

Grow, Pray, Study for the Week of March 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, your son, Amen.

Monday, March 27

Scripture: Luke 19:11-28

As they listened to this, Jesus told them another parable because he was near Jerusalem and they thought God's kingdom would appear right away. He said, "A certain man who was born into royalty went to a distant land to receive his kingdom and then return. He called together ten servants and gave each of them money worth four months' wages. He said, 'Do business with this until I return.' His citizens hated him, so they sent a representative after him who said, 'We don't want this man to be our king.' After receiving his kingdom, he returned and called the servants to whom he had given the money to find out how much they had earned. The first servant came forward and said, 'Your money has earned a return of one thousand percent.' The king replied, 'Excellent! You are a good servant. Because you have been faithful in a small matter, you will have authority over ten cities.'" "The second servant came and said, 'Master, your money has made a return of five hundred percent.' To this one, the king said, 'You will have authority over five cities.'" "Another servant came and said, 'Master, here is your money. I wrapped it up in a scarf for safekeeping. I was afraid of you because you are a stern man. You withdraw what you haven't deposited and you harvest what you haven't planted.' The king replied, 'I will judge you by the words of your own mouth, you worthless servant! You knew, did you, that I'm a stern man, withdrawing what I didn't deposit, and harvesting what I didn't plant? Why then didn't you put my money in the bank? Then when I arrived, at least I could have gotten it back with interest.'" "He said to his attendants, 'Take his money and give it to the one who has ten times as much.'" "But Master," they said, "he already has ten times as much!" He replied, 'I say to you that everyone who has will be given more, but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away. As for my enemies who don't want me as their king, bring them here and slaughter them before me.'" After Jesus said this, he continued on ahead, going up to Jerusalem.

Observation

Jesus' bold story of a king and his servants taught a lesson about faithful service. This story (Matthew 25 told it a bit differently) showed the master praising and rewarding servants who went all out to serve him. But it warned against playing it too safe—the king chided the "worthless servant" who was too fearful to risk anything.

Application

Jesus' story wouldn't have made sense if the servants had all instantly believed they "owned" the large sum of money they received. How easy or hard do you find it to shift from thinking "I OWN all this" to "I'm a steward to whom God has entrusted these things (material possessions or gifts and talents) to use for God's purposes"?

Prayer

King Jesus, I want to serve you faithfully. Help me to see in what ways you have gifted me and help me use those gifts to serve you boldly and faithfully. Amen

Tuesday, March 28

Scripture: Luke 19:29-48

As Jesus came to Bethphage and Bethany on the Mount of Olives, he gave two disciples a task. He said, "Go into the village over there. When you enter it, you will find tied up there a colt that no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here. If anyone asks, 'Why are you untying it?' just say, 'Its master needs it.'" Those who had been sent found it exactly as he had said. As they were untying the colt, its owners said to them, "Why are you untying the colt?" They replied, "Its master needs it." They brought it to Jesus, threw their clothes on the colt, and lifted Jesus onto it. As Jesus rode along, they spread their clothes on the road. As Jesus approached the road leading down from the Mount of Olives, the whole throng of his disciples began rejoicing. They praised God with a loud voice because of all the mighty things they had seen. They said, "Blessings on the king who comes in the name of the Lord. Peace in heaven and glory in the highest heavens." Some of the Pharisees from the crowd said to Jesus, "Teacher, scold your disciples! Tell them to stop!" He answered, "I tell you, if they were silent, the stones would shout."

As Jesus came to the city and observed it, he wept over it. He said, "If only you knew on this of all days the things that lead to peace. But now they are hidden from your eyes. The time will come when your enemies will build fortifications around you, encircle you, and attack you from all sides. They will crush you completely, you and the people within you. They won't leave one stone on top of another within you, because you didn't recognize the time of your gracious visit from God."

When Jesus entered the temple, he threw out those who were selling things there. He said to them, "It's written, *My house will be a house of prayer, but you have made it a hideout for crooks.*" Jesus was teaching daily in the temple. The chief priests, the legal experts, and the foremost leaders among the people were seeking to kill him. However, they couldn't find a way to do it because all the people were enthralled with what they heard.

Observation

Jesus' long journey (which began in Luke 9:51) ended as he entered Jerusalem. He very deliberately entered in a way that echoed history (1 Kings 1:32-39) and prophecy (Zechariah 9:9-10). His entry said he symbolically claimed kingship, but peacefully. He wept over the city, and his tears showed that he loved the city's people. But he also wept because their heedless leaders did not love him.

Application

The prophet Zechariah said a righteous king would ride on a donkey's colt to offer peace and salvation to the people. How did Luke hint that Jesus pre-arranged his ride into Jerusalem to fulfill that prophecy (verses 31-34)? Who sang and praised Jesus (verses 37-39)? Who disliked his entrance into the holy city (verse 47)? Would you more likely have been with "the establishment" who didn't want their orderly status quo upset, or with the upstart rabbi from Galilee?

Prayer

Loving Lord, when you were born, Jerusalem ignored the news. When you came to the city, its leaders still didn't welcome you. Lord, I open my heart—I want to make room for you in my life always. Amen.

Wednesday, March 29

Scripture: Luke 20:1-40

On one of the days when Jesus was teaching the people in the temple and proclaiming the good news, the chief priests, legal experts, and elders approached him. They said, "Tell us: What kind of authority do you have for doing these things? Who gave you this authority?" He replied, "I have a question for you. Tell me: Was John's baptism of heavenly or of human origin?" They discussed among themselves, "If we say, 'It's of heavenly origin,' he'll say, 'Why didn't you believe him?' But if we say, 'It's of human origin,' all the people will stone us to death because they are convinced that John was a prophet." They answered that they didn't know where it came from. Then Jesus replied, "Neither will I tell you what kind of authority I have to do these things."

Jesus told the people this parable: "A certain man planted a vineyard, rented it to tenant farmers, and went on a trip for a long time. When it was time, he sent a servant to collect from the tenants his share of the fruit of the vineyard. But the tenants sent him away, beaten and empty-handed. The man sent another servant. But they beat him, treated him disgracefully, and sent him away empty-handed as well. He sent a third servant. They wounded this servant and threw him out. The owner of the vineyard said, 'What should I do? I'll send my son, whom I love dearly. Perhaps they will respect him.' But when they saw him, they said to each other, 'This is the heir. Let's kill him so the inheritance will be ours.' They threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. What will the owner of the vineyard do to them? He will come and destroy those tenants and give the vineyard to others." When the people heard this, they said, "May this never happen!" Staring at them, Jesus said, "Then what is the meaning of this text of scripture: *The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone?* Everyone who falls on that stone will be crushed. And the stone will crush the person it falls on." The legal experts and chief priests wanted to arrest him right then because they knew he had told this parable against them. But they feared the people.

The legal experts and chief priests were watching Jesus closely and sent spies who pretended to be sincere. They wanted to trap him in his words so they could hand him over to the jurisdiction and authority of the governor. They asked him, "Teacher, we know that you are correct in what you say and teach. You don't show favoritism but teach God's way as it really is. Does the Law allow people to pay taxes to Caesar or not?" Since Jesus recognized their deception, he said to them, "Show me a coin. Whose image and inscription does it have on it?" "Caesar's," they replied. He said to them, "Give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God." They couldn't trap him in his words in front of the people. Astonished by his answer, they were speechless.

Some Sadducees, who deny that there's a resurrection, came to Jesus and asked, "Teacher, Moses wrote for us that *if a man's brother dies leaving a widow but no children, the brother must marry the widow and raise up children for his brother.* Now there were seven brothers. The first man married a woman and then died childless. The second and then the third brother married her. Eventually all seven married her, and they all died without leaving any children. Finally, the woman died too. In the resurrection, whose wife will she be? All seven were married to her."

Jesus said to them, "People who belong to this age marry and are given in marriage. But those who are considered worthy to participate in that age, that is, in the age of the resurrection from the dead, won't marry nor will they be given in marriage. They can no longer die, because they are like angels and are God's children since they share in the resurrection. Even Moses demonstrated that the dead are raised—in the passage about the burning bush, when he speaks of the Lord as *the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.* He isn't the God of the dead but of the living. To him they are all alive." Some of the legal experts responded, "Teacher, you have answered well." No one dared to ask him anything else.

Observation

Shielding their high status, Jerusalem's religious leaders plotted Jesus' death. They tried hard to build a case for his execution. Maybe they could get him to refuse to pay Roman taxes, or to admit that belief in "resurrection" was absurd. But neither their trick questions nor their show of outward piety fooled Jesus. They fumed (verse 19) when he told a story exposing the murder in their hearts.

Application

Jesus' vineyard story drew on a beloved Scripture (Isaiah 5:1-7), which called Israel God's vineyard. But he exposed the hate around him during that fateful week (Luke 19:47, 20:19). We, like the Jerusalem leaders, can have blind spots. Is there anything God's spirit is nudging you to face honestly in your life? Do you have the courage to face it in the light of Jesus' "good news"?

Prayer

King Jesus, your piercing insight made some powerful people very angry. But your purpose was always to redeem. Give me a measure of your insight, and a large dose of your redemptive heart. Amen.

Thursday, March 30

Scripture: Luke 20:41 – 21:28

Jesus said to them, "Why do they say that the Christ is David's son? David himself says in the scroll of Psalms, *The Lord said to my lord, 'Sit at my right side until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.'* Since David calls him 'Lord,' how can he be David's son?"

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

Looking up, Jesus saw rich people throwing their gifts into the collection box for the temple treasury. He also saw a poor widow throw in two small copper coins worth a penny. He said, "I assure you that this poor widow has put in more than them all. All of them are giving out of their spare change. But she from her hopeless poverty has given everything she had to live on." Some people were talking about the temple, how it was decorated with beautiful stones and ornaments dedicated to God. Jesus said, "As for the things you are admiring, the time is coming when not even one stone will be left upon another. All will be demolished." They asked him, "Teacher, when will these things happen? What sign will show that these things are about to happen?" Jesus said, "Watch out that you aren't deceived. Many will come in my name, saying, 'I'm the one!' and 'It's time!' Don't follow them. When you hear of wars and rebellions, don't be alarmed. These things must happen first, but the end won't happen immediately." Then Jesus said to them, "Nations and kingdoms will fight against each other. There will be great earthquakes and wide-scale food shortages and epidemics. There will also be terrifying sights and great signs in the sky. But before all this occurs, they will take you into custody and harass you because of your faith. They will hand you over to synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors because of my name. This will provide you with an opportunity to testify. Make up your minds not to prepare your defense in advance. I'll give you words and wisdom that none of your opponents will be able to counter or contradict. You will be betrayed by your parents, brothers and sisters, relatives, and friends. They will execute some of you. Everyone will hate you because of my name. Still, not a hair on your heads will be lost. By holding fast, you will gain your lives. "When you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then you will know that its destruction is close at hand. At that time, those in Judea must flee to the

mountains, those in the city must escape, and those in the countryside must not enter the city. These are the days of punishment, when everything written will find its fulfillment. How terrible it will be at that time for women who are pregnant or for women who are nursing their children. There will be great agony on the earth and angry judgment on this people. They will fall by the edge of the sword and be taken away as captives among all nations. Jerusalem will be plundered by Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are concluded. "There will be signs in the sun, moon, and stars. On the earth, there will be dismay among nations in their confusion over the roaring of the sea and surging waves. The planets and other heavenly bodies will be shaken, causing people to faint from fear and foreboding of what is coming upon the world. Then they will see the Human One coming on a cloud with power and great splendor. Now when these things begin to happen, stand up straight and raise your heads, because your redemption is near."

Observation

For Jesus, true worth lay in people like the humble widow, whose tiny gift only he saw. And worse lay ahead—the end of the Temple, where devout Jews met God. Great hardship and suffering would follow. It all happened—Rome destroyed the Temple in 70 A.D. Despite this world's sad state, Jesus urged his listeners to keep faith whatever came. He told them, "Don't be alarmed...raise your heads, because your redemption is near" (21:9, 28).

Application

Life in a broken world gets tough. Scholar N. T. Wright said, "This is what it's about: not an exciting battle, with adrenalin flowing and banners flying, but the steady tread, of prayer and hope and scripture and sacrament and witness, day by day and week by week." In what ways can you sustain the "steady tread" of your faith journey even through personal or world crises? What models of patient, steady faith can you draw on?

Prayer

Lord Jesus, I want to trust you even when life gets hard. Give me the strength and patience I need to deal with life's struggles - the ones I am facing now and any others in the future. Amen.

Friday, March 31

Scripture: Luke 21:29 – 22:30

Jesus told them a parable: "Look at the fig tree and all the trees. When they sprout leaves, you can see for yourselves and know that summer is near. In the same way, when you see these things happening, you know that God's kingdom is near. I assure you that this generation won't pass away until everything has happened. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will certainly not pass away. "Take care that your hearts aren't dulled by drinking parties, drunkenness, and the anxieties of day-to-day life. Don't let that day fall upon you unexpectedly, like a trap. It will come upon everyone who lives on the face of the whole earth. Stay alert at all times, praying that you are strong enough to escape everything that is about to happen and to stand before the Human One." Every day Jesus was teaching in the temple, but he spent each night on the Mount of Olives. All the people rose early in the morning to hear him in the temple area.

The Festival of Unleavened Bread, which is called Passover, was approaching. The chief priests and the legal experts were looking for a way to kill Jesus, because they were afraid of the people. Then Satan entered Judas, called Iscariot, who was one of the Twelve. He went out and discussed with the chief priests and the officers of the temple guard how he could hand Jesus

over to them. They were delighted and arranged payment for him. He agreed and began looking for an opportunity to hand Jesus over to them—a time when the crowds would be absent.

The Day of Unleavened Bread arrived, when the Passover had to be sacrificed. Jesus sent Peter and John with this task: “Go and prepare for us to eat the Passover meal.” They said to him, “Where do you want us to prepare it?” Jesus replied, “When you go into the city, a man carrying a water jar will meet you. Follow him to the house he enters. Say to the owner of the house, ‘The teacher says to you, “Where is the guestroom where I can eat the Passover meal with my disciples?’” He will show you a large upstairs room, already furnished. Make preparations there.” They went and found everything just as he had told them, and they prepared the Passover meal.

When the time came, Jesus took his place at the table, and the apostles joined him. He said to them, “I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. I tell you, I won’t eat it until it is fulfilled in God’s kingdom.” After taking a cup and giving thanks, he said, “Take this and share it among yourselves. I tell you that from now on I won’t drink from the fruit of the vine until God’s kingdom has come.” After taking the bread and giving thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, “This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” In the same way, he took the cup after the meal and said, “This cup is the new covenant by my blood, which is poured out for you. “But look! My betrayer is with me; his hand is on this table. The Human One goes just as it has been determined. But how terrible it is for that person who betrays him.” They began to argue among themselves about which of them it could possibly be who would do this.

An argument broke out among the disciples over which one of them should be regarded as the greatest. But Jesus said to them, “The kings of the Gentiles rule over their subjects, and those in authority over them are called ‘friends of the people.’ But that’s not the way it will be with you. Instead, the greatest among you must become like a person of lower status and the leader like a servant. So which one is greater, the one who is seated at the table or the one who serves at the table? Isn’t it the one who is seated at the table? But I am among you as one who serves. “You are the ones who have continued with me in my trials. ²⁹ And I confer royal power on you just as my Father granted royal power to me. ³⁰ Thus you will eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and you will sit on thrones overseeing the twelve tribes of Israel.

Observation

The annual weeklong Festival of Unleavened Bread, with the Passover meal, reminded Hebrews of their defining story: God rescuing them from Egypt (cf. Exodus 12:1-18). Jesus shared the Passover meal with his disciples. With the cross just ahead, Jesus said for them the bread and wine would point to his even greater act of giving himself to rescue us from sin and death.

Application

Jesus said, “The kings of the Gentiles rule over their subjects, and those in authority over them are called ‘friends of the people.’” But in God’s kingdom, Jesus said, “That’s not the way it will be with you...the greatest among you must become...like a servant.” Where do you have power (parent, boss, teacher, pastor, public office, etc.)? How can you use your power to serve others?

Prayer

Living Lord, I rejoice in your saving acts in the past. But even more, I eagerly look forward to the day when you fully establish your kingdom. Keep me faithfully on track until that day. Amen.

Saturday, April 1

Scripture: Luke 22:31-62

“Simon, Simon, look! Satan has asserted the right to sift you all like wheat. However, I have prayed for you that your faith won’t fail. When you have returned, strengthen your brothers and sisters.” Peter responded, “Lord, I’m ready to go with you, both to prison and to death!” Jesus replied, “I tell you, Peter, the rooster won’t crow today before you have denied three times that you know me.”

Jesus said to them, “When I sent you out without a wallet, bag, or sandals, you didn’t lack anything, did you?” They said, “Nothing.” Then he said to them, “But now, whoever has a wallet must take it, and likewise a bag. And those who don’t own a sword must sell their clothes and buy one. I tell you that this scripture must be fulfilled in relation to me: *And he was counted among criminals*. Indeed, what’s written about me is nearing completion.” They said to him, “Lord, look, here are two swords.” He replied, “Enough of that!”

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

While Jesus was still speaking, a crowd appeared, and the one called Judas, one of the Twelve, was leading them. He approached Jesus to kiss him. Jesus said to him, “Judas, would you betray the Human One with a kiss?” When those around him recognized what was about to happen, they said, “Lord, should we fight with our swords?” One of them struck the high priest’s servant, cutting off his right ear. Jesus responded, “Stop! No more of this!” He touched the slave’s ear and healed him. Then Jesus said to the chief priests, the officers of the temple guard, and the elders who had come to get him, “Have you come with swords and clubs to arrest me, as though I were a thief? Day after day I was with you in the temple, but you didn’t arrest me. But this is your time, when darkness rules.”

After they arrested Jesus, they led him away and brought him to the high priest’s house. Peter followed from a distance. When they lit a fire in the middle of the courtyard and sat down together, Peter sat among them. Then a servant woman saw him sitting in the firelight. She stared at him and said, “This man was with him too.” But Peter denied it, saying, “Woman, I don’t know him!” A little while later, someone else saw him and said, “You are one of them too.” But Peter said, “Man, I’m not!” An hour or so later, someone else insisted, “This man must have been with him, because he is a Galilean too.” Peter responded, “Man, I don’t know what you are talking about!” At that very moment, while he was still speaking, a rooster crowed. The Lord turned and looked straight at Peter, and Peter remembered the Lord’s words: “Before a rooster crows today, you will deny me three times.” And Peter went out and cried uncontrollably.

Observation

“Lord,” Peter said defiantly, “I’m ready to go with you, both to prison and to death!” Little did he know that he wasn’t at all “ready” for that. Jesus knew him better than he knew himself. After Jesus’ arrest, Peter heatedly denied three times having been with Jesus. Then a rooster crowed, Jesus looked at him, and Peter “went out and cried uncontrollably.”

Application

All four gospels tell of Peter’s humiliating failure. Yet when Luke and the others wrote, Peter had been a brave church leader Rome martyred around 64-65 A.D. Peter probably openly told about his failure, and the forgiveness and hope he found in its wake. When have you grown through facing a failure openly and learning from it by God’s grace?

Prayer

Lord Jesus, like Peter, I keep finding a need to grow even in areas I thought I was done with. Thank you for your ongoing grace, for urging me to grow even when I'm comfortable. Amen.