who need extra help or extra love.

These last ten months have made it more difficult to find and help the wanderers; instead of yelling out in class or ripping their papers, they just turn their

screens off or don't sign in to Zoom at all. A dark or absent screen is much more difficult to respond to than a child visibly in crisis. We can't make things right with a calming walk down the hall to talk, so we urge them back by inviting stuffed animals, baby brothers and pets to join the class in order to provide comfort. We deliver needed supplies in person or send Amazon deliveries. We utilize breakout rooms as safe havens to talk and share.

The ways we find our lost have changed and we have had to grow and push each other, but this growth has made us better at finding the lost and better teachers.

I think this is true of all of us when we are called to be shepherds. It's relatively easy to shepherd friends, loved ones or colleagues when they are calling out for help, but we learn to become better friends, loved ones, and colleagues when we really have to look hard. It's relatively easy to shepherd a toddler when they have hurt feelings, but less so an adolescent who insists nothing is wrong and broods in a darkened bedroom. It's relatively easy to shepherd a friend who calls to ask to talk than to shepherd a friend who hasn't answered their phone in a week. In this time of continued isolation that is becoming

merri jones mckeown

-on-

luke 15:1-7 “parable of the lost sheep”

"Or what woman, if she owns ten silver coins and loses one of them, won't light a lamp and sweep the house, searching her home carefully until she finds it? 9 When she finds it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, 'Celebrate with me because I've found my lost coin.' In the same way, I tell you, joy breaks out in the presence of God's angels over one sinner who changes both heart and life."

Luke 15:8-10

I'm not a coin collector, but I do have several 19th century silver dollars, passed down in the family. I like to feel them in my hand. How much are they worth? I couldn't tell you. Perhaps about as much as the silver coins in Jesus' story. Called drachmas, each coin was about a day's wage.

The woman in the story has ten drachmas. What is she saving them for? A new roof before the winter rains? A daughter's dowry? An emergency, in case her husband gets sick? She has worked so hard to save these coins. Yet, now, one is missing. When she realizes it is lost, she lights her oil lamp and grabs a broom.

I like this about her. I like how she doesn't immediately blame her children or her husband, or the guy who worked on the plumbing. She gets busy and sweeps.

Takeaway: good things can happen when you have a broom in your hands. Not only do you get a clean house, but you can find all sorts of things: missing socks, toys, a misplaced credit card, an old letter from a friend. Sweeping away the dust and cobwebs can lead to important discoveries.

So, as she's sweeping behind the dresser, with the end bristles of her broom, she swishes out, can it be, yes, the missing silver coin!

"I found it," she yells, although no one is at home to hear her. She is so excited she quickly runs to her neighbors. "You won't believe what just happened to me," she exclaims. "I lost a silver coin, and now I've found it." From neighbor to neighbor she scurries, telling each one, and inviting them to come over that evening. "Come drink a glass of wine with me," she invites them. "I'm so happy. I found what I had lost."

That evening, when her neighbors enter her house, they are amazed. It's not even Friday, yet everything has been tidied up. And the floor is so clean, you could almost eat off it.

ben jacques

-on-

luke 15:8-10

3.7.21

third sunday of lent



Then the older son was furious and didn't want to enter in, but his father came out and begged him. He answered his father, 'Look, I've served you all these years, and I never disobeyed your instruction. Yet you've never given me as much as a young goat... Then his father said, 'Son, you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. But we had to celebrate and be glad because this brother of yours was dead and is alive. He was lost and is found.'"

When reading Luke 15:11-32, better known as the Parable of the Lost Son, we encounter a story of repentance, of forgiveness of sins. And yet, at a time in our human history when we need it most, this reading also shows us the parameters of God's love and, in turn, a lesson on how to love one another.

While our focus is initially drawn to the son who left home to live a life of debauchery only to realize the consequences of his wayward ways and return, many of us can relate to the son who stayed behind. How many of us have experienced that feeling of frustration when another is recognized for a seemingly lesser deed? Or when our neighbor is easily forgiven for something that we would never dream to do? We question our dedication towards daily struggles to uphold certain values - is it easier to just stray and come back when things get better? Why can't I live a carefree, irresponsible life, if I

know my sins will be forgiven? Our world is relying on us to make sacrifices everyday, and yet we must also love those who flagrantly ignore the recommendations. How can we square that circle?

It is so tempting to view God's favor and blessings in the same way that we sometimes view wealth, career advancement, or life milestones - as a zero-sum game. If someone else has something, then it must be something that we do not have. And yet, this parable challenges our perspective. Life is not about competing for God's favor or blessings through acts of service or sacrifice. Rather, it is about celebrating the blessed moments where we individually and collectively turn towards God's light.

While it can be so difficult to see others receive blessings that we would like, and truly feel happy for them, it is an easier task when we understand the workings of God's love. Just as the father waits everyday for his wayward son to return home, God loves us patiently, ready to receive us at any moment. Just as the father runs to his son to greet him, God is eager to meet us halfway and help us home. Just as the father begs his son to come inside despite his rude behavior, God sees through to our inner child and gently encourages us to be our best selves without judgment.

We can let go of our burden to compete with one another, to judge each other's choices, and learn instead to feel God's love whether we are coming home to Him or continuing our life alongside His path. Let us learn to love each other the way that Jesus teaches us of God's love. Let us be patient, yet eager, and without judgement as we all navigate these times together.

that manager, and some aspects of your life are not where they should be. You got started on something you never finished. You wanted to help but stayed home instead. You hold grudges where you should start conversations. And you're not as honest about these things as you should be. Jesus is telling us that it's always the right time to take stock of ourselves and our impact on the world.

Lastly, Jesus reminds us that extravagant wealth and luxury are antithetical to his teachings. The path Jesus wants us to walk is not a gimmicky get-rich-quick guarantee, it's an arduous journey where we must be moved by empathy, generosity, and faith in every relationship. This season, ask yourself in what ways is God asking you to be more attentive and generous to those around you.

Be blessed.

rebecca davidson & alex maur

-on-

luke 15:11-32 “the parable of the lost son”

No household servant can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be loyal to the one and have contempt for the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.”

Luke 16:13

During his travels, Jesus told a parable to tax collectors. In modern times, it would play out like a Ted Talk at a FinTech company:

“The area manager was worried, earnings report was due, and he had a lot of pending invoices. His CEO, fresh off a red-eye flight, had tweeted: “Fake News haters saying my estate is failing, rest assured I’m firing the one guy who’s at fault with the numbers.”

The ‘guy’ in question knew he had to do something. For his family, he couldn’t afford a lower paying job or unemployment. He jumped on the phones like when Jerry Maguire he lost his job, “Debtors, show me the money.” He accepted payments at deep discount, changing past agreements and closing the deal – any deal – to show his boss better numbers. The boss commended him in the end, tweeting about it and all.

You got to have street smarts for your church startup to build a base. I’m telling you, put your money where your ministry is. Start small, think big, know your values, help others with what you have.”

The parable of the shrewd manager is one of the most puzzling ones that Jesus told. Was Jesus endorsing fiscal malfeasance? Does this mean I will go to heaven

even if I dedicate my life to fraud or racketeering? Well not so fast.

Jesus uses the manager and his conundrum to illustrate how we should respond to moments of great uncertainty, and to demand that we give material matters our concern, but not our whole being.

The shrewd manager was in a tough spot. But he didn't just freeze, he had resilience. He didn't whimper under the covers, he built trust with others. He didn't pursue a perfect solution; he found the most agreeable one. Above all, he acted faithfully. By the time the boss arrived, he had exhausted his options, left no stone unturned.

God calls us to stay active in the pursuit of rightfulness, without falling into inertia through lives' challenges and tribulations. Maybe you're like that manager, and some aspects of your life are not where they should be. You got started on something you never finished. You wanted to help but stayed home instead. You hold grudges where you should start conversations. And you're not as honest about these things as you should be. Jesus is telling us that it's always the right time to take stock of ourselves and our impact on the world.

Lastly, Jesus reminds us that extravagant wealth and luxury are antithetical to his teachings. The path Jesus wants us to walk is not a gimmicky get-rich-quick guarantee, it's an arduous journey where we must be moved by empathy, generosity, and faith in every relationship. This season, ask yourself in what ways is God asking you to be more attentive and generous to those around you. Be blessed.

matias ramos

-on-

luke 16:1-18 “parable of the shrewd manager”

He shouted, ‘Father Abraham, have mercy on me. Send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I’m suffering in this flame.’

Luke 16:24



For reflection:

For which neighbor am I responsible?

wendy miller olapade
-on-
luke 16:19-31 “the rich man and lazarus”

“Even if someone sins against you seven times in one day and returns to you seven times and says, ‘I am changing my ways,’ you must forgive that person.”

Luke 17:4

The passage starts with a reminder to be positive examples, and not cause another to stumble. Our words and behavior have an impact on those around us, and show others, and ourselves, who we choose to be.

Forgiveness is often a subject that causes strong emotions, especially for those who have suffered at the hands of others. Withholding forgiveness can feel like the only power one has when one is hurting. However, withholding forgiveness is something that causes us to not allow ourselves to heal, it holds the wound open, raw and painful. When we forgive, we allow ourselves to move past the pain and allow the wound to close. God knows it is difficult to forgive, yet God loves us so much that God forgive all of us.

Faith feels like something that may be “not strong enough” to accomplish what God calls us to do. We doubt ourselves, and feel inadequate. God, in infinite wisdom and love, does not ask of us more than we are able. When we trust that is true, we find that we have been given the strength to accomplish the task we have been called to do. Just like a tiny mustard seed grows into a large tree, a tiny spark of faith grows exponentially.

As Christians, we take pride in doing God's work, and as humans, we crave approbation for work well done. This passage reminds us that following God's commands is expected. It is how we show our devotion to God, any work we do is out of our love and devotion, without expectation of reward.

*O, God, we are not worthy of your love and forgiveness,
we fall short.*

*Please, give us the strength to forgive as you have
given us.*

*Nurture our seed of faith and help us to grow in your
love.*

*Provide us with the strength to do your work and follow
your guidance.*



joanna ostrander

-on-

luke 17:1-10 “forgiveness, faith, devotion”

Ten men with skin diseases approached...keeping their distance from him, they raised their voices and said, "Jesus, Master, show us mercy!" When Jesus saw them, he said, "Go, show yourselves to the priests." ...One of them, when he saw that he had been healed, returned and praised God with a loud voice. He fell on his face at Jesus' feet and thanked him. "Weren't ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? No one returned to praise God except this foreigner?" Then Jesus said to him, "Get up and go. Your faith has healed you."

Luke 17:11-19

Leprosy is a visible, ugly and painful disease. Although it attacks the skin, it also affects the nerves and causes disfigurement. Extremely contagious, leprosy is life-altering. In Jesus' time, lepers had to leave their families and live in colonies outside the community.

Even though the ten lepers would not have been able to hear Jesus as he spoke to the multitudes, they must have heard of him and his power to heal. When the lepers saw Jesus, they called out to Him, "Jesus, Master, have pity on us." Jesus did take pity on them and told them to go and see the priest. On the way, they were healed, but only one leper returned to give thanks and praise.

This story takes on new meaning in the midst of the COVID-19 epidemic. The contagious virus has caused us to separate from friends and family, and mask and socially

distance from everyone else!

I have been a bit judgemental of the nine lepers who did not return to give thanks and show their gratitude for such an amazing healing. But now, I think of how immensely grateful I should be every single day, that all those I love are currently well. I no longer feel judgemental of the nine lepers, knowing that so many times in my life I have not given praise and thanks and glory to God for His amazing gifts to me!



rebecca jacques

-on-

luke 17:11-19 “jesus heals ten men with leprosy”

The Human One will appear on his day in the same way that a flash of lightning lights up the sky from one end to the other. However, first he must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation.

Luke 17:24-25

One of the best things I've learned in seminary so far is the word *ruach*. In the Bible's Hebrew, *ruach* means, at different times: *spirit*, *holy wind*, and *breath*.

Friends, I will be frank: there are parts in this passage that make Jesus sound a lot like that uncle who spends too much time on YouTube at 4am. And as much as I'd like to make a big safe allegory out of this, if we do that, we might lose track of the love moving through this little sermon on time. That's right. Not the rapture, not the apocalypse, though some have read it that way: this is a story about *time*.

In this passage, time comes onstage like lightning. Something *was* and now something new *is*. Feels a little familiar, right? The world *was*, and now over and over again it *is*.

When we are warned away from looking back—it is a sober reminder that time has no choice but forward. A reminder, yes, but a reminder that knows the way you

smile when the crocus pierces the frost. A reminder that beckons us into a world where we can again breathe the holy wind of other bodies with no fear, where the thought of entering a crowded church does not fill us with dread.

Persist, dear ones, through the fire, and through the darkness.

If love draws you forth, then love will lead you home.



john sinclair

-on-

luke 17:20-37 “the coming of the kingdom”



Jesus was telling them a parable about their need to pray continuously and not to be discouraged...

Luke 18:1

I love the spirit of the persistent widow; she is determined to get the justice she deserves. The image of the persistent widow makes me feel a lot of things. For one, I feel angry at the unjust system that made her seek justice in the first place. But I also feel hopeful, because this passage is clear that God is on the side of oppressed; “And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night?” (18:7). The persistency of the widow is necessary, but God’s heart for the oppressed should not be missed.

The question I want to leave you with today is this: what is God asking you to be persistent about right now in this season or moment? Is it justice? Is it care for yourself, a family member, or pursuing a vocation? This week let us take up “the spirit of persistency” because God is listening.

michelle eastman

-on-

luke 18:1-8 “the persistent widow”

“...the tax collector stood at a distance. He wouldn’t even lift his eyes to look toward heaven. Rather, he struck his chest and said, ‘God, show mercy to me, a sinner.’ tell you, this person went down to his home justified...all who lift themselves up will be brought low, and those who make themselves low will be lifted up.”

Luke 18:13-14

who the true winners are

God gives us lessons we all surely need.
Here we can see where selfish pride can lead.

A Pharisee claims he’s better than most.
Of his fasting and tithes he loves to boast.

He points at others and calls them sinners.
While they, so humble, become the winners !

rebecca ramsay

-on-

luke 18:9-14

"Allow the children to come to me. Don't forbid them, because God's kin-dom belongs to people like these children. I assure you that whoever doesn't welcome God's kin-dom like a child will never enter it."

Luke 18:16-17



For reflection:

Does belonging *require* child-like-ness?
Can one 'accomplish' grace?

wendy miller olapade
-on-
luke 18:15-17 “a child of god”

"Sell everything you own and distribute the money to the poor. Then you will have treasure in heaven. And come, follow me." When he heard these words, the man became sad because he was extremely rich..."it is easier for a camel to squeeze through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter God's kin-dom

Luke 18:22-24

Denial

Why must I lose all that I have earned, Why must I forgo that which is mine. I see no justice in that. I have kept to the commandments and believe that I have lived my life for so that I may enter God's kingdom; yet the good teacher tells me I must give more? This cannot be, I cannot accept this as I need these things to live a life of relative comfort. Not only this, but I must also shed those who I hold most dear; my mother, my brother and hopefully my eventual partner and offspring.

Anger

They are wrong! They must be! I cannot give all that I have because it is all that I have. How will I eat, how will I sleep, how will I remain comfortable?

Bargaining

What if I kept my things until I am no longer able to use them, or how about if I hold onto them for a few more

years then sell everything. This feels like a compromise that's acceptable don't you think? It will benefit both of us, I keep what's mine, then you receive a devoted acolyte with no possessions.

Depression

I am only a man, and yet I am being held to the standard that the good teacher upholds. I cannot do what they do. That is unobtainable. This sudden and supposed truth pushes myself and man to a level of robot like proportions, suggesting that we are no more than shells that must give everything and all so that we may find happiness after we have lived what is a seemingly fruitless life

Acceptance

What am I saying, I can't bargain with the good teacher. I must remain steadfast and follow their word because it is the truth. I have never been steered wrong thus far, there is no reason to think I am now.

aaron olapade

-on-

luke 18:18-30 “the rich young ruler”

"He will be handed over to the Gentiles. He will be ridiculed, mistreated, and spit on. After torturing him, they will kill him. On the third day, he will rise up." But the Twelve understood none of these words. The meaning of this message was hidden from them and they didn't grasp what he was saying.

Luke 18:32-34

I used to love roller coasters when I was a teenager. I loved everything about the ride; the slow climb to the top of that first drop, the fast dive that immediately followed. I loved all the twist and turns. My favorite part was being able to catch a glimpse of what was to come but not being able to see the entire ride all at once. I could see a turn was about to happen but couldn't see the loop around the bend. It was fun, exhilarating and a bit scary.

I'm much older now and although I don't ride on roller coasters anymore, I have come to view life a roller coaster; full of ups and downs, twists and turns. It is fun, exhilarating and a bit scary. My daily routines enable me to catch a glimpse of what my day will be like but to see all the details is impossible. I can never predict exactly how any one of my days will be because there is always an unexpected turn.

Jesus, however, knew what his entire roller coaster life was going to be like. He didn't have to predict, guess or

wonder. He knew. He knew he was going to be mocked, tortured and killed. He knew all the twists, turns, loops of his life and knew how his ride would end. “He (Jesus) will be handed over to the Gentiles. He will be ridiculed, mistreated, and spit on. After torturing him, they will kill him.” (v32-33).

As a teenager, I would stand in awe of roller coasters wishing I could see the entire coaster at once. I have spent many days as an adult wishing I could see my roller coaster life in advance. Although, I find myself asking, “Could I love the person who will eventually betray me like Jesus did with Judas?” “Could I forgive the person who will deny me in the future like Jesus did with Peter?” “Could I forgive and love all those I know will one day treat me wrong?” Jesus did and his message was clear, “Forgive them for they know not what they do.” (Lk 23:24)

God, grant me the ability to love those who have hurt me. Grant me the ability to forgive those who have wronged me. Teach me to give grace to those who do not understand. Help me to remember the words of Jesus, “Forgive them for they know not what they do.” I give thanks and praise to you Lord for sending your Son Jesus Christ for me and for all of us. Amen.

tori le blanc

-on-

luke 18:31-34 “christ foretells his death”

As Jesus came to Jericho, a certain blind man was sitting beside the road begging.

Luke 18:35

My father worked with non-sighted people at the Carroll Center for the Blind in Newton, Massachusetts. He taught them to fence with a sword. A program was designed to better their spatial relations, increase their acuity and their confidence. He was hired to achieve that mission and so he did. He was fondly treasured. My Dad never told them you must do it this way. Much like Jesus did, he was gentle in his approach. He would only coax them into alignment spatially or through touch. His non-sighted students loved to fence and many more students joined on. They would fence one another. These students learned to move more freely and confidently, less afraid to fall or bump into things, always directed towards aiming for that true spot. They began to learn of their power of perception. To trust in the gift of that extra sense that is often not spoken of but recognized throughout the Bible. One doesn't need the senses to know of it. It is in the heart.

My Dad's students soon became so good at fencing that my father decided to take his best fencing students at MIT and blindfolded them to fence against his non-sighted students. The duel began and again and again the blind students won. It was a triumph that shocked them all. and my Dad was so proud of them for he knew they had found their own power and freedom with the help of the sword and a gentle guide.

Jesus, in the biblical story of Luke 18:35-43, is asked for mercy by a non-sighted person. He signed up for the lesson to see. To see in what, I asked myself. Physical sight? Or was he asking for deeper help. Was he asking, "Help me to look within more deeply and see myself not marred by loss of a sense? Help me to see me as God would see me. Through the heart of God's unconditional love that is undeniably and indescribably life altering? Was this man calling for the love of God to heal his sight or his soul....or both?

I chose this passage, as I am a healer. An acupuncturist that uses a thin needle, like the mini-sword from my Dad, to unblock that which blocks the flow of energy and causes pain. As a healer, I learned that I was not the one healing but only a vehicle for God's healing through that needle to give that person the energy needed to unblock what was blocking them from experiencing that flow of natural energy that is our birthright. Jesus taught me to say to my clients, "You came here because you wanted to heal. It is you who has healed yourself. I am only the plumber." We both chuckle.

In the last words of Luke 18:43: "...At once, he was able to see, and he began to follow Jesus, praising God. When all the people saw it, they praised God too." We are all born seers of truth. Some don't want it. But for those who do, it is there for the asking. God keeps it simple. 'Ask and ye shall receive.' Seeing is believing.

jessica sollee

-on-

luke 18:35-43 “blind beggar given his sight”



He was trying to see who Jesus was, but, being a short man, he couldn't because of the crowd.

Luke 19:3

affirmed

Up I went.

Short I might be (not wee: stop that), but sure of foot.
Still, not respected by folk I collect from or for...
I just want to lay eyes on him.
I know people, especially liars and cheats. t
I'll know if he's for real.

Here he comes, *crap*, he's gonna look up!
Oh, what beautiful eyes; what color are they?
What? How does he know my name?
What? Dinner at MY house?
Wait, he's made a mistake;
someone must have lied to him about who I am.
Deuce. He almost had me...

But no.
He... he knew me.

the indignity
my humiliation
my loneliness.

The spiteful whine of the crowd touched a nerve!
(Ha! could they be jealous?)

I confessed my wrongs,
affirmed my own new honesty and generosity,
whispered my unrequited love for my people.

He already knew; He loved me back into life.

Turning away from it all, we--He and I--sat down and
ate,

starting with figs
from that beautiful,
life-changing tree.

ivy tillman is a friend of Sanctuary UCC whose poem “affirmed” takes its inspiration from the stupendous children’s song “Zacchaeus Was a Wee Little Man”

ivy tillman
-on-
luke 19:1-10 “jesus & zacchaeus”

He replied, 'I say to you that everyone who has will be given more, but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away.

Luke 19:26

I have a recurring dream. In this dream it is the end of a college semester and I suddenly realize that I have not been attending a class that I'm registered for. The final exam is looming ahead and I'm panicked because I haven't done the work for the class. Thankfully, I usually wake up at this point and realize that I'm off the hook. It was only a dream.

But what if it was true? And what if it was not just a college class but the end of the age and the examiner was the Lord? We realize too late that we must give an account to God and you have not been doing what you were supposed to have done. That would be an awful nightmare from which you would not wake up.

Jesus tells this parable to warn us about the upcoming exam. He told the parable because the disciples and others who were journeying with Him to Jerusalem had the wrong notion that He would institute the kingdom of God immediately. They didn't realize that He would suffer and die, be raised again, ascend into heaven, and that many years would go by before He returned to establish His kingdom. Jesus wanted to let His hearers know what they were supposed to be doing in His

absence. They were not supposed to sit around waiting for Him to return. Rather, they were to be actively doing business for Him with what He entrusted to them.

This parable of the Minas makes two points. One has to do with the timing of Jesus' second coming being a long way off. The other has to do with how we are stewarding what we've been given until that time. We are asked to reflect on the special gifts that God has given to each one of us and how we are using them for the benefit of our brothers and sisters in need. Where do we invest our gifts and our talents? Failure is not necessarily the loss of what we are given but a lack of effort to increase. The parable of the talents reminds us that nothing can excuse inaction. We must live our lives with an energy not focused on what we consider our worth to be, but what it can be.

Suppose there is actually one job --just one- that we have been assigned and we will be held responsible for how we've done it. Our ONE JOB until Jesus returns is to faithfully invest everything he's given us.



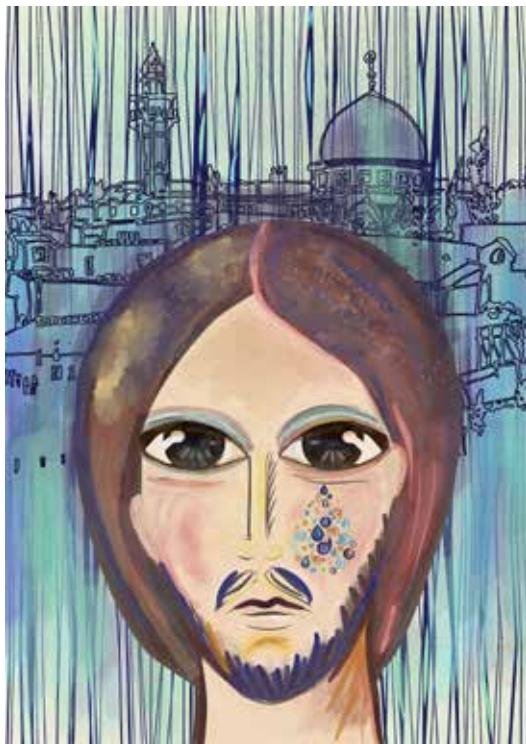
kate eshelman

-on-

luke 19:11-27 “parable of the ten minas”

As Jesus came to the city and observed it, he wept over it. He said, "If only you knew on this of all days the things that lead to peace. But now they are hidden from your eyes."

Luke 19:41-42



For reflection:
What are you weeping over today? What is hidden from you?

wendy miller olapade
-on-
luke 11:14-28

When Jesus entered the temple, he threw out those who were selling things there. He said to them, “It’s written, My house will be a house of prayer, but you have made it a hide-out for crooks.”

Luke 19:45-46

I've heard and read this passage so many times that it's easy to overlook how truly odd it is to 21st century ears. I mean, why were the "vendors" there in the first place?

Having paid attention during sermons, I think I know the answer: making sacrifices at the Temple was a big part of worship back then and there were very specific rules about what was suitable to be sacrificed. The sellers were providing such suitable items (and probably making a nice profit, but that's speculation on my part). The reason for their presence wasn't mentioned in the text because it was a given for original audience of the Luke; why waste time explaining the obvious?

Note that Jesus isn't telling the sellers do their trade honestly (don't overcharge!) as he had with tax collectors. He didn't condemn how they did their trade, he condemned **that** they did it. By extension, he was challenging sacrifice-based worship itself.

If I were Tom or Wendy, I could use this observation as a jumping off point for further meditation. As it is, I can only note that this rebuke must have added to the long list of reasons why the leadership of the time wanted to be rid of Jesus.

robert seiler

-on-

luke 19:45-48 “jesus clears the temple”

In the presence of all the people, Jesus said to his disciples, "Watch out for the legal experts. They like to walk around in long robes. They love being greeted with honor in the markets. They long for the places of honor in the synagogues and at banquets. They are the ones who cheat widows out of their homes, and to show off they say long prayers. They will be judged most harshly."

Luke 45-47

Who gives you permission to speak up about important matters of faith or about life in our civic community? Where does the authority to speak out come from?

In the United States we are guaranteed freedom of speech by the Constitution, so you can offer your opinions freely. In the church, because we are part of a community that respects each person, we provide ways for every person to express their thoughts and be respectfully heard.

But this has not always been the practice. In Jesus' day, authority resided in the Emperor and those who represented the Emperor, such as Caesar Augustus or Pontius Pilate. On religious matters it was the High Priest and the Council that had authority to speak. Other people had no such right.

So when Jesus spoke his mind, religious leaders asked him where he got the authority to teach. He refused to

tell them. Where do you think he got his authority? (Read Luke 20: 1-8)

The religious leaders were especially upset because Jesus criticized them for requiring people to observe every little practice of their law, while they cheated widows out of their homes and prayed long prayers just to impress people. In other words, they had not taken care of the vineyard (the true religion that they had inherited). They were like renters in the vineyard who mistreated and even killed the servants of the owner. Jesus was saying that God was the owner of their religion, and they had the solemn responsibility to be good stewards (tenants) of their religion and of the people who followed that faith.

We also have a solemn responsibility to be faithful stewards of our religion, not just by following rules, but by deeply seeking and living the core values of our faith. (Read Luke 20: 9-19)

Whenever it is time to report my income and figure out how much I have to pay in taxes, I think of this passage, and Jesus' teaching: "Give the Emperor what belongs to the Emperor and give to God what belongs to God." It is important for each of us to ask ourselves: how much do I owe to as a debt of gratitude to God, and how much do I owe, under the law, to my government? (Read Luke 20: 20-26)

Finally, Jesus responds to a question about life after

death. It was based on a real concern in a society where there were no pensions, no Social Security, and no welfare. If a woman's husband died how would she support herself and her children? It had become the practice that the brother of a man who died would marry his widow in order to provide a home for her.

So a religious group called the Sadducees slyly wondered if that same system operated in heaven – but they didn't really believe that people rose from the dead. Jesus' responded that in the future life people will not marry but will be like angels – God's children, "because they have been raised to life." (Read Luke 20:27-47)



lawrence bergstresser
-on-
luke 20

Looking up, Jesus saw rich people throwing their gifts into the collection box for the temple treasury. He also saw a poor widow throw in two small copper coins worth a penny. He said, "I assure you that this poor widow has put in more than them all. All of them are giving out of their spare change. But she from her hopeless poverty has given everything she had to live on."

Luke 21:1-4

These days it always feels appropriate to talk about fear. Global pandemic, civil unrest, economic uncertainty, widespread and targeted injustice, and these are just a few names for the fears walking within and without us.

Yet again I read Luke and am reminded how very translatable the fear is.

"These days," that selective phrase assuming particularity, speaks across all of human history, for the end is always nigh. What does justice look like? Victory? Salvation? And how, how will we know?

"By your endurance," Luke remembers Jesus saying, "you will gain your souls."

She who opens the Olivet discourse knew endurance. The widow knew hunger, uncertainty, going without. Her story preludes Jesus' apocalyptic prophecy and imminent eschatology, but it is not a story of fear or loss. It is a story of wealth and love. In the eyes of the Master Healer, it is the loving contribution of two small coins

that epitomizes the gospel of internality and heart's desire. The desire to give is wealth over and against material abundance. Endurance, greater than sacrifice alone, greater than drudgery. The spark that warms from within, propelling a vision of a gospel that proclaims peace to the stranger and foreigner. A gospel of love as an act of rebellious resistance amid poverty.

Rainer Marie Rilke wrote:

*Again and again, even though we know love's landscape
and the little churchyard with its lamenting names
and the terrible reticent gorge in which the others
end: again and again the two of us walk out together
under the ancient trees,*

*lay ourselves down again and again
 among the flowers, and look up into the sky.*

Fear and love, unmitigated by the other. But again and again, the widow casts in her lot for love, a wealth its own.

The collapse of all things presses ferociously, cruelly, essentially. And the widow preludes Luke's memory of Jesus. Casting love.

kristen blair
-on-
"the olivet discourse pt. 1" luke 21:1-25

sixth sunday of lent

3.28.21



The planets and other heavenly bodies will be shaken, causing people to faint from fear and foreboding of what is coming upon the world. Then they will see the Human One[a] coming on a cloud with power and great splendor. Now when these things begin to happen, stand up straight and raise your heads, because your redemption is near."

Luke 21:26-28

This photo of an image entitled *The Prophet #1*, by artist Charles White is found in one of the liturgical resources called, *Imaging the Word*. Connected to the image is an anonymous observation which says, "The rose is often used as a symbol of perfection, and thus of God. This prophet's gaze upon the rose seems to suggest a life centered around the holy."

I have come to understand that centering on the holy, even if only for a moment, often yields surprising insight and a sense of peace. Prophetic voices render these in the form of wisdom, which is knowledge from the depths of their being and beyond. Wisdom penetrates all complication and mystery, yet its yield may still elude us. Even still, we are all blessed with a "special gift", as the theologian Fred Craddock put it: "the law written on the heart... the capacity to be faithful and obedient."

The scriptural reference for these pages in *Imaging the Word* is Jeremiah 31:33 – "I will put my law within them, and I will write on their hearts; and I will be their God,

and they shall be my people.” During this holy season, may you seek to gaze upon perfection? I pray you will find, even if only for a moment, the perfect capacity to be faithful and obedient in the love of God, written on your heart.



tom gerstenlauer

-on-

luke 21:26-28 “the olivet discourse pt. 2”

pt. 1

Enter through the city gates
where water jug
how did jesus a man
there! on his head
a water jug where
“come see!”

the room is ready,
heavy money
go with simon
the owner is expecting
tears my pocket
prepare the feast?
“the perfect room”
but see
clean, set table, wait

The smell of the bread
his blood?
as it broke,
he offers
ALL over us!
his broken body?
am I weeping?
to be free

This is yours, too.

a collage by the sanctuary writer's workshop
-on-
luke 22:1-38 (the last supper)

pt. 2

single-parent,
never been
grandmother
pastor's kid

part of worship
no invitation
Madame
grew up in a church

we

just need a spot
a bowl of water
bent knee
& a little towel
in the open air
my place
a quite large cathedral

we

remove his shoes and socks
“this cup is for all”
the special bread
motioned to me
connection to the almighty
such a friendly way
that little voice
that word
even with a mask on
“for you”
tears running down
juice today?
a place
astounded

Jesus left and made his way to the Mount of Olives, as was his custom, and the disciples followed him. When he arrived, he said to them, “Pray that you won’t give in to temptation.” He withdrew from them about a stone’s throw, knelt down, and prayed. He said, “Father, if it’s your will, take this cup of suffering away from me. However, not my will but your will must be done.” Then a heavenly angel appeared to him and strengthened him. He was in anguish and prayed even more earnestly. His sweat became like drops of blood falling on the ground. When he got up from praying, he went to the disciples. He found them asleep, overcome by grief. He said to them, “Why are you sleeping? Get up and pray so that you won’t give in to temptation.”

Luke 22:39-46

In the song “Gethsemane” from the rock opera *Jesus Christ Superstar*, Jesus prays in the garden in Gethsemane: “Now, I’m sad and tired... / Tried for three years, seems like thirty.” Then, later, as his anxiety grows deeper, Jesus prays: “Now, I’m sad and tired / After all, I’ve tried for three years, seems like ninety.”

Three years. Seems like thirty. Seems like ninety. Seem familiar?

A little over a year ago, my daughter Kate texted me: “Hey, Pop! We’re trying to figure out how our family’s gonna survive a lockdown for the next six weeks or so.”

She had no idea. Nor did any of us. One year. Seems like thirty. Seems like ninety.

How do we survive? There is a clue in some ancient versions of Luke's Gospel, where there is a verse that does not appear in the Gethsemane episodes in Matthew and Mark, namely, "And there appeared to him an angel from heaven, strengthening him." (22:43)

This addition harmonizes the Gethsemane story with that other time when Jesus was alone and desolate and desperate, the Temptation narrative—where in Matthew and Mark "angels...ministered to him."

In Mark, the shortest Gospel, we find the shortest Temptation story. Mark tells us only that Jesus "was in the wilderness for forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts, and the angels ministered to him." The point being that for Mark, the "angels" were a key point!

Writers as varied as Billy Graham (*Angels: God's Secret Agents*) and St. Augustine have written about angels—but for me, I find meaning in my fascination with the biblical words themselves.

The Hebrew/Aramaic word that Jesus would have used is malakh. The Greek word that Luke used is angelos. Interestingly, both words have a double meaning. Even more interestingly, those two double meanings are iden-

tical. The word that we translate as “angel” basically means a messenger, a human agent; but by extension, it also means a messenger from God.

So we come back around to Jesus in dire distress. And we see that the relief he gets, the one hope in the hellish situations he is faced with, comes in the form of angels/messengers that minister to him.

One year. Seems like thirty. Seems like ninety.

What can help us survive this time in our wilderness? I’m sure there are myriad answers. But one I think of right now—one that I need to be reminded of—is that we are to be ministering messengers to one another. Human agents of love and caring for one another.

We cannot feed all the hungry children in this country, but we can put food in the food pantry. We can call or text a lonely old friend who’s in lockdown. We can comfort those we know who’ve lost loved ones to Covid. Each of us can be a malakh from God, an angelos of God’s love.

jerry cook
-on-
luke 22:39-46 “gethsemane”

47 While Jesus was still speaking, a crowd appeared, and the one called Judas, one of the Twelve, was leading them. He approached Jesus to kiss him.

jesus is arrested



For Reflection:

The crowd's devotion had protected Jesus from the authorities but now...

Where does your allegiance lie when the powerful arrive to maintain the status quo?

wendy miller olapade

-on-

luke 22:47-65

They said, “If you are the Christ, tell us!” He answered, “If I tell you, you won’t believe. And if I ask you a question, you won’t answer”

Luke 22:67-68

.There is much drama in the events recounted here in the Passion narrative of Luke’s Gospel. Every turn in the story has meaning. However, I wish to focus on what is not here.

What is not here is Jesus’ explicit admission that he is the Savior. What is not here is a titanic battle, *Lord of the Rings* style, between good and evil—between Jesus’ putative supporters, the disciples, and the religious and political authorities, represented by the Sanhedrin, Pilate, and Herod. We have an apocalypse without a revelation; we have a drama without a climax. (In fact, the given text stops short of the crucifixion itself!)

So where is the Good News in this truncated tragedy? Where do we find it? For all the action going on in this narrative, it is the silences that are most revealing.

Confronted by the Sanhedrin, Pilate, and Herod, who demand that he declare his identity, Jesus does not respond. The religious authorities want to catch him in blasphemy; the political authorities want to catch him in sedition. Whatever the charge, they want a scapegoat to pacify the bloodthirsty crowd, which has been stirred

into a rage after years of oppressive rule by a puppet king of the Roman Empire.

But Jesus, who is wholly of God and is firmly centered in God's pacific love, will not let himself be played. He knows he will not be rescued by cunning replies. He will not be rescued by force of arms. No, not another religious rebellion; not another violent revolution. He knows he is in the clutches of the wolves around him. He knows he will suffer and die. There is no changing that. However, he believes he can prevent the suffering and death of others, both right there in Jerusalem and everywhere down the generations of human history. He believes his steadfast witness to God's pacific love will change everything.

Therefore, he keeps silent. He refuses to defend himself. He refuses to escalate the situation. He refuses to leverage the divine power within him to settle scores, smite his foes, and vindicate himself and the living God. This is not the way salvation would come. This is not the way liberation would come. This is not the way of love. Rather, Jesus withholds his consent to be swept into the dustbin of history as another scapegoat sacrifice. And in so doing he exposes the bankruptcy of the worldly powers. He exposes the scapegoating mechanism at the heart of all systems of oppression and tyranny and forever disables the powers who seek peace through war and justice through murder.

We who seek to follow the poor and humble Prince of Peace are challenged today and for all time to stand courageously against the powers who scapegoat us or our beloved neighbors, speaking out against the sacrifice of stigmatized persons and groups—and withholding our consent to the mechanism of scapegoating—until God's promises of a new world of freedom and justice are fulfilled.

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bro. anthony zuba

-on-

luke 22:66-23:25 “the passion of jesus christ”

[Joseph of Arimathea] went to Pilate and asked for Jesus' body. Taking it down, he wrapped it in a linen cloth and laid it in a tomb carved out of the rock, in which no one had ever been buried. It was the Preparation Day for the Sabbath, and the Sabbath was quickly approaching. The women who had come with Jesus from Galilee followed Joseph. They saw the tomb and how Jesus' body was laid in it, then they went away and prepared fragrant spices and perfumed oils. They rested on the Sabbath, in keeping with the commandment.

Luke 23:52-55

Pause. For just a moment. Take a breath, the deepest one you have taken all day. Notice what parts of you loosen, what parts tighten or shrink back with this slow and careful attention. For me, these pauses often find a catch in my throat. A tightness in my chest I would much rather ignore. I think of the loss of my great-grandmother, and all the grandmothers that have slipped away this past year whose final goodbyes were managed over phone lines, without a chance to touch. Of nurses and doctors who risk their lives maintain the least amount of death. Of those who have had no choice but to keep working through the despair. Even if we could touch, our hands can never be big enough to catch all the pain we want to heal. There is grief we do not even yet know how to bear.

It is not for nothing, then, that today is Holy Saturday. It is the often-overlooked day between Good Friday and Easter Sunday, maybe in years past most known as the day to dye Easter eggs or set up baskets with green plastic grass. While our Holy Saturday might still be grasping at some of these anchoring traditions, I invite us to look together at the Gospels for an example of how to bear witness to the slow, slow movement from death to life. From crucifixion to resurrection, knowing that there is pain, fear, and grief in between.

Our victorious Easter stories deny us this truth. And yet, as we turn to the Gospels, we find that grief has been there all along. In Luke 23:53-56, we watch as Joseph of Arimathea takes down Jesus' battered body from the cross. We call to mind the pieta, the image of Mary holding her son draped across her lap. Mourning, they wrap their crucified friend, son, teacher, story-teller in linen cloth and place him in a tomb. We hold the knowledge alongside these figures that Jesus has, in fact, died. Even though we read as though we already know the ending, the women in the story do not. They go home. They prepare their spices. They honor the Sabbath. Our health care workers go home. They prepare their PPE. They try to find rest. There is no hope of resurrection here, and the witness of Holy Saturday tells us that it is indeed a faithful response to the "God with us" simply to mourn those we have lost.

Holy Saturday reminds us that, even though we do know the ending – that the tomb is empty, that the vaccine is trickling into the public – that a truthful witness is needed for the triumphant ending to mean something. This Holy Saturday, we carve out space to grieve the 2.4 million COVID related deaths across the world, the ones who will not witness the end of this ongoing nightmare. And yet, if our Easter faith is worth anything, it claims that love survives, and for now, it's wrapped in linens.



erin wagner

-on-

luke 23:26-56



EASTER