

**Luke: Jesus and the Outsiders, Outcasts and Outlaws – 4. The Journey to Jerusalem**  
**Luke 17:11-19**  
**March 19, 2-23**  
**Pastor Tami Luckhardt**

It's March and you know what that means. St. Patrick's Day, March Madness, the first day of spring and if you're a student or a teacher, Spring Break! Last week, the University of Minnesota was on spring break, and so Jerry and I took a trip, just the 2 of us, to Austin, Texas. Having lived there in the early 1990's when Jerry worked with the Longhorn Marching Band at University of Texas, we used the time to visit old friends. We soaked up some Texas sun, drove and hiked through the beautiful Texas Hill Country. We were delightfully surprised to find the bluebonnets are blooming early this year. That was an unexpected treat! But before we left, preparing for a trip like that took some planning. First there was coordinating the plane tickets, hotel, and rental car reservations. Then figuring out rides to and from our home to the airport. We needed to make plans for things like someone to take care of our dog, bring in the mail and getting the garbage to the curb on the right day. Oh, and because of the snow, we needed someone to run a snowblower up and down our driveway a couple of times so it wasn't obvious that we weren't home. Then figuring out what to do once we were in Texas, that was a whole other to do list. There's a lot of work that goes into taking a trip.

During this season of Lent, we've been reading the gospel of Luke together as a church and looking each week at the overarching theme of his gospel which is that Jesus came to lift up the lowly, reaching out to, having compassion for and caring for the outsiders and outcasts. Today we are going to focus on the part of Luke's gospel that talks about Jesus' journey from Galilee to Jerusalem. In Luke 9:51 we read, "*As the time approached when Jesus was to be taken up into heaven, he determined to go to Jerusalem.*" Some translations say, "he set his face towards" or "resolutely set out for Jerusalem", both indications that even though he knew he would face persecution and death in Jerusalem, he was determined to go there. And this journey from Galilee to Jerusalem, a trip that should have taken about 9 days is 40% of Luke's gospel. It is not until ten chapters later, in chapter 19 that Jesus arrives in Jerusalem. Because Luke takes so much time with this journey, it's an indication that he thinks this is important and therefore, we should pay close attention.

It is in these ten chapters, while on this journey we find some of Jesus' greatest teachings; the two great commandments to love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength and love your neighbor as yourself. It is on the journey where Jesus shares many meals with the pharisees, Zacchaeus, and Mary and Martha. It is on the journey where Jesus teaches us the Lord's Prayer. And of course, some of the most-loved parables are found along this journey, the Good Samaritan, the rich man and Lazarus, and the prodigal son. Today, I want to focus on the story on this story of ten lepers. This a story draws attention to two important themes in Luke's gospel. Jesus' care and compassion for the marginalized, the outsiders and outcasts and secondly, the importance and power of gratitude.

Let's start with the first part of today's scripture. "*On the way to Jerusalem, Jesus traveled along the border between Samaria and Galilee.*" Luke 17:11 You may recall the relationship between the Samaritans and the Jews at this time, was conflicted and sometimes violent. Centuries before, they had been one people, but changes and tensions wrought by the Babylonian exile and return put them at odds regarding beliefs about scripture, worship, and what it meant to be holy. The Jews did not like the Samaritans and to be fair, the Samaritans did not like the Jews. The northernmost part of this area was Galilee. This is where Jesus grew up and spent most of his life and ministry. Galilee included a large number of Jews but also many

foreigners/immigrants. The center of the country was Samaria, roughly the area considered to be the West Bank today, home to the Palestinians. And the southern area was Judea. This is where Jesus was born and where Jerusalem was located.

There were two main routes Jews would take to get from Galilee to Jerusalem for the religious festivals. The most direct route was through Samaria, but “good Jews” would do all that they could to stay out of that area and away from “those people”. The other route was to go east, cross over the Jordan River, travel south and then back over to the west, into Judea and on towards Jerusalem, avoiding Samaria all together.

Luke tells us Jesus and his disciples were traveling along the border-area between Samaria and Galilee. This means that this entire encounter between Jesus and the ten men with skin diseases took place in a geographical borderland that is neither Samaria nor Galilee. Chicano author, Gloria Anzaldua, who writes about the American/Mexican border, describes them this way. *“Border lands are more than geographical boundaries. They are a psychic, social, and cultural terrain that we inhabit, and that inhabits all of us. Borders are set up to define places that are safe and unsafe, to draw lines that distinguish “us” from “them. A borderland is a vague and undetermined space created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary, the prohibited and forbidden are its residents.”* This may be why Luke tells us this healing encounter happened in this hybrid place, this place that transcends culture, religion, economics, and politics just like Jesus does and draws our attention to the marginalized and outcasts.

One of the people we visited last week while we were in Austin is a longtime friend, Jeff, who is a high school principal but also a member of the Army Reserves. He recently was activated and for the next year is serving alongside the US Border Patrol in Laredo, Texas. Jeff says Laredo is a dark, scary, anxious, and dangerous place. He's thankful that he gets to go home to his family on weekends but for the folks who live there and call Laredo home, it's an especially heartbreaking situation.

*“As he, Jesus, entered this village/border town, ten men with skin diseases approached him. Keeping their distance from him, they raised their voices and said, “Jesus, Master, show us mercy!”*

What the Common English Bible calls “skin diseases” other translations call “leprosy”. So, what was leprosy? “Leprosy” in the Bible was different from the disease we once called Leprosy but that we now know as Hansen’s disease, a serious disorder caused by bacterial infection, whose symptoms are ulcerations, loss of feeling in certain nerve regions, or loss of fingers and toes. The term “leprosy” in the Bible, however, is used to describe a variety of skin diseases, which probably ranged from simple blemishes to serious rashes to more serious fungal and bacterial infections. Lepers were, therefore, somewhat common. As we look back to the Law of Moses, some 1,300 years before Jesus, we find very specific rules that needed to be observed by someone who was suffering from one of these skin diseases. Leviticus 13:45-46, *“Anyone with an infection of skin disease must wear torn clothes, dishevel their hair, cover their upper lip, and shout out, “Unclean! Unclean!” They will be unclean as long as they are infected. They are unclean. They must live alone outside the camp.”*

In addition to suffering from one of these terrifying skin diseases, folks were ostracized and forced to live outside of their communities, away from family and friends and among other folks who were also considered unclean. These diseases were common and frequently curable so if you contracted leprosy, it did not doom you forever as an outcast. There were techniques for quarantining, healing and ritual cleansing. I think the pandemic gave us all a better idea of what

it felt like to be isolated. In the height of the pandemic, anxiety, depression, and other related illnesses were running rampant, and so doctors began prescribing social activities like walks in nature, driveway meet and greets, and other non-traditional forms of medical treatments that required people to engage with one another. They knew, and we learned, that comprehensive healing cannot happen in isolation, it requires direct participation, and it requires community.

You may recall that in Biblical times, when someone suffered a tragedy, sickness, or disease, it was thought to be punishment from God for a sin that they or one of their family members had committed. And over time, if they fully repented, God would forgive them and heal them. Only the priests could declare a person clean again so that they would be allowed back into their communities. But this was not how Jesus saw diseases. Over and over again, we read how Jesus sought out folks with diseases and sicknesses, and having the power and compassion, he healed them.

Upon hearing their plea, Jesus instructs the lepers to go and show themselves to the priests. And “while they were on their way” Jesus made clean. They responded with faith and Jesus healed them simply by speaking. And once again, we see the power of Christ at work in this world. This is the first part of this story. As we see Jesus’ heart caring for lepers it reminds us that this is what we are called to do as followers of Jesus. We are called to see people who others look past, to have compassion and mercy and to offer hope and healing, to lift up the lowly. Are there people in your life, or maybe your community, that you regard in a similar way, or perhaps regard you in a similar way? Are there neighborhoods, communities, border towns or nations you would be afraid to travel through? Are there people who would hesitate to travel through the neighborhood where you live? When we find ourselves in these situations we should ask, what would Jesus do and then do likewise.

Let’s now look at the second part of this story. *“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.”* Luke 17:14-16

The hero of this story was not one of the nine Jews, the insiders, who didn’t come back and thank Jesus, but instead, the doubly cursed Samaritan, who not only had leprosy but was also labeled as an outsider, or an enemy. And when Jesus saw his faith, he said, “Get up and go. Your faith has healed you.” This is proof that God’s mercy is not limited to human conventions regarding insiders and outsiders, even when the outsider is considered “the enemy.” The good news of this encounter carries a promise that through Jesus, God empowers us to step across boundaries, share mercy with outsiders, pay attention to things worthy of praise and move forward into God’s future with assurance that there is more to God’s story than meets the eye. For that may we always give thanks.

This story is also about gratitude. 90% of the lepers who were healed didn’t think to go back and thank Jesus. I’ve been giving this a lot this week and wondering which leper am I most like? The 9 who left without saying thank you or the one who returned? Which leper are you more like? Every single day, there are blessings that come into our lives but do we always stop and say thank you. Let’s start with the simple fact that you woke up this morning. I have a friend who says, “Woo hoo!” every morning when he first wakes up. It’s his way of saying, “thank you God for the gift of another day.” We can give thanks for the rain this past week. Rain that melts snow and nourishes the earth as spring officially begins tomorrow and we wait with great anticipation for signs of new life to burst forth from the earth. We can give thanks for food, relationships, warm homes, jobs, God’s grace and mercy in our lives. We can give thanks for this faith community called Messiah Church, a truly unique and blessed community. I don’t know if you all

realize this or not, but you have an amazing way of caring for one another, supporting one another, as well as our neighbors and the world. You embrace the value that John Wesley set forth for us that, “Though we cannot think alike, may we not love alike? May we not be of one heart, though we are not of one opinion? This is what the Body of Christ is meant to be. I want to you know that I see this in you. And for that, I do give thanks to God every, single day!

Do you remember to say thank you often enough? I know that I don't. I want to. I set out each day to do so, but I know I fall short. If you're like me, I have some good news for you. The act of showing up to worship is one way to say thank you to God. In fact, “thank you, God”, is what worship is all about. But thanking God is also important in our daily prayer life. We were made to, created to give thanks. In fact, a Barna Research (considered to be the leading research organization focused on the intersection of faith and culture) poll revealed that those with an active Christian faith — who attend church, read the Bible, and pray — are more likely than other adults to say that they are very happy with their lives, that their faith is growing deeper, and that they are in excellent physical health.

If you were around in the fall of 2021, we did a message series that focused on five spiritual practices that will help us grow as followers of Jesus Christ. One practice is that we worship God through prayer. Our fist reminds us that we are to pray together, like we are doing today in worship, and the five fingers remind us to pray five times a day; when we get up in the morning, before breakfast, lunch, and dinner, and before we go to bed at night. This week, I challenge you to The Five Finger Challenge. Each day, let your five fingers be a reminder to pray five times a day. And your prayer can be as simple as, “thank you, God.”

I want to close with this story about gratitude that is attributed to the 13th century, German theologian, Meister Eckhart. On his way to church, a scholar was surprised to see a man in tattered clothes and barefoot. Nevertheless, as a good Christian, he greeted the poor man: “May God give you a good morning!” The poor man replied cheerfully, “I have never yet had a bad morning.” “Then may God give you good luck!” “I have never yet had bad luck.” “Well, may God give you happiness!” “I have never yet been unhappy.” The scholar then asked the man, “Could you please explain yourself to me? I do not understand.”

And the poor man replied, “With pleasure! You wish me a good morning, yet I have never had a bad morning. For when I am hungry, I praise God; when I feel cold, or when it is raining or snowing, I praise God; and that is why I have never had a bad morning.”

You wish that God may give me luck. However, I have never had bad luck. This is because I live with God and always feel what he does for me is the best. Whatever God sends me, be it pleasant or unpleasant, I accept with a grateful heart. That is why I have never had bad luck.

Finally, you wish that God should make me happy. But I have never been unhappy. For all I desire is to follow God's will; I have surrendered my will so totally to God's will that, whatever God wants, that is what I also want. That is why I have never been unhappy.

Let's do a heart check. Do you have a grateful heart? Who do you need to say “thank you” to today? Do you accept The Five Finger Challenge this week? The story of this grateful Samaritan leper reminds us of the promise that through Jesus, God empowers us to step across boundaries, share mercy with outsiders, pay attention to things worthy of praise and

move forward into God's future with assurance that there is more to God's story than meets the eye. For that may we always give thanks.

Let's pray: Lord Jesus, as you journeyed to Jerusalem, you showed God's love and mercy to those whom others pushed away or overlooked all together. Fill us with your compassion for those who are marginalized, despised, and ignored, for as we draw closer to them, you draw us closer to you. And for that, we give great thanks and praise, Amen.

## **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