Messiah CHURCH

WHERE LIFE & PURPOSE CONNECT

Grow, Pray, Study for the Week of March 19, 2023

Weekly Prayer
Loving God, open my eyes and my ears to what you would have me read and hear today. Through your Holy Word, convict me, challenge me, and comfort me. Open my mind to new insights and fresh perspectives. Open my heart to the moving of your Spirit. In the name of Jesus Christ, your son, amen.

Monday, March 20

Scripture: Luke 14:25 – 15:32
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. "If one of you wanted to build a tower, wouldn't you first sit down and calculate the cost, to determine whether you have enough money to complete it? Otherwise, when you have laid the foundation but couldn't finish the tower, all who see it will begin to belittle you. They will say, 'Here's the person who began construction and couldn't complete it!' Or what king would go to war against another king without first sitting down to consider whether his ten thousand soldiers could go up against the twenty thousand coming against him? And if he didn't think he could win, he would send a representative to discuss terms of peace while his enemy was still a long way off. In the same way, none of you who are unwilling to give up all of your possessions can be my disciple. "Salt is good. But if salt loses its flavor, how will it become salty again? It has no value, neither for the soil nor for the manure pile. People throw it away. Whoever has ears to hear should pay attention."

All the tax collectors and sinners were gathering around Jesus to listen to him. The Pharisees and legal experts were grumbling, saying, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them." Jesus told them this parable: "Suppose someone among you had one hundred sheep and lost one of them. Wouldn't he leave the other ninety-nine in the pasture and search for the lost one until he finds it? And when he finds it, he is thrilled and places it on his shoulders. 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. “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? 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.” Jesus said, “A certain man had two sons. The younger son said to his father, ‘Father, give me my share of the inheritance.’ Then the father divided his estate between them. Soon afterward, the younger son gathered everything together and took a trip to a land far away. There, he wasted his wealth through extravagant living. “When he had used up his resources, a severe food shortage arose in that country and he began to be in need. He hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed pigs. He longed to eat his fill from what the pigs ate, but no one gave him anything. When he came to his senses, he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired hands have more than enough food, but I’m starving to death! I will get up and go to my father, and say to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I no longer deserve to be called your son. Take me on as one of your hired hands.”’ So he got up and went to his father. “While he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was moved with compassion. His father ran to him, hugged him, and kissed him. Then his son said, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I no longer deserve to be called your son.’ But the father said to his servants, ‘Quickly, bring out the best robe and put it on him! Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet! Fetch the fattened calf and slaughter it. We must celebrate with feasting because this son of mine was dead and has come back to life! He was lost and is found!’ And they began to celebrate. “Now his older son was in the field. Coming in from the field, he approached the house and heard music and dancing. He called one of the servants and asked what was going on. The servant replied, ‘Your brother has arrived, and your father has slaughtered the fattened calf because he received his son back safe and sound.’ 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 so I could celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours returned, after gobbling up your estate on prostitutes, you slaughtered the fattened calf for him.’ 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.’”

Observation

One of the “costs” of following Jesus was hearing pious people grumble, “This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.” Jesus didn’t even try to deny it. In three vivid stories, he told how finding a lost sheep, a lost coin and a lost boy set off big parties, “joy in heaven.” In the last story, he pointedly added a recognizable older son who thought it was wrong to welcome the lost son home.

Application

The Pharisees thought “bad people” don’t change. Jesus saw people much more as “lost” (like the sheep, coin or boy), and said God tirelessly seeks hearts gone off course. When have you lost your way spiritually and needed finding? Jesus said God rejoiced at every

return. What has most helped you see God as more eager to welcome you home than to punish you for getting lost?

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

Tuesday, March 21

Scripture: Luke 16:1-31
Jesus also said to the disciples, "A certain rich man heard that his household manager was wasting his estate. He called the manager in and said to him, 'What is this I hear about you? Give me a report of your administration because you can no longer serve as my manager.' "The household manager said to himself, What will I do now that my master is firing me as his manager? I'm not strong enough to dig and too proud to beg. I know what I'll do so that, when I am removed from my management position, people will welcome me into their houses. "One by one, the manager sent for each person who owed his master money. He said to the first, 'How much do you owe my master?' He said, 'Nine hundred gallons of olive oil.' The manager said to him, 'Take your contract, sit down quickly, and write four hundred fifty gallons.' Then the manager said to another, 'How much do you owe?' He said, 'One thousand bushels of wheat.' He said, 'Take your contract and write eight hundred.' "The master commended the dishonest manager because he acted cleverly. People who belong to this world are more clever in dealing with their peers than are people who belong to the light. I tell you, use worldly wealth to make friends for yourselves so that when it's gone, you will be welcomed into the eternal homes. "Whoever is faithful with little is also faithful with much, and the one who is dishonest with little is also dishonest with much. If you haven't been faithful with worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches? If you haven't been faithful with someone else's property, who will give you your own? 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."
The Pharisees, who were money-lovers, heard all this and sneered at Jesus. He said to them, "You are the ones who justify yourselves before other people, but God knows your hearts. What is highly valued by people is deeply offensive to God. Until John, there was only the Law and the Prophets. Since then, the good news of God's kingdom is preached, and everyone is urged to enter it. It's easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for the smallest stroke of a pen in the Law to drop out. Any man who divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery, and a man who marries a woman divorced from her husband commits adultery. "There was a certain rich man who clothed himself in purple and fine linen, and who feasted luxuriously every day. At his gate lay a certain poor man named Lazarus who was covered with sores. Lazarus longed to eat the crumbs that fell from the rich man's table. Instead, dogs would come and lick his sores. "The poor man died and was carried by angels to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was

buried. While being tormented in the place of the dead, he looked up and saw Abraham at a distance with Lazarus at his side. 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.' But Abraham said, 'Child, remember that during your lifetime you received good things, whereas Lazarus received terrible things. Now Lazarus is being comforted and you are in great pain. Moreover, a great crevasse has been fixed between us and you. Those who wish to cross over from here to you cannot. Neither can anyone cross from there to us.' "The rich man said, 'Then I beg you, Father, send Lazarus to my father's house. I have five brothers. He needs to warn them so that they don't come to this place of agony.' Abraham replied, 'They have Moses and the Prophets. They must listen to them.' The rich man said, 'No, Father Abraham! But if someone from the dead goes to them, they will change their hearts and lives.' Abraham said, 'If they don't listen to Moses and the Prophets, then neither will they be persuaded if someone rises from the dead.'"

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

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

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

Wednesday, March 22

Scripture: Luke 17:1-19
Jesus said to his disciples, "Things that cause people to trip and fall into sin must happen, but how terrible it is for the person through whom they happen. It would be better for them to be thrown into a lake with a large stone hung around their neck than to cause one of these little ones to trip and fall into sin. Watch yourselves! If your brother or sister sins,

warn them to stop. If they change their hearts and lives, forgive them. 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." The apostles said to the Lord, "Increase our faith!" The Lord replied, "If you had faith the size of a mustard seed, you could say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and planted in the sea,' and it would obey you. "Would any of you say to your servant, who had just come in from the field after plowing or tending sheep, 'Come! Sit down for dinner'? Wouldn't you say instead, 'Fix my dinner. Put on the clothes of a table servant and wait on me while I eat and drink. After that, you can eat and drink'? You won't thank the servant because the servant did what you asked, will you? In the same way, when you have done everything required of you, you should say, 'We servants deserve no special praise. We have only done our duty.'"
On the way to Jerusalem, Jesus traveled along the border between Samaria and Galilee. As he entered a village, ten men with skin diseases approached him. 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." As they left, they were cleansed. 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. He was a Samaritan. Jesus replied, "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."

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

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

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

Thursday, March 23

Scripture: Luke 17:20 – 18:8
Pharisees asked Jesus when God's kingdom was coming. He replied, "God's kingdom isn't coming with signs that are easily noticed. Nor will people say, 'Look, here it is!' or 'There it is!' Don't you see? God's kingdom is already among you." Then Jesus said to the disciples, "The time will come when you will long to see one of the days of the Human One, and you won't see it. People will say to you, 'Look there!' or 'Look here!' Don't leave or go chasing after them. 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. "As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be during the days of the Human One. People were eating, drinking, marrying, and being given in marriage until the day Noah entered the ark and the flood came and destroyed them all. Likewise in the days of Lot, people were eating, drinking, buying, selling, planting, and building. But on the day Lot left Sodom, fire and sulfur rained down from heaven and destroyed them all.That's the way it will be on the day the Human One is revealed. On that day, those on the roof, whose possessions are in the house, shouldn't come down to grab them. Likewise, those in the field shouldn't turn back. Remember Lot's wife! Whoever tries to preserve their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life will preserve it. I tell you, on that night two people will be in the same bed: one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding grain together: one will be taken and the other left." The disciples asked, "Where, Lord?" Jesus said, "The vultures gather wherever there's a dead body."

Jesus was telling them a parable about their need to pray continuously and not to be discouraged. He said, "In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor respected people. In that city there was a widow who kept coming to him, asking, 'Give me justice in this case against my adversary.' For a while he refused but finally said to himself, I don't fear God or respect people, but I will give this widow justice because she keeps bothering me. Otherwise, there will be no end to her coming here and embarrassing me." The Lord said, "Listen to what the unjust judge says. Won't God provide justice to his chosen people who cry out to him day and night? Will he be slow to help them? I tell you, he will give them justice quickly. But when the Human One comes, will he find faithfulness on earth?"

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

Application
In 18:1-8 Jesus used a "how much more" question, as rabbis often did. In effect he asked, "If even an unjust judge will do justice if pressed, how much more can we trust God to do justice?" But, he asked, will I find faithfulness on earth? Can you keep faithfully trusting

God to do justice even when there seem to be letdowns or delays? How do you answer Jesus' question about faith?

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

Friday, March 24

Scripture: Luke 18:9-34
Jesus told this parable to certain people who had convinced themselves that they were righteous and who looked on everyone else with disgust: "Two people went up to the temple to pray. One was a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and prayed about himself with these words, 'God, I thank you that I'm not like everyone else—crooks, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week. I give a tenth of everything I receive.' But the tax collector stood at a distance. He wouldn't even lift his eyes to look toward heaven. Rather, he struck his chest and said, 'God, show mercy to me, a sinner.' I tell you, this person went down to his home justified rather than the Pharisee. All who lift themselves up will be brought low, and those who make themselves low will be lifted up."
People were bringing babies to Jesus so that he would bless them. When the disciples saw this, they scolded them. Then Jesus called them to him and said, "Allow the children to come to me. Don't forbid them, because God's kingdom belongs to people like these children. I assure you that whoever doesn't welcome God's kingdom like a child will never enter it."
A certain ruler asked Jesus, "Good Teacher, what must I do to obtain eternal life?" Jesus replied, "Why do you call me good? No one is good except the one God. You know the commandments: *Don't commit adultery. Don't murder. Don't steal. Don't give false testimony. Honor your father and mother."* Then the ruler said, "I've kept all of these things since I was a boy." When Jesus heard this, he said, "There's one more thing. 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. When Jesus saw this, he said, "It's very hard for the wealthy to enter God's kingdom! It's easier for a camel to squeeze through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter God's kingdom." Those who heard this said, "Then who can be saved?" Jesus replied, "What is impossible for humans is possible for God." Peter said, "Look, we left everything we own and followed you." Jesus said to them, "I assure you that anyone who has left house, husband, wife, brothers, sisters, parents, or children because of God's kingdom will receive many times more in this age and eternal life in the coming age."
Jesus took the Twelve aside and said, "Look, we're going up to Jerusalem, and everything written about the Human One by the prophets will be accomplished. 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.

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

Application
When the young ruler whose riches "owned" him turned away, Jesus said it was very hard for the wealthy to enter God's kingdom. Yet most people in Jesus' day equated wealth with God's favor, so they asked, "Then who can be saved?" Do you trust that whether you are a "somebody" or a "nobody," your salvation is "possible for God"? How does that shape the way you live each day?

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

Saturday, March 25

Scripture: Luke 18:35 – 19:10
As Jesus came to Jericho, a certain blind man was sitting beside the road begging. When the man heard the crowd passing by, he asked what was happening. They told him, "Jesus the Nazarene is passing by." The blind man shouted, "Jesus, Son of David, show me mercy." Those leading the procession scolded him, telling him to be quiet, but he shouted even louder, "Son of David, show me mercy." Jesus stopped and called for the man to be brought to him. When he was present Jesus asked, "What do you want me to do for you?" He said, "Lord, I want to see." Jesus said to him, "Receive your sight! Your faith has healed you." 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.

Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through town. A man there named Zacchaeus, a ruler among tax collectors, was rich. He was trying to see who Jesus was, but being a short man, he couldn't because of the crowd. So he ran ahead and climbed up a sycamore tree so he could see Jesus, who was about to pass that way. When Jesus came to that spot, he looked up and said, "Zacchaeus, come down at once. I must stay in your home today." So Zacchaeus came down at once, happy to welcome Jesus. Everyone who saw this grumbled, saying, "He has gone to be the guest of a sinner." Zacchaeus stopped and said to the Lord, "Look, Lord, I give half of my possessions to the poor. And if I have cheated anyone, I repay them four times as much." Jesus said to him, "Today, salvation has come to

this household because he too is a son of Abraham. The Human One came to seek and save the lost."

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

Application
Jesus asked the blind man, "What do you want me to do for you?" (18:41). The man clearly stated the need he felt. If Jesus had asked wealthy, healthy Zacchaeus the same question as he sat in that sycamore tree, do you think he could have answered as clearly? Imagine Jesus asking you that question. What need(s) do you sense most clearly?

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