

Luke: Jesus and the Outsiders, Outcasts and Outlaws – 1. Lifting Up the Lowly  
Luke 1:51-53  
February 26, 2023  
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For nearly two thousand years, Christians have looked to the Gospels to learn about the life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Each of the Gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, tell the story of Jesus in its own way, with unique emphases that the writers want us to understand about the life of Jesus. Each year at Messiah Church, during the season of lent, it has been our practice to read through one of the gospels. This year, I invite you to journey with us as we read through the gospel of Luke. For those here in the room, as you leave the sanctuary today, you'll be given a bookmark with a daily reading schedule on it. For those of you worshiping with us online, you can go just below my picture and find and click on the box that says, *Gospel of Luke Reading Guide*. Throughout this sermon series, we'll also be using the new book by Pastor Adam Hamilton titled, *Luke, Jesus and the Outsiders, Outcasts and Outlaws*.

Luke was written by an unknown Christian who, *after reading the accounts of the life of Jesus and after careful study, decided to write another account.* (Luke 1:1-4) A couple of weeks ago, Pastor Bethany reminded us that the same person also wrote the book of Acts. Ancient tradition says the author of both books is Luke, the dearly loved physician who was with Paul during part of his missionary work. This gospel was probably written between 70-100 CE, about 40-70 years after Jesus' resurrection.

Luke seems to have had a copy of the gospel of Mark. The gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke share some of the same sources but also contain writings that are unique to each of them. Mark is believed to be the first of the gospels written because both Luke and Matthew contain much of the same information that Mark included in his gospel. And they also contain similar information from another source of unknown authorship. That source is called Q. These three gospels are called the Synoptic gospels. Synoptic means to be seen together because when read together, they help us see the bigger picture of **what Jesus did**. John on the other hand, John writes about the divinity of Jesus and helps us see **who Jesus was**.

So Luke, while using some of Mark's writings, expands considerably by adding stories of Jesus' birth and childhood, much more about Jesus' teaching and Jesus' resurrection appearances. Some of the most beloved stories and parables are found only in Luke's Gospel. These include the story of Zacchaeus and Lazarus, the parables of the rich man, the good Samaritan and the prodigal son. It also tells of Jesus's resurrection appearance on the road to Emmaus and the angel's appearances to Zechariah and then to Mary in the nativity story.

In this gospel, we also find stories of Jesus's ministry with ordinary, unexpected people. They weren't perfect. Many of them were struggling and didn't have their acts together. Some of them were outsiders, and some, even outlaws. Whoever they were, Jesus brought the good news of God's kingdom to those who most needed to hear it. That includes you and me. Today we begin where Luke began with the story of Zechariah and Elizabeth.

*During the rule of King Herod of Judea there was a priest named Zechariah who belonged to the priestly division of Abijah. His wife Elizabeth was a descendant of Aaron. They were both righteous before God, blameless in their observance of all the Lord's commandments and regulations. They had no children because Elizabeth was unable to become pregnant and they both were very old.* Luke 1:5-7

So when you hear “very old”, how old do you think that is? In Luke 2:16 that Anna was very old, 84 years old. But if you read the earliest authoritative book of Jewish Law, it says that 60 was “very old”, the age that everyone had to stand when you entered a room. I remember when I used to think 60 was old. But now that I’m, let’s just say *in the neighborhood*, that doesn’t seem old to me at all. In fact, I hear that 60 is the new 40. 80 starts to seem old to me but not “very old”. I know some incredibly vibrant and active octogenarians. So regardless of their actual numerical age, it’s clear (and perhaps surprising) that God chose to use Zechariah and Elizabeth.

It’s also seems important to Luke that he tells us that Zechariah and Elizabeth were both righteous before God, and blameless. Because you may recall from last week’s message that in this first century culture, when someone was sick or suffered a tragic event in their lives, and that included infertility, the common belief was that they or someone in their family had sinned and therefore had been cast aside by God and labeled an outsider. Luke sets the record straight very quickly, they were righteous and blameless in God’s sight. And so, despite their old age, or perhaps because of it, God chose Elizabeth and Zechariah as the ones to be parents to John the Baptist.

Throughout scripture we read of other “very old” adults who God used. There’s Abraham and Sarah, who at the age of 75 and 65 were told to leave everything they knew and go to the Promised Land, and they did. Then 25 years later, at the ages of 100 and 90, God blessed them with their first son, Isaac. They were perhaps, the least likely couple in the land and yet, God chose them. Then there’s Moses who was 80, a convicted murderer and a stutterer when God called him to lead the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt. And so from this opening chapter of Luke’s gospel, we see once again that God chooses to use those who are older. Today, Jimmy Carter comes to mind. He will be remembered as our 39th president and also for his humanitarian efforts, specifically through his work with Habitat for Humanity. Over the course of more than 30 years, he and Rosalind have worked alongside nearly 103,000 volunteers in 14 countries to build, renovate and repair 4,331 homes. Even into their 90’s they’ve been an inspiration to millions of people.

In his book, *From Strength to Strength, Finding Success, Happiness, and Deep Purpose in the Second Half of Life*, sociologist, Arthur Brooks reports that half of the people who are retirement age and older are happier than they’ve ever been, yet the other half is not as happy as they once were. He attributes that to the fact in our younger years, we are laser focused at being high achievers but as our physiology changes with age, our brains begin to change. We can’t do the things we used to do but we’re holding on to that early success, trying to relive it and capture our youth again.

But if we can understand how the brain works we might be able to find happiness and purpose later in life as well. Hamilton uses Tom Brady as an example. Brady won his seventh Super Bowl at the age of 43. In his younger years, he won by being faster, stronger, more agile and quicker at making decisions. But over time, those abilities diminish, and different strengths emerge. So, in 2020, when the Tampa Bay Buccaneers hired him at the age of 43, they were counting on his experience, wisdom and knowledge of the game to win games.

This is what Brooks calls fluid intelligence and crystallized intelligence. Fluid intelligence, what we have in our younger years, includes problem solving, quickness of thought, memory and adaptation. But with age, our fluid intelligence diminishes, and our crystallized intelligence emerges. This includes maturity, wisdom, insight, and experience. It also means perhaps, more

patience, grace, humility, and love. This may be why throughout scripture; we see God choosing older adults to carry out his mission. Messiah Church has a large and vibrant community of older adults. You, dear ones, are a tremendous gift to this church and this community. God has called you... and you serve with incredible gifts, including wisdom, experience, and leadership. You are at the stage where you realize your life can really be focused on serving other people. And your humility makes you able to say, "it's not about me anymore."

I will never forget my experience serving alongside some of our own more senior members of Messiah Church on a mission trip to the Pine Ridge Reservation four years ago. One of our projects was to plant baby pine trees on the top ridge of a mountain that had been devastated by fire not once, but twice. Pine trees can usually reseed after a fire but when fires happen in quick succession, that is almost impossible. So there we were, on the side of a mountain, planting trees for future generations. This required us to swing a heavy hodad, similar to a pick axe, to dig a hole in which to drop a sapling. And our seniors were right there with the rest of the team. This is a reminder that we need never retire from the work God calls us to and, in whatever stage of life we find ourselves, God is seeking to use us. God isn't finished with you yet. Your best years are still ahead of you as you yield yourself to God and see yourself as being able to mentor, encourage and build up others.

Just as God often chooses and uses the very old, God also can choose and use those who are young. Those of you who are younger, you have an incredible amount of fluid intelligence right now. You're able to grasp new concepts and problem solve quickly. You can use those skills to serve others and to serve God. Luke knows this as well and so he quickly, just 26 verses into his first chapter, shifts his focus and writes about how God uses a young person to fulfill God's purposes as well.

*When Elizabeth was six months pregnant, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a city in Galilee, to a virgin who was engaged to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David's house. The virgin's name was Mary. When the angel came to her, he said, "Rejoice, favored one! The Lord is with you!" Luke 1:26-27*

Mary, this young girl, just 13 or 14 years old, was called by God to do the most significant event that has ever happened in human history. God came to us, to save us and redeem us, through this young girl. And her response, "let it be with me just as you have said." Sometimes, people look down on young people and dismiss them as naïve, inexperienced or as having little to contribute. But time after time, we see God calling young people to complete his mission.

We see this in young David who did what no other adult had the courage and faith to do when he fought and defeated the giant, Goliath. We read about it in Esther, who as a young woman became queen of Persia and eventually saved her people. We read it in 1 Timothy, when Paul writes to his young protegee, Timothy, with these words of advice, *Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young. Instead, set an example for the believers through your speech, behavior, love, faith, and by being sexually pure.* 1 Timothy 4:12

Let me take a minute and share what some of our recent Messiah Youth grads are up to? Nina recently graduated from UW Madison and is working to promote landscaping that is water saving, house cooling and pollinator friendly.

Konnor, a freshman in college, followed his passion, and has his own business making beautiful, quality fishing lures.

Also a freshman in college, Andreas has his pilot's license.

Matthew is touring Europe with blues legend Bernard Allison.

Andrew is training to be an honorary Plymouth Firefighter

And if you want to know what our current youth are up to just stop one of them in the atrium and ask. They are all up to something! I'm excited to see how God will use these young people and their gifts in the future.

No matter your age, when you feel God calling you to do something that requires courage or sacrifice, let your response be like Mary's and say, "let it be with me just as you have said." God chooses and uses both the very old and the young, despite the tendency of some to dismiss both groups as having nothing to contribute.

After being blessed by her Aunt Elizabeth, Mary shouts the words of The Magnificat and ends with these words:

*He has shown strength with his arm. He has scattered those with arrogant thoughts and proud inclinations. He has pulled the powerful down from their thrones and lifted up the lowly. He has filled the hungry with good things and sent the rich away empty-handed. Luke 1:51-53*

In Hebrew, the word for those considered outsiders, 'Am ha-Arez. This means, literally, "the people of the land," and in first-century Judaism it was often used as a disparaging term to describe those who were uneducated or uncouth, ignorant, or unsophisticated—the way one might use the word yokel or bumpkin today. Mary would have been considered an Am ha Arez, an uneducated girl from the wrong side of the tracks. And yet, in the Gospels and especially in Luke, we find Jesus seeking out, ministering to, and lifting up the 'Am-ha-Arez. He appealed to them and saw them as beloved children of God.

So what does this mean for you if you are not among the poor and lowly? It means that you humble yourself before God and offer yourself to be used by God. Throughout scripture, over and over again, we are called to be humble servants. Jesus himself modeled this for us when he washed the feet of his disciples. Luke 12:48 says, *Much will be demanded from everyone who has been given much, and from the one who has been entrusted with much, even more will be asked.* When we humble ourselves and interact with the lowly, offering whatever gifts and talents we have, they go away filled and lifted up.

This past Friday marked the one-year anniversary of the war in Ukraine. In the past year, over 310,000 people, both Russians and Ukrainians have lost their lives. Over 8 million Ukrainians have fled their homeland and over 17 million people are currently in need of humanitarian aid. So no matter the official outcome of the war, Putin has already lost and will be held accountable by God and pulled down from his throne.

So for us, Mary's words are both a promise and a calling. God calls us to lift up the lowly as we follow Jesus and partner with God. God uses us to do this by acting and moving in this world as the hands and feet of Jesus. Paul calls this The Body of Christ. You, Messiah Church I continue to see you, being The Body of Christ, lifting up the lowly.

Remember those 21,000 rice meals you packed in January? We received word just this week that they will be shipped to folks in the Ukraine in mid-March. You are *"filling the hungry with good things."*

I see it in your ongoing partnership with our two refugee families.

I see you do this every time I walk into my office and pass by the Totes for Hope food shelf for our Bloom families. \$15,000 was given through our Christmas offering to make this possible. Recently, several of you have asked me how you can help those impacted by the devastating earthquakes in Turkey and Syria. Of course, we can all pray for the people living in these areas as well as the first responders still at work on the ground. We have also made it easy for you to

make a financial gift to the United Methodist Committee on Relief. 100% of your giving to UMCOR goes directly to disaster relief efforts.

Did you start this day feeling too old, too young, too uneducated or unsophisticated? If so, I hope you know now that you are someone God can use. As we begin the season of Lent, I invite you to be mindful of Jesus's own low status, born in a cave, to a young girl from the wrong side of the tracks with a carpenter as a father, calling to us as his followers to lift up the lowly.

Let us pray: God of the most high, you always look with favor on those who are lowly. Move us by your spirit today to show your mercy to people pushed to the margins and pushed down by suffering. Use us, unlikely choices though we are, to reach out with compassion to others, in the name and for the sake of him who was born among the hungry and the outcasts, our Lord, Jesus the Christ. Amen.

### **Grow, Pray, Study for the Week of February 26, 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, Amen.

*Note: We are reading the entire gospel of Luke in the GPS. Some days' readings are longer than usual. We hope you'll have an extra cup of coffee, or use your lunch break, and read Luke's entire story of Jesus.*

#### **Monday, February 27**

##### **Scripture: Luke 3:21-4:13**

When everyone was being baptized, Jesus also was baptized. While he was praying, heaven was opened and the Holy Spirit came down on him in bodily form like a dove. And there was a voice from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I dearly love; in you I find happiness." Jesus was about 30 years old when he began his ministry. People supposed that he was the son of Joseph son of Heli son of Matthat son of Levi son of Melchi son of Jannai son of Joseph son of Mattathias son of Amos son of Nahum son of Esli son of Naggai son of Maath son of Mattathias son of Semein son of Josech son of Joda son of Joanan son of Rhesa son of Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel son of Neri son of Melchi son of Addi son of Cosam son of Elmadam son of Er son of Joshua son of Eliezer son of Jorim son of Matthat son of Levi son of Simeon son of Judah son of Joseph son of Jonam son of Eliakim son of Melea son of Menna son of Mattatha son of Nathan son of David son of Jesse son of Obed son of Boaz son of Sala son of Nahshon son of Amminadab son of Admin son of Arni son of Hezron son of Perez son of Judah son of Jacob son of Isaac son of Abraham son of Terah son of Nahor son of Serug son of Reu son of Peleg son of Eber son of Shelah son of Cainan son of Arphaxad son of Shem son of Noah son of Lamech son of Methuselah son of Enoch son of Jared son of Mahalalel son of Cainan son of Enos son of Seth son of Adam son of God.

Jesus returned from the Jordan River full of the Holy Spirit, and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness. There he was tempted for forty days by the devil. He ate nothing during those days and afterward Jesus was starving. The devil said to him, "Since you are God's Son, command this stone to become a loaf of bread." Jesus replied, "It's written, *People won't live only by bread.*" Next the devil led him to a high place and showed him in a single instant all the

kingdoms of the world. The devil said, "I will give you this whole domain and the glory of all these kingdoms. It's been entrusted to me and I can give it to anyone I want. Therefore, if you will worship me, it will all be yours." Jesus answered, "It's written, *You will worship the Lord your God and serve only him.*" The devil brought him into Jerusalem and stood him at the highest point of the temple. He said to him, "Since you are God's Son, throw yourself down from here; for it's written: *He will command his angels concerning you, to protect you and they will take you up in their hands so that you won't hit your foot on a stone.*" Jesus answered, "It's been said, *Don't test the Lord your God.*" After finishing every temptation, the devil departed from him until the next opportunity.

### **Observation**

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

### **Application**

Our culture often toys with the medieval idea of an ugly, horned devil. Would a figure like that have actually appeared to Jesus? Are you tempted, not by a dark "devil" figure, but by an inner whisper urging you to ignore God's way? How can embracing your identity as God's child help you resist that whisper?

### **Prayer**

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

## **Tuesday, February 28**

### **Scripture: Luke 4:14-44**

Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee, and news about him spread throughout the whole countryside. He taught in their synagogues and was praised by everyone. Jesus went to Nazareth, where he had been raised. On the Sabbath he went to the synagogue as he normally did and stood up to read. The synagogue assistant gave him the scroll from the prophet Isaiah. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:

*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,  
because the Lord has anointed me.  
He has sent me to preach good news to the poor,  
to proclaim release to the prisoners  
and recovery of sight to the blind,  
to liberate the oppressed,  
and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.*

He rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the synagogue assistant, and sat down. Every eye in the synagogue was fixed on him. He began to explain to them, "Today, this scripture has been fulfilled just as you heard it." Everyone was raving about Jesus, so impressed were they by the gracious words flowing from his lips. They said, "This is Joseph's son, isn't it?" Then Jesus said to them, "Undoubtedly, you will quote this saying to me: 'Doctor, heal yourself. Do here in your hometown what we've heard you did in Capernaum.'" He said, "I assure you that no prophet is welcome in the prophet's hometown. And I can assure you that there were many widows in Israel during Elijah's time, when it didn't rain for three and a half years and there was a great

food shortage in the land. Yet Elijah was sent to none of them but only to a widow in the city of Zarephath in the region of Sidon. There were also many persons with skin diseases in Israel during the time of the prophet Elisha, but none of them were cleansed. Instead, Naaman the Syrian was cleansed.” When they heard this, everyone in the synagogue was filled with anger. They rose up and ran him out of town. They led him to the crest of the hill on which their town had been built so that they could throw him off the cliff. But he passed through the crowd and went on his way.

Jesus went down to the city of Capernaum in Galilee and taught the people each Sabbath. They were amazed by his teaching because he delivered his message with authority. A man in the synagogue had the spirit of an unclean demon. He screamed, “Hey! What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are. You are the holy one from God. “Silence!” Jesus said, speaking harshly to the demon. “Come out of him!” The demon threw the man down before them, then came out of him without harming him. They were all shaken and said to each other, “What kind of word is this, that he can command unclean spirits with authority and power, and they leave?” Reports about him spread everywhere in the surrounding region. After leaving the synagogue, Jesus went home with Simon. Simon’s mother-in-law was sick with a high fever, and the family asked Jesus to help her. He bent over her and spoke harshly to the fever, and it left her. She got up at once and served them. When the sun was setting, everyone brought to Jesus relatives and acquaintances with all kinds of diseases. Placing his hands on each of them, he healed them. Demons also came out of many people. They screamed, “You are God’s Son.” But he spoke harshly to them and wouldn’t allow them to speak because they recognized that he was the Christ. When daybreak arrived, Jesus went to a deserted place. The crowds were looking for him. When they found him, they tried to keep him from leaving them. But he said to them, “I must preach the good news of God’s kingdom in other cities too, for this is why I was sent.” So he continued preaching in the Judean synagogues.

### **Observation**

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

### **Application**

Jesus was the ultimate “servant leader.” That included intentional soul care. In verse 42 (again in Luke 5:16), Luke said Jesus made a point of praying in solitary places. Solitude—just you and God—can be hard. How could you create some alone time on purpose each day? How could you find longer periods of solitude with God as needed?

### **Prayer**

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

### **Wednesday, March 1**

#### **Scripture: Luke 5:1-26**

One day Jesus was standing beside Lake Gennesaret when the crowd pressed in around him to hear God’s word. Jesus saw two boats sitting by the lake. The fishermen had gone ashore and were washing their nets. Jesus boarded one of the boats, the one that belonged to Simon, then asked him to row out a little distance from the shore. Jesus sat down and taught the crowds from the boat. When he finished speaking to the crowds, he said to Simon, “Row out farther, into

the deep water, and drop your nets for a catch.” Simon replied, “Master, we’ve worked hard all night and caught nothing. But because you say so, I’ll drop the nets.” So they dropped the nets and their catch was so huge that their nets were splitting. They signaled for their partners in the other boat to come and help them. They filled both boats so full that they were about to sink. When Simon Peter saw the catch, he fell at Jesus’ knees and said, “Leave me, Lord, for I’m a sinner!” Peter and those with him were overcome with amazement because of the number of fish they caught. James and John, Zebedee’s sons, were Simon’s partners and they were amazed too. Jesus said to Simon, “Don’t be afraid. From now on, you will be fishing for people.” As soon as they brought the boats to the shore, they left everything and followed Jesus. Jesus was in one of the towns where there was also a man covered with a skin disease. When he saw Jesus, he fell on his face and begged, “Lord, if you want, you can make me clean.” Jesus reached out his hand, touched him, and said, “I do want to. Be clean.” Instantly, the skin disease left him. Jesus ordered him not to tell anyone. “Instead,” Jesus said, “go and show yourself to the priest and make an offering for your cleansing, as Moses instructed. This will be a testimony to them.” News of him spread even more and huge crowds gathered to listen and to be healed from their illnesses. But Jesus would withdraw to deserted places for prayer. One day when Jesus was teaching, Pharisees and legal experts were sitting nearby. They had come from every village in Galilee and Judea, and from Jerusalem. Now the power of the Lord was with Jesus to heal. Some men were bringing a man who was paralyzed, lying on a cot. They wanted to carry him in and place him before Jesus, but they couldn’t reach him because of the crowd. So they took him up on the roof and lowered him—cot and all—through the roof tiles into the crowded room in front of Jesus. When Jesus saw their faith, he said, “Friend, your sins are forgiven.” The legal experts and Pharisees began to mutter among themselves, “Who is this who insults God? Only God can forgive sins!” Jesus recognized what they were discussing and responded, “Why do you fill your minds with these questions? Which is easier—to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Get up and walk’? But so that you will know that the Human One has authority on the earth to forgive sins” —Jesus now spoke to the man who was paralyzed, “I say to you, get up, take your cot, and go home.” Right away, the man stood before them, picked up his cot, and went home, praising God. All the people were beside themselves with wonder. Filled with awe, they glorified God, saying, “We’ve seen unimaginable things today.”

### **Observation**

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

### **Application**

Sadly, many religious leaders watched Jesus with a critical spirit (verses 17-21). They didn’t like him helping “sinners.” In his book, *On Being Christian*, Hans Küng wrote, “The Church must always dissociate itself from sin, but it can never have any excuse for keeping any sinner at a distance.” Are you fully aware that only a church that, like Jesus, welcomes “sinners” can truly welcome you?

### **Prayer**

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

**Thursday, March 2**

**Scripture: Luke 5:27-6:11**

Afterward, Jesus went out and saw a tax collector named Levi sitting at a kiosk for collecting taxes. Jesus said to him, "Follow me." Levi got up, left everything behind, and followed him. Then Levi threw a great banquet for Jesus in his home. A large number of tax collectors and others sat down to eat with them. The Pharisees and their legal experts grumbled against his disciples. They said, "Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?" Jesus answered, "Healthy people don't need a doctor, but sick people do. I didn't come to call righteous people but sinners to change their hearts and lives."

Some people said to Jesus, "The disciples of John fast often and pray frequently. The disciples of the Pharisees do the same, but your disciples are always eating and drinking." Jesus replied, "You can't make the wedding guests fast while the groom is with them, can you? The days will come when the groom will be taken from them, and then they will fast." Then he told them a parable. "No one tears a patch from a new garment to patch an old garment. Otherwise, the new garment would be ruined, and the new patch wouldn't match the old garment. Nobody pours new wine into old wineskins. If they did, the new wine would burst the wineskins, the wine would spill, and the wineskins would be ruined. Instead, new wine must be put into new wineskins. No one who drinks a well-aged wine wants new wine, but says, 'The well-aged wine is better.'"

One Sabbath, as Jesus was going through the wheat fields, his disciples were picking the heads of wheat, rubbing them in their hands, and eating them. Some Pharisees said, "Why are you breaking the Sabbath law?" Jesus replied, "Haven't you read what David and his companions did when they were hungry? He broke the Law by going into God's house and eating the bread of the presence, which only the priests can eat. He also gave some of the bread to his companions." Then he said to them, "The Human One is Lord of the Sabbath." On another Sabbath, Jesus entered a synagogue to teach. A man was there whose right hand was withered. The legal experts and the Pharisees were watching him closely to see if he would heal on the Sabbath. They were looking for a reason to bring charges against him. Jesus knew their thoughts, so he said to the man with the withered hand, "Get up and stand in front of everyone." He got up and stood there. Jesus said to the legal experts and Pharisees, "Here's a question for you: Is it legal on the Sabbath to do good or to do evil, to save life or to destroy it?" Looking around at them all, he said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." So he did and his hand was made healthy. They were furious and began talking with each other about what to do to Jesus.

**Observation**

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

**Application**

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

How has God transformed you from old ways of living to new ways? How does living out God's mission to the whole world shape Messiah's international mission work?

### **Prayer**

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

### **Friday, March 3**

#### **Scripture: Luke 6:12-38**

During that time, Jesus went out to the mountain to pray, and he prayed to God all night long. At daybreak, he called together his disciples. He chose twelve of them whom he called apostles: Simon, whom he named Peter; his brother Andrew; James; John; Philip; Bartholomew; Matthew; Thomas; James the son of Alphaeus; Simon, who was called a zealot; Judas the son of James; and Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor.

Jesus came down from the mountain with them and stood on a large area of level ground. A great company of his disciples and a huge crowd of people from all around Judea and Jerusalem and the area around Tyre and Sidon joined him there. They came to hear him and to be healed from their diseases, and those bothered by unclean spirits were healed. The whole crowd wanted to touch him, because power was going out from him and he was healing everyone. Jesus raised his eyes to his disciples and said:

“Happy are you who are poor,  
because God's kingdom is yours.

Happy are you who hunger now,  
because you will be satisfied.

Happy are you who weep now,  
because you will laugh.

Happy are you when people hate you, reject you, insult you, and condemn your name as evil because of the Human One. Rejoice when that happens! Leap for joy because you have a great reward in heaven. Their ancestors did the same things to the prophets.

But how terrible for you who are rich,  
because you have already received your comfort.

How terrible for you who have plenty now,  
because you will be hungry.

How terrible for you who laugh now,  
because you will mourn and weep.

How terrible for you when all speak well of you.  
Their ancestors did the same things to the false prophets.

“But I say to you who are willing to hear: Love your enemies. Do good to those who hate you. Bless those who curse you. Pray for those who mistreat you. If someone slaps you on the cheek, offer the other one as well. If someone takes your coat, don't withhold your shirt either. Give to everyone who asks and don't demand your things back from those who take them. Treat people in the same way that you want them to treat you. “If you love those who love you, why should you be commended? Even sinners love those who love them. If you do good to those who do good to you, why should you be commended? Even sinners do that. If you lend to those from whom you expect repayment, why should you be commended? Even sinners lend to sinners expecting to be paid back in full. Instead, love your enemies, do good, and lend expecting nothing in return. If you do, you will have a great reward. You will be acting the way children of the Most High act, for he is kind to ungrateful and wicked people. Be compassionate

just as your Father is compassionate. “Don’t judge, and you won’t be judged. Don’t condemn, and you won’t be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven. Give, and it will be given to you. A good portion—packed down, firmly shaken, and overflowing—will fall into your lap. The portion you give will determine the portion you receive in return.”

### **Observation**

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

### **Application**

Like Mary’s song in Luke 1:46-55, this sermon offered God’s favor and comfort to people we see as unfortunate, and warned those we see as particularly favored. Which parts of his sermon most challenge our culture’s wisdom on how to “succeed”? Which of Jesus’ promises in this sermon mean the most to you?

### **Prayer**

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

### **Saturday, March 4**

#### **Scripture: Luke 7:11-35**

A little later Jesus went to a city called Nain. His disciples and a great crowd traveled with him. As he approached the city gate, a dead man was being carried out. He was his mother’s only son, and she was a widow. A large crowd from the city was with her. When he saw her, the Lord had compassion for her and said, “Don’t cry.” He stepped forward and touched the stretcher on which the dead man was being carried. Those carrying him stood still. Jesus said, “Young man, I say to you, get up.” The dead man sat up and began to speak, and Jesus gave him to his mother. Awestruck, everyone praised God. “A great prophet has appeared among us,” they said. “God has come to help his people.” This news about Jesus spread throughout Judea and the surrounding region.

John’s disciples informed him about all these things. John called two of his disciples and sent them to the Lord. They were to ask him, “Are you the one who is coming, or should we look for someone else?” When they reached Jesus, they said, “John the Baptist sent us to you. He asks, ‘Are you the one who is coming, or should we look for someone else?’” Right then, Jesus healed many of their diseases, illnesses, and evil spirits, and he gave sight to a number of blind people. Then he replied to John’s disciples, “Go, report to John what you have seen and heard. *Those who were blind are able to see. Those who were crippled now walk. People with skin diseases are cleansed. Those who were deaf now hear. Those who were dead are raised up. And good news is preached to the poor.* Happy is anyone who doesn’t stumble along the way because of me.” After John’s messengers were gone, Jesus spoke to the crowds about John. “What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A stalk blowing in the wind? What did you go out to see? A man dressed up in refined clothes? Look, those who dress in fashionable clothes and live in luxury are in royal palaces. What did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. He is the one of whom it’s written: *Look, I’m sending my messenger before you, who will prepare your way before you.* I tell you that no greater human being has ever been born than John. Yet whoever is least in God’s kingdom is greater than he.” Everyone who heard this, including the tax collectors, acknowledged God’s justice because

they had been baptized by John. But the Pharisees and legal experts rejected God's will for themselves because they hadn't been baptized by John. "To what will I compare the people of this generation?" Jesus asked. "What are they like? They are like children sitting in the marketplace calling out to each other, 'We played the flute for you and you didn't dance. We sang a funeral song and you didn't cry.' John the Baptist came neither eating bread nor drinking wine, and you say, 'He has a demon.' Yet the Human One<sup>[c]</sup> came eating and drinking, and you say, 'Look, a glutton and a drunk, a friend of tax collectors and sinners.' But wisdom is proved to be right by all her descendants."

### **Observation**

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

### **Application**

In Jesus' day, losing an only son was an utter disaster for a widow. Only through a male relative could she legally own property or funds. Jesus saved the widow, not just from emotional loss, but likely from poverty and marginalization. What has Jesus saved you from? In what ways can trusting his loving power give you strength and comfort for each day?

### **Prayer**

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