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table of contents

introduction	4
luke 1.⁵⁻⁷	6
luke 1.⁸⁻¹⁷	7
luke 1.¹⁸⁻²⁵	9
luke 1.²⁶⁻³³	10
luke 1.³⁴⁻³⁸	12
luke 1.³⁹⁻⁴⁵	13
luke 1.⁴⁶⁻⁵⁶— just scripture	14
luke 1.⁴⁶⁻⁵⁶	16
luke 1.⁵⁷⁻⁶⁶	18
luke 1.⁶⁷⁻⁸⁰	19
luke 2.¹⁻⁷	21
luke 2.¹⁻⁷— atonement	22
luke 2.⁸⁻¹⁴	23
luke 2.¹⁵⁻²⁰	25
luke 2.²¹⁻²⁴	26
luke 2.²⁵⁻³⁵	27
luke 2.³⁶⁻³⁹	28
luke 2.⁴⁰⁻⁵²	29
luke 3.¹⁻⁶	31
luke 3.⁷⁻¹⁴— just scripture	32
luke 3.¹⁵⁻²⁰	34
luke 3.²¹⁻²²	35
luke 4.¹⁻⁴	36
luke 4.⁵⁻⁸	38
luke 4.⁹⁻¹³	39
luke 4.¹⁴⁻²²— atonement	41
luke 4.²³⁻³⁰	43

luke 4. ³¹⁻³⁶	44
luke 4. ³⁷⁻³⁹	45
luke 4. ⁴⁰⁻⁴⁴	46
matthew 4. ²³ ; 9. ³⁵ & luke 4. ⁴³ — jesus and the kingdom or rule of god (questionary 4) ...	47
luke 5. ¹⁻¹¹	48
luke 5. ¹²⁻¹⁶ — atonement.....	50
luke 5. ¹⁷⁻²⁶	52
luke 5. ²⁷⁻³²	54
luke 5. ³³⁻³⁹	55
luke 6. ¹⁻⁵	56
luke 6. ⁶⁻¹¹	57
luke 6. ¹²⁻¹⁶	58
luke 6. ¹⁷⁻¹⁹	59
luke 6. ²⁰ & matthew 5. ³ — (part 1) jesus & the kingdom or rule of god (questionary 6)...	60
luke 6. ²⁰ & matthew 5. ³ — (part 2) jesus & the kingdom or rule of god (questionary 7)...	62
luke 6. ²⁰ & matthew 5. ³ — (part 3) jesus & the kingdom or rule of god (questionary 8)...	64
luke 6. ²⁰⁻²⁶ — just scripture	67
luke 6. ²⁷⁻³⁰	69
luke 6. ³¹⁻³⁶	70
luke 6. ³⁷⁻³⁸	71
luke 6. ³⁹⁻⁴²	72
luke 6. ⁴³⁻⁴⁵	73
luke 6. ⁴⁶⁻⁴⁹	74
luke 7. ³⁶⁻⁵⁰ — atonement.....	75
luke 8. ²⁶⁻³⁹ — atonement.....	77
luke 8. ³⁴⁻³⁹	80
luke 9. ^{28-36, 44-45}	82
luke 9. ⁵¹⁻⁵⁶	84
luke 10. ³⁸⁻⁴²	86
matthew 6. ¹⁰ & luke 11. ² — jesus & the kingdom or rule of god (questionary 10).....	87
luke 15. ¹⁻⁷ — lent.....	89
luke 17. ³⁻⁶ — lent.....	90
luke 18. ⁹⁻¹⁴	92
luke 18. ²²⁻²⁷ — just scripture.....	93
luke 18. ³¹⁻³⁴	94
luke 19. ^{30, 35-38}	95

luke 21.¹⁻⁴	96
luke 21.³²⁻³⁶	97
luke 22.¹⁴⁻²⁰	98
luke 22.³⁹⁻⁴⁴ — atonement.....	99
luke 22.³⁹⁻⁴⁶ — lent	101
luke 22.⁴⁷⁻⁵³ —lent	103
luke 22.⁵⁴⁻⁶² — lent	105
luke 22.⁶³⁻⁷¹ — lent	106
luke 23.¹⁻⁷ — lent.....	107
luke 23.⁸⁻¹² —lent.....	108
luke 23.¹³⁻²⁵ — lent	109
luke 23.²⁶⁻³¹ — lent	110
luke 23.³²⁻³⁸ — lent	111
luke 23.³⁹⁻⁴³ — lent	112
luke 23.⁴⁴⁻⁴⁹ — lent	113
luke 24.¹⁻¹² — lent.....	114
luke 24.¹⁻¹² — atonement.....	116
luke 24.¹³⁻²⁴	118
luke 24.²⁵⁻²⁷	120
luke 24.²⁸⁻³²	122
luke 24.³³⁻⁴³	123
luke 24.⁴⁴⁻⁴⁹	125
luke 24.⁵⁰⁻⁵³	126

Introduction



The image of a small portion of Michelangelo's fresco, "Creation," found above serves as metaphor for this page's means and ends.

- ? How would you characterize God's arm in the fresco?
- ? How would you characterize Adam's arm?
- ? What is the message in Adam's limp wrist? In the fact that his arm rests on his knee?
- ? How does Adam, as painted in Michelangelo's fresco, represent all of us as we engage in scripture study and seek to understand scripture, scripture's divine author and our relationship to Him?
- ? How does Adam, as painted in Michelangelo's fresco, represent all of us as we seek God's enlivening, strengthening, and saving influence and presence in our daily lives?

Michelangelo reminds us of our desperate need for God's presence in our lives if we are to follow Him and be all that He hopes us to be. In relation to this page and its purposes, we are in need of God's help as we seek to understand and apply scripture.

The questions we posed and our brief commentary concerning the fresco represent an example of our approach to each scripture reading.

Scripture readings are accompanied by general and passage-specific questions to ponder along with brief comments. In addition to the passage-specific questions associated with each reading, the reader can apply the following **general questions** to most readings. These questions come from the purposes of scripture as identified in the introduction to our site, ponderthescriptures.com, found on the site's home page

- What does this reading reveal about the character of God?
- How and what does this reading testify of Christ?
- What wisdom and knowledge does this reading provide?
- How does this reading direct the way you think and act?
- Of what dangers does this reading warn? How does it help you avoid these dangers?
- How does this reading gladden your heart, encourage you, and give you hope?
- How does this reading expand your vision and increase your expectations of the possible?
- What does this reading discern or "read" about you?
- How will you apply this reading to your life, to how you relate with others, and to how you relate to Father, Son, and Holy Spirit?

It is not intended that the reader ponder every question. We introduce numerous and varied questions in hopes that readers will find a question or two that catches their imagination and interest, seems pertinent to their lives, and provides an opportunity for meaningful pondering and further spiritual insight. In addition, if the reader wishes, the many and varied ponder questions allow the reader to spend additional time to consider passages from various perspectives.

Finally, we suggest that during and after your reading and pondering experience you consider how you can incorporate your thoughts and feelings from the scripture reading into your personal prayer life. As you pray, share with Heavenly Father what you thought and felt as you studied and pondered. In your prayer, seek further insight from a God who is anxious to reveal himself, his will, and his interest in our lives. Incorporating your reading and pondering into your prayers can, we think, enliven a prayer life that can all too easily become mundane, mechanical, and rote.

Luke 1.⁵⁻⁷

⁵There was in the days of Herod, the king of Judæa, a certain priest named Zacharias, of the course of Abia: and his wife was of the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elisabeth. ⁶And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless. ⁷And they had no child, because that Elisabeth was barren, and they both were now well stricken in years.

Questionary

Today's reading represents the first of sixteen related to Luke's introduction. After a four-verse preface to his work, Luke launched into the story he has to tell. Luke 1.⁵-2.⁵² can be read as a sort of introduction to his work. Luke does what most authors do in an introduction. He summarizes his work, his message, and what he hopes the reader will learn.

Luke's introduction comes in the form of eight narratives, each accompanied by an "oracle." By oracle, I mean "a divine announcement." The first seven oracles come from the mouth of angels, men, and women—all inspired by the Holy Spirit of God. The eighth and final oracle comes from the very mouth of God Himself. Today's reading is the first of three readings in this first narrative (verses 5-25) with its accompanying oracle (verses 13-17).

1. Jewish names often have a symbolic meaning. Do some research to determine the meaning of Zacharias and Elisabeth.
 - ? What do these names mean?
 - ? What is the significance of these names in relation to Luke's message and the life and ministry of Jesus?
 - ? How does God "remember" through Jesus Christ, the commitments he had made to Israel?
 - ? What had God covenanted to do through a redeemer?
2. Luke records that "they had no child, because that Elisabeth was barren."
 - ? In what other scripture stories, are couples childless due to the wife's barrenness?
3. Luke identifies Zacharias and Elisabeth as "righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless."
 - ? What does this actually mean?
 - ? What is the relationship between being legalistic about "commandments and ordinances" and being moral and ethical?
 - ? How does John's response to the angel's promise of a son (verses 18-20) show that Zacharias' "blamelessness" is not quite as comprehensive as Luke might have us at first think, or that we might at first imagine?

Luke 1.⁸⁻¹⁷

⁸And *while he executed the priest's office before God in the order of his course, ⁹According to the custom of the priest's office, his lot was to burn incense when he went into the temple of the Lord. ¹⁰And the whole multitude of the people were praying without at the time of incense. ¹¹And there appeared unto him an angel of the Lord standing on the right side of the altar of incense. ¹²And when Zacharias saw him, he was troubled, and fear fell upon him. ¹³But the angel said unto him,

“Fear not, Zacharias:
thy prayer is heard;
and thy wife Elisabeth shall bear thee a son,
and thou shalt call his name John.
¹⁴And thou shalt have joy and gladness;
and many shall rejoice at his birth.
¹⁵For he shall be great in the sight of the Lord,
and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink;
and he shall be filled with the Holy Ghost,
even from his mother's womb.
¹⁶And many of the children of Israel
shall he turn to the Lord their God.
¹⁷And he shall go before him
in the spirit and power of Elias,
to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children,
and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just;
to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.”

Q

uestionary

Today's reading represents the second of sixteen related to Luke's introduction. After a four-verse preface to his work, Luke launched into the story he has to tell. Luke 1.⁵-2.⁵² can be read as a sort of introduction to his work. Luke does what most authors do in an introduction. He summarizes his work, his message, and what he hopes the reader will learn.

Luke's introduction comes in the form of eight narratives, each accompanied by an “oracle.” By oracle, I mean “a divine announcement.” The first seven oracles come from the mouth of angels, men, and women—all inspired by the Holy Spirit of God. The eighth and final oracle comes from the very mouth of God Himself. Today's reading contains the first oracle.

1. John's name, Yohanan, means “Yahweh is merciful.”
 - ? John's name is central to Luke's message, and symbolic of Jesus' service in the life of so many. Take some time to review Luke's Gospel and identify individuals who experienced mercy in their encounter with Jesus.
 - ? The “joy and gladness” that John would bring to his parents is symbolic of the “joy and gladness” that Jesus would bring to so many. Take some time to review Luke's Gospel and identify those who were gladdened by their encounter with Jesus.
2. John's father learned that his son would labor with the spirit of Elijah and “turn the hearts of the fathers to their children.” John labored entirely outside the temple and its perspectives. In fact, he was almost certainly opposed to the temple and its personnel.
 - ? So, what does this idea of the hearts of parents being turned to their children mean outside the temple?
 - ? What additional thoughts to the preceding question does the following Tanakh Translation of Malachi suggest to your mind?

“He shall reconcile parents with children and children with their parents...”

- ? How does Jesus continue and amplify John's message and this objective?
- ? How do you feel when you contemplate that John's and Jesus' work was the work of "reconciliation"?

Luke 1.¹⁸⁻²⁵

¹⁸And Zacharias said unto the angel, “Whereby shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife well stricken in years.”

¹⁹And the angel answering said unto him, “I am Gabriel, that stand in the presence of God; and am sent to speak unto thee, and to shew thee these glad tidings. ²⁰And, behold, thou shalt be dumb, and not able to speak, until the day that these things shall be performed, because thou believest not my words, which shall be fulfilled in their season.”

²¹And the people waited for Zacharias, and marvelled that he tarried so long in the temple. ²²And when he came out, he could not speak unto them: and they perceived that he had seen a vision in the temple: for he beckoned unto them, and remained speechless.

²³And it came to pass, that, as soon as the days of his ministration were accomplished, he departed to his own house. ²⁴And after those days his wife Elisabeth conceived, and hid herself five months, saying, ²⁵“Thus hath the Lord dealt with me in the days wherein he looked on me, to take away my reproach among men.”

Questionary

Today’s reading represents the third of sixteen related to Luke’s introduction. After a four-verse preface to his work, Luke launched into the story he has to tell. Luke 1.⁵-2.⁵² can be read as a sort of introduction to his work. Luke does what most authors do in an introduction. He summarizes his work, his message, and what he hopes the reader will learn.

Luke’s introduction comes in the form of eight narratives, each accompanied by an “oracle.” By oracle, I mean “a divine announcement.” The first seven oracles come from the mouth of angels, men, and women—all inspired by the Holy Spirit of God. The eighth and final oracle comes from the very mouth of God Himself. Today’s reading contains Zachariah’s initial response to the first oracle as uttered by the angel Gabriel.

1. In response to the angel’s promise that he and Elisabeth would have a son, Zachariah asked, “Whereby shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife well stricken in years.”
 - ? What is the tone and tenor of these questions? Why do you answer as you do?
 - ? What do you think and feel when you hear that a couple who had been barren in their younger, more “fertile” years will have a child in their “golden years”?
2. When a priest exited the temple after offering the incense, the expectation was that he would offer a prayer of blessing for those in attendance. But when Zachariah left the temple, “he could not speak unto them,” but “beckoned unto them, and remained speechless.”
 - ? How does the awareness of the expectation impact the way you visualize and feel about Zachariah’s handicap?
3. Upon becoming pregnant, Elisabeth felt that God had “take[n] away my reproach among men.”
 - ? How do Elisabeth’s feelings of release from shame and reproach relate to Luke’s greater message concerning Jesus and his service toward others?
 - ? Why, do you think, did Elisabeth hide her pregnancy through the first five months?

Luke 1.²⁶⁻³³

²⁶And in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God unto a city of Galilee, named Nazareth, ²⁷To a virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin's name was Mary. ²⁸And the angel came in unto her, and said,

“Hail, thou that art highly favoured,
the Lord is with thee:
blessed art thou among women.”

²⁹And when she saw him, she was troubled at his saying, and cast in her mind what manner of salutation this should be. ³⁰And the angel said unto her,

“Fear not, Mary:
for thou hast found favour with God.
³¹And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb,
and bring forth a son,
and shalt call his name JESUS.

³²He shall be great,
and shall be called the Son of the Highest:
and the Lord God shall give unto him
the throne of his father David:

³³And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever;
and of his kingdom there shall be no end.”

Q

uestionary

This reading is the 2nd in a series of Advent readings and post-Advent readings that will continue through the end of December.

It also represents the fourth of sixteen readings related to Luke's introduction. After a four-verse preface to his work, Luke launched into the story he has to tell. Luke 1.⁵-2.⁵² can be read as a sort of introduction to his work. Luke does what most authors do in an introduction. He summarizes his work, his message, and what he hopes the reader will learn.

Luke's introduction comes in the form of eight narratives, each accompanied by an “oracle.” By oracle, I mean “a divine announcement.” The first seven oracles come from the mouth of angels, men, and women—all inspired by the Holy Spirit of God. The eighth and final oracle comes from the very mouth of God Himself. This reading contains the second oracle.

1. The angel bestows several names, titles, and honors upon Mary's son.
 - ? What are those names, titles, and honors?
 - ? What is the significance of each?
 - ? What evidences do you find in Jesus' life, ministry, death, and continued ministry from the right hand of God that justify such exalted status?
2. The angel informs Mary that her son “shall be called the Son of the Highest.”
 - ? This appellation is surely meant to convey the truth that Jesus is God's son. But can it mean anything in addition to this?
 - ? How would you feel about understanding this to also indicate that Jesus is the “highest of sons”?
 - ? Take a moment to identify two or three passages that, in your mind, bear witness to Jesus' preeminence over all other sons and daughters of God.
 - ? Did you have these on your list? Colossians 1.¹⁵⁻¹⁹; John 1.²⁹⁻³⁰; Psalm 113.⁴⁻⁶; Psalm 148.¹³? Take a moment to consider the message of each.
3. The angel also informs Mary that in addition to being the Son of God her son is a son of David and will sit on his throne.

- ? In what ways is Jesus similar to David?
 - ? In what ways is he different than, and superior to David?
 - ? What are the implications of Jesus' world-wide rule for the world's kingdoms?
 - ? Given what you see and hear every day in the news, how are the kingdoms of this world likely to respond to his claim to world rule?
4. The angel also informs Mary that she is to name her son, Jesus or Joshua.
- ? What is the significance of this name?
 - ? In what ways is Jesus similar to and different from Joshua of Old Testament fame?
 - ? What do you think and feel about Jesus when you consider the following superlative words that are used in relation to him: "great," "highest," "for ever," "no end"?
 - ? How do these personal superlatives that are related to him and his character impact you in your daily life?

Luke 1.³⁴⁻³⁸

³⁴Then said Mary unto the angel, “How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?”

³⁵And the angel answered and said unto her,

“The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee,
and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee:
therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee
shall be called the Son of God.

³⁶And, behold, thy cousin Elisabeth,
she hath also conceived a son in her old age:
and this is the sixth month with her,
who was called barren.

³⁷For with God
nothing shall be impossible.”

³⁸And Mary said, “Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word.”
And the angel departed from her.

Q

uestionary

Today’s reading represents the fifth of sixteen related to Luke’s introduction. After a four-verse preface to his work, Luke launched into the story he has to tell. Luke 1.⁵-2.⁵² can be read as a sort of introduction to his work. Luke does what most authors do in an introduction. He summarizes his work, his message, and what he hopes the reader will learn.

Luke’s introduction comes in the form of eight narratives, each accompanied by an “oracle.” By oracle, I mean “a divine announcement.” The first seven oracles come from the mouth of angels, men, and women—all inspired by the Holy Spirit of God. The eighth and final oracle comes from the very mouth of God Himself. Today’s reading contains the second oracle.

1. Mary’s response to the announcement that she would become pregnant was: “How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?”—i.e., “how can I become pregnant without having a husband with whom I can have intercourse?”
 - ? How do you feel about this response?
 - ? How reasonable is her response?
 - ? How is the angel’s reminder that her cousin, Elisabeth, “hath also conceived a son in her old age,” serve to address Mary’s question?
 - ? Based on common experience, which woman’s pregnancy seems less likely?
2. Abraham’s wife, Sarah, another elderly woman who questioned an angelic promise that she would bare a son in spite of the barrenness she had suffered during her more fertile years, was asked, “Is any thing too hard for the LORD?” (Gen. 18.¹⁴) In assuring Mary that his promise of a son would be fulfilled, the angel declared,

“For with God nothing shall be impossible.”

- ? What do you think and feel when you consider these two similar responses to the two reasonable concerns?
- ? To what challenging experiences in your own life could you apply these two angel’s words of assurance?

Luke 1.³⁹⁻⁴⁵

³⁹And Mary arose in those days, and went into the hill country with haste, into a city of Juda; ⁴⁰And entered into the house of Zacharias, and saluted Elisabeth. ⁴¹And it came to pass, when Elisabeth heard the salutation of Mary, the babe leaped in her womb; and Elisabeth was filled with the Holy Ghost: ⁴²and she spake out with a loud voice, and said,

“Blessed art thou among women,
and blessed is the fruit of thy womb.

⁴³And whence is this to me,
that the mother of my Lord should come to me?

⁴⁴For, lo, as soon as the voice of thy salutation sounded in mine ears,
the babe leaped in my womb for joy.

⁴⁵And blessed is she that believed:
for there shall be a performance of those things which were told her from the Lord.”

Q

uestionary

Today’s reading represents the sixth of sixteen related to Luke’s introduction. After a four-verse preface to his work, Luke launched into the story he has to tell. Luke 1.⁵-2.⁵² can be read as a sort of introduction to his work. Luke does what most authors do in an introduction. He summarizes his work, his message, and what he hopes the reader will learn.

Luke’s introduction comes in the form of eight narratives, each accompanied by an “oracle.” By oracle, I mean “a divine announcement.” The first seven oracles come from the mouth of angels, men, and women—all inspired by the Holy Spirit of God. The eighth and final oracle comes from the very mouth of God Himself. Today’s reading contains the third oracle.

1. Luke reports the John’s leapt in his mother’s womb at the presence of Jesus, still in his mother Mary’s womb.
 - ? What is the significance of the John’s leaping for joy?
 - ? What might Luke hope you to learn and consider from this experience?
 - ? Have you “leaped for joy” because of the Savior’s presence and ministry in your own life?
 - ? What could you do to deepen and increase your joy in the Savior?
2. Upon feeling her baby leap for joy, “Elisabeth was filled with the Holy Ghost.”
 - ? What function was the Holy Spirit playing in this notice?
 - ? What is the relationship between the bestowal of the Holy Spirit and Jesus?
 - ? What can you do to experience the realities and blessings of the Spirit’s direction in your own life?

Nephi says that when “ye receive the Holy Ghost; yea, then cometh the baptism of fire and of the Holy Ghost; and *then can ye speak with the tongue of angels, and shout praises unto the Holy One of Israel*” (2 Nephi 31.¹³).

- ? How does this passage relate to Elisabeth’s and John reaction to the Savior’s presence?
 - ? What role does the Holy Spirit play in whether we feel to joyfully praise Jesus or not?
3. Speaking to and of Mary, Elisabeth proclaimed, “blessed is she that believed.” The angel’s promise to Mary seemed pretty incredible to her, yet she believed that God could bring about the promised potentiality.
 - ? God may have revealed some potentialities concerning you that seem almost too big. What can you do to follow Mary’s example of faith and believe and act upon promises in your own life?

Luke 1.⁴⁶⁻⁵⁶— just scripture

⁴⁶And Mary said,

“My soul doth magnify the Lord,

⁴⁷And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour.

⁴⁸For he hath regarded the low estate of his handmaiden:

for, behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed.

⁴⁹For he that is mighty hath done to me great things;

and holy is his name.

⁵⁰And his mercy is on them that fear him

from generation to generation.

⁵¹He hath shewed strength with his arm;

he hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts.

⁵²He hath put down the mighty from their seats,

and exalted them of low degree.

⁵³He hath filled the hungry with good things;

and the rich he hath sent empty away.

⁵⁴He hath holpen his servant Israel,

in remembrance of his mercy;

⁵⁵As he spake to our fathers,

to Abraham, and to his seed for ever.”

⁵⁶And Mary abode with her about three months, and returned to her own house.

Questionary

Today’s reading represents the seventh of sixteen related to Luke’s introduction. After a four-verse preface to his work, Luke launched into the story he has to tell. Luke 1.⁵-2.⁵² can be read as a sort of introduction to his work. Luke does what most authors do in an introduction. He summarizes his work, his message, and what he hopes the reader will learn.

Luke’s introduction comes in the form of eight narratives, each accompanied by an “oracle.” By oracle, I mean “a divine announcement.” The first seven oracles come from the mouth of angels, men, and women—all inspired by the Holy Spirit of God. The eighth and final oracle comes from the very mouth of God Himself. Today’s reading contains the fourth oracle.

Today’s reading is called “Mary’s Magnificat.” In addition to being a passage we classify as a *Just Scripture*, it is also part of the traditional Christmas story that we retell year after year.

1. “Magnificat” means ‘to magnify’ or ‘exalt.’
 - ? What role does “magnification” play in Mary’s poem?
 - ? How does Mary “magnify” the Lord?
 - ? How does the Lord “magnify” Mary?
 - ? Who else is “magnified” in the poem?
 - ? How does the Lord “magnify” “them of low degree” and the “hungry”?
 - ? What impact does the Lord’s magnification of the low and hungry have on “the mighty” who govern and “the rich” who have everything a body could want?
2. In verses 50-54, Mary summarizes the work in which her son will engage during his ministry.
 - ? How would you summarize Mary’s insight into her son’s ministry and the results for which he will work?
 - ? How do you feel and what do you think when you contemplate that one of Jesus’ principle efforts will be to “remove the powerful from their thrones” and “remove all that the rich have”?
 - ? How does Jesus’ intentions toward the powerful and the rich relate to his intention to “scatter the proud in the imagination of their hearts”?

- ? What, do you think, do the hearts of the proud “imagine”?
- ? If we are to follow his example, minister as he ministers, and work for what he works, what would Mary’s Magnificat have you do?
- ? What will you do to be true to Jesus’ ministry and trying to accomplish his will?
- ? How is American Christianity doing as ministering as Jesus ministers?
- ? If it needs change or improvement, what can you do and say to work toward that change and improvement?

- ? How do you feel about the role reversals that Mary, mother of Jesus, describes in this passage?
- ? What did Jesus do during his earthly ministry to fulfil this aspect of his ministry?
- ? How does he continue to fulfil this aspect of his ministry from heaven?
- ? What do you think and feel about God when you consider the following superlative language: “Magnify the Lord,” “he that is *mighty*,” “done to me *great things*,” “he hath shewed *strength*,” “he hath...*exalted*,” “he hath *filled*”?
- ? What do you think and feel when you consider that this superlative language is aimed at a woman of “low estate,” “them of low degree,” and “the hungry,” i.e., vulnerable individuals and populations?
- ? What can you do to assist the Lord in the reversals his ministry intends and be true to this spirit of aid and comfort to the vulnerable?

Luke 1.⁴⁶⁻⁵⁶

- ⁴⁶And Mary said,
“My soul doth magnify the Lord,
⁴⁷And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour.
⁴⁸For he hath regarded the low estate of his handmaiden:
for, behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed.
⁴⁹For he that is mighty hath done to me great things;
and holy is his name.
⁵⁰And his mercy is on them that fear him
from generation to generation.
⁵¹He hath shewed strength with his arm;
he hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts.
⁵²He hath put down the mighty from their seats,
and exalted them of low degree.
⁵³He hath filled the hungry with good things;
and the rich he hath sent empty away.
⁵⁴He hath holpen his servant Israel,
in remembrance of his mercy;
⁵⁵As he spake to our fathers,
to Abraham, and to his seed for ever.”
⁵⁶And Mary abode with her about three months, and returned to her own house.

Q

uestionary

Today’s reading is the 16th in a series of Advent readings that will continue throughout the month of December.

Today’s reading represents the seventh of sixteen related to Luke’s introduction. After a four-verse preface to his work, Luke launched into the story he has to tell. Luke 1.⁵-2.⁵² can be read as a sort of introduction to his work. Luke does what most authors do in an introduction. He summarizes his work, his message, and what he hopes the reader will learn.

Luke’s introduction comes in the form of eight narratives, each accompanied by an “oracle.” By oracle, I mean “a divine announcement.” The first seven oracles come from the mouth of angels, men, and women—all inspired by the Holy Spirit of God. The eighth and final oracle comes from the very mouth of God Himself. Today’s reading contains the fourth oracle.

Today’s reading is called “Mary’s Magnificat.” In addition to being a passage we classify as a *Just Scripture*, it is also part of the traditional Christmas story that we retell year after year.

1. “Magnificat” means ‘to magnify’ or ‘exalt.’
 - ? What role does “magnification” play in Mary’s poem?
 - ? How does Mary “magnify” the Lord?
 - ? How does the Lord “magnify” Mary?
 - ? Who else is “magnified” in the poem?
 - ? How does the Lord “magnify” “them of low degree” and the “hungry”?
 - ? What impact does the Lord’s magnification of the low and hungry have on “the mighty” who govern and “the rich” who have everything a body could want?
2. In verses 50-54, Mary summarizes the work in which her son will engage during his ministry.
 - ? How would you summarize Mary’s insight into her son’s ministry and the results for which he will work?
 - ? How do you feel and what do you think when you contemplate that one of Jesus’ principle efforts will be to “remove the powerful from their thrones” and “remove all that the rich

- have”?
- ? How does Jesus’ intentions toward the powerful and the rich relate to his intention to “scatter the proud in the imagination of their hearts?
 - ? What, do you think, do the hearts of the proud “imagine”?
 - ? If we are to follow his example, minister as he ministers, and work for what he works, what would Mary’s Magnificat have you do?
 - ? What will you do to be true to Jesus’ ministry and trying to accomplish his will?
 - ? How is American Christianity doing as ministering as Jesus ministers?
 - ? If it needs change or improvement, what can you do and say to work toward that change and improvement?
- ? How do you feel about the role reversals that Mary, mother of Jesus, describes in this passage?
 - ? What did Jesus do during his earthly ministry to fulfil this aspect of his ministry?
 - ? How does he continue to fulfil this aspect of his ministry from heaven?
 - ? What do you think and feel about God when you consider the following superlative language: “Magnify the Lord,” “he that is *mighty*,” “done to me *great things*,” “he hath shewed *strength*,” “he hath...*exalted*,” “he hath *filled*”?
 - ? What do you think and feel when you consider that this superlative language is aimed at a woman of “low estate,” “them of low degree,” and “the hungry,” i.e., vulnerable individuals and populations?
 - ? What can you do during the Christmas season and, indeed, throughout the year to assist the Lord in the reversals his ministry intends and be true to this spirit of aid and comfort to the vulnerable?

Luke 1.⁵⁷⁻⁶⁶

⁵⁷Now Elisabeth's full time came that she should be delivered; and she brought forth a son. ⁵⁸And her neighbours and her cousins heard how the Lord had shewed great mercy upon her; and they rejoiced with her. ⁵⁹On the eighth day they came to circumcise the child; and they called him Zacharias, after the name of his father. ⁶⁰And his mother answered and said, "Not so; but he shall be called John."

⁶¹And they said unto her, "There is none of thy kindred that is called by this name." ⁶²And they made signs to his father, how he would have him called. ⁶³And he asked for a writing table, and wrote, saying, "His name is John."

And they marvelled all.

⁶⁴And his mouth was opened immediately, and his tongue loosed, and he spake, and praised God.

⁶⁵And fear came on all that dwelt round about them: and all these sayings were noised abroad throughout all the hill country of Judæa. ⁶⁶And all they that heard them laid them up in their hearts, saying, "What manner of child shall this be!"

And the hand of the Lord was with him.

Questionary

Today's reading represents the eighth of sixteen related to Luke's introduction. After a four-verse preface to his work, Luke launched into the story he has to tell. Luke 1.⁵-2.⁵² can be read as a sort of introduction to his work. Luke does what most authors do in an introduction. He summarizes his work, his message, and what he hopes the reader will learn.

Luke's introduction comes in the form of eight narratives, each accompanied by an "oracle." By oracle, I mean "a divine announcement." The first seven oracles come from the mouth of angels, men, and women—all inspired by the Holy Spirit of God. The eighth and final oracle comes from the very mouth of God Himself.

- ? How does today's reading contribute to introducing Luke's overall message?
 - ? What themes does he introduce that will be carried throughout his Gospel?
 - ? How does Luke's notice that Elisabeth's "neighbours and her cousins heard how the Lord had shewed great mercy upon her; and they rejoiced with her" signal at least two of his principle themes?
1. On the day that Elisabeth's son is to be circumcised and named, attendees are surprised to hear that he will be named 'John.'
 - ? What does John's name (Yohannan) mean?
 - ? How does his name serve as a sign to one of Luke's principle themes?
 - ? What examples from Luke's Gospel come to mind when you consider Jesus' mercy?
 2. Luke tells us that those who attended John's circumcision "marveled all" and that the region "laid up" in their hearts the things they were hearing about John and thought, "What manner of child shall this be!"
 - ? How does this prefigure the marvel and wonderment that Jesus will produce in people who meet him during his earthly ministry?
 - ? How does Jesus continue today to cause marvel and wonderment as he ministers from the right hand of God?
 - ? To what degree do you find wonderment and astonishment at Jesus' ministry today?
 - ? What do you see and experience him doing that is so surprising and joyous?

Luke 1.⁶⁷⁻⁸⁰

⁶⁷And his father Zacharias was filled with the Holy Ghost, and prophesied, saying,

⁶⁸Blessed be the Lord God of Israel;
for he hath visited and redeemed his people,
⁶⁹and hath raised up an horn of salvation
for us in the house of his servant David;
⁷⁰as he spake by the mouth of his holy prophets,
which have been since the world began:
⁷¹that we should be saved from our enemies,
and from the hand of all that hate us;
⁷²to perform the mercy promised to our fathers,
and to remember his holy covenant;
⁷³the oath which he sware to our father Abraham,
⁷⁴that he would grant unto us,
that we being delivered out of the hand of our enemies
might serve him without fear,
⁷⁵in holiness and righteousness before him,
all the days of our life.
⁷⁶And thou, child, shalt be called the prophet of the Highest:
for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord
to prepare his ways;
⁷⁷to give knowledge of salvation unto his people
by the remission of their sins,
⁷⁸through the tender mercy of our God;
whereby the dayspring from on high hath visited us,
⁷⁹to give light to them that sit in darkness
and in the shadow of death,
to guide our feet into the way of peace.

⁸⁰And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, and was in the deserts till the day of his shewing unto Israel.

Questionary

This reading is the 10th in a series of Advent readings and post-Advent readings that will continue through the end of December.

Today's reading also represents the ninth of sixteen related to Luke's introduction. After a four-verse preface to his work, Luke launched into the story he has to tell. Luke 1.⁵-2.⁵² can be read as a sort of introduction to his work. Luke does what most authors do in an introduction. He summarizes his work, his message, and what he hopes the reader will learn.

Luke's introduction comes in the form of eight narratives, each accompanied by an "oracle." By oracle, I mean "a divine announcement." The first seven oracles come from the mouth of angels, men, and women—all inspired by the Holy Spirit of God. The eighth and final oracle comes from the very mouth of God Himself. Today's reading contains the fifth oracle.

1. Zachariah says that God "raised up an horn of salvation."
? What does a "horn of salvation" mean to you?
2. The "horn of salvation" is found "in the house of his servant David." This "power of salvation" "saves" and "delivers" Israel from its enemies.
? Why is a horn used as a symbol of power?
? From what enemies does Jesus save Israel?

- ? What is the relationship between these enemies and the Kingdoms of this world that act in ways contrary to those of the Kingdom of God?
- 3. John the Baptist would “give knowledge of salvation unto his people by the remission of their sins, through the tender mercy of our God.”
 - ? How is the remission of sins the direct result of “the tender mercy of our God”?
 - ? How does the remission of sin “give knowledge of salvation”?
- 4. Zachariah speaks of Jesus as “the dayspring [rising sun] from on high.”
 - ? What does this mean to you?
- 5. Zachariah promises that Jesus will “guide our feet into the way of peace.”
 - ? How has he guided you “into the way of peace”?

Luke 2.¹⁻⁷

¹*In those days, that there went out a decree from Cæsar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed.

²(And this taxing was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria.) ³And all went to be taxed, every one into his own city.

⁴And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judæa, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem; (because he was of the house and lineage of David:) ⁵to be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child. ⁶*While they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered. ⁷And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn.

Q

uestionary

Today's reading is the 25th in a series of Advent readings that will continue throughout the month of December. It also represents a reading for Advent and the tenth of sixteen related to Luke's introduction. After a four-verse preface to his work, Luke launched into the story he has to tell. Luke 1.⁵-2.⁵² can be read as a sort of introduction to his work. Luke does what most authors do in an introduction. He summarizes his work, his message, and what he hopes the reader will learn.

Luke's introduction comes in the form of eight narratives, each accompanied by an "oracle." By oracle, I mean "a divine announcement." The first seven oracles come from the mouth of angels, men, and women—all inspired by the Holy Spirit of God. The eighth and final oracle comes from the very mouth of God Himself.

1. Today's reading is the first of three readings that cover the most traditional of Christmas readings, Luke 2.¹⁻²⁰.
 - ? What have you learned and felt in the past as you have personally read this part of the Christmas story or have heard it recited in various settings?
 - ? Have you learned or felt anything new as you have read this passage today?
2. Luke reports that Mary "wrapped [Jesus] in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger."
 - ? What are swaddling clothes? What, exactly, is a "manger"?
 - ? In addition to any "historical" reportage that this notice may involve, what greater significance might it hold concerning the character of Jesus and his relationship with the world?
 - ? What message might it possess in relation to Jesus' "atonement," or his "unity/connectedness to others, including you?"

Luke 2.¹⁻⁷— atonement

¹*In those days, that there went out a decree from Cæsar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed.

²(And this taxing was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria.) ³And all went to be taxed, every one into his own city.

⁴And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judæa, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem; (because he was of the house and lineage of David:) ⁵to be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child. ⁶*While they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered. ⁷And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn.

Q

uestionary

In addition to being a reading in our series of readings on Atonement that we entitle, “Sacrifice: What Jesus Suffered for us,”* today’s reading is also one of our Advent readings and represents the tenth of sixteen readings related to Luke’s introduction (Luke 1-2).

One of my central understandings of Jesus Christ and his ministry is that he and it represented a witness of God’s feelings of connectedness, attachment, linkage, participation, and unity with humankind. Rather than understanding the basic meaning of at-one-ment to be something like “expatiation,” or “propitiation” or “sacrifice,” etc., I understand its basic meaning as “connectedness,” “attachment,” “unity,” “oneness,” etc.

1. Today, we use the passage as a demonstration and evidence of the Savior’s unity and connectedness with us.
 - ? What have you learned and felt in the past as you have personally read this passage or heard it recited in various settings?
 - ? What light does it shed on Jesus’ at-one-ment and his willingness to participate in our individual lives and the kind of lives we all live?
2. Luke reports that Mary “wrapped [Jesus] in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger.”
 - ? What are swaddling clothes? What, exactly, is a “manger”?
 - ? In addition to any “historical” reportage that this notice may involve, what greater significance might it hold concerning the character of Jesus and his relationship with the world?
 - ? What message might it possess in relation to Jesus’ “atonement,” or his “unity/connectedness to others, including you?

* The following ten titles are part of our atonement series:

“Fall: Our Need of Atonement”

“Grace: The Savior’s Generous and Earnest Invitation”

“At-one-ment: The Savior’s unity and connectedness with us”

“Sacrifice: What Jesus Suffered for Us”

“Glorification: The Savior’s Resurrection, Ascension, and Enthronement”

“Justification: How We Repent and Change”

“Renewal: The Hope, Joy, Peace, and Power of Atonement”

“Sanctification: Imitating and living a life of Atonement”

“Thanksgiving: In Praise of Atonement”

“Song of the Righteous: A Song unto Me”

Luke 2.⁸⁻¹⁴

⁸And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. ⁹And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid. ¹⁰And the angel said unto them,

“Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy,
which shall be to all people.

¹¹For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour,
which is Christ the Lord.

¹²And this shall be a sign unto you;
ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes,
lying in a manger.”

¹³And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying,

¹⁴“Glory to God in the highest,
and on earth peace, good will toward men.”

Questionary

Today’s reading is the 26th in a series of Advent readings that will continue throughout the month of December.

Today’s reading represents the eleventh of sixteen related to Luke’s introduction. After a four-verse preface to his work, Luke launched into the story he has to tell. Luke 1.⁵-2.⁵² can be read as a sort of introduction to his work. Luke does what most authors do in an introduction. He summarizes his work, his message, and what he hopes the reader will learn.

Luke’s introduction comes in the form of eight narratives, each accompanied by an “oracle.” By oracle, I mean “a divine announcement.” The first seven oracles come from the mouth of angels, men, and women—all inspired by the Holy Spirit of God. The eighth and final oracle comes from the very mouth of God Himself. Today’s reading contains the sixth oracle.

1. Upon seeing the angel Gabriel, Zachariah “was troubled, and fear fell upon him” (Luke 1.¹²). Mary, upon seeing the same angel Gabriel, “was troubled” and was encouraged to “fear not” (Luke 1.²⁹⁻³⁰). When the shepherds saw “the angel of the Lord” they were “sore afraid.”
? What, do you think, were they all feeling in being “troubled” and “afraid”?
? Why, do you think, they were all “troubled” and “afraid”?
2. The shepherds were told that they had “good tidings of great joy” that was “to all people.”
? What do you think a few provincial Jewish shepherds made of this announcement that the “good tidings of great joy” would be “to all people.”
? What, do you think, did Luke want his readers to think and feel when they read this?
? How has the “good tidings of great joy” affected your life?
3. The shepherds were told that they would find “the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.”
? What, other than “historical narration” is the significance of Jesus being wrapped in rags and lying in an animal trough?
? How does it relate to Jesus’ mission to reveal the atonement or connectedness that he and his Father felt for humankind?
? How does the fact that Jesus was wrapped in rags and sleeping in an animal trough relate to this earlier passage from our Advent readings?

“...Christ Jesus: ⁶who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: ⁷but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: ⁸and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled

himself... (Philippians 2.⁵⁻⁸).

- ? What do you think and how do you feel when you contemplate Jesus, the great God, Yahweh, of the Old Testament, entering into a human body and being subjected to being dressed in rags and sleeping in an animal trough?
- 4. The angels speak of “peace” on earth and “good will toward men.”
 - ? Who feels the “good will toward men”?
 - ? How does an awareness of God’s positive feelings for humankind, best expressed in his sending his Son, work to produce “peace on earth”?

Luke 2.¹⁵⁻²⁰

¹⁵* As the angels were gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another, “Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us.”

¹⁶And they came with haste, and found Mary, and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger. ¹⁷And when they had seen it, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child. ¹⁸And all they that heard it wondered at those things which were told them by the shepherds. ¹⁹But Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart. ²⁰And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told unto them.

Q

uestionary

Today’s reading is the 28th in a series of Advent readings (this one “post-Advent”) that will continue throughout the month of December.

Today’s reading represents the twelfth of sixteen related to Luke’s introduction. After a four-verse preface to his work, Luke launched into the story he has to tell. Luke 1.⁵-2.⁵² can be read as a sort of introduction to his work. Luke does what most authors do in an introduction. He summarizes his work, his message, and what he hopes the reader will learn.

Luke’s introduction comes in the form of eight narratives, each accompanied by an “oracle.” By oracle, I mean “a divine announcement.” The first seven oracles come from the mouth of angels, men, and women—all inspired by the Holy Spirit of God. The eighth and final oracle comes from the very mouth of God Himself. Today’s reading contains the sixth oracle.

1. In today’s reading, we are told several things about the shepherds.

? What do you learn about the shepherds, their reaction to the angels’ message, and their feelings about seeing the babe, Jesus?

We learn that after the angels’ message about Jesus’ birth, the shepherds “came with haste.”

We learn that upon seeing the babe, Jesus, “they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child.”

We learn that “the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God.”

? How might you imitate the shepherds in each of these responses?

Luke 2.²¹⁻²⁴

²¹And when eight days were accomplished for the circumcising of the child, his name was called JESUS, which was so named of the angel before he was conceived in the womb. ²²And when the days of her purification according to the law of Moses were accomplished, they brought him to Jerusalem, to present him to the Lord; ²³(As it is written in the law of the Lord, Every male that openeth the womb shall be called holy to the Lord;) ²⁴and to offer a sacrifice according to that which is said in the law of the Lord, “A pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons.”

Q

uestionary

Today’s reading represents the thirteenth of sixteen related to Luke’s introduction. After a four-verse preface to his work, Luke launched into the story he has to tell. Luke 1.⁵-2.⁵² can be read as a sort of introduction to his work. Luke does what most authors do in an introduction. He summarizes his work, his message, and what he hopes the reader will learn.

Luke’s introduction comes in the form of eight narratives, each accompanied by an “oracle.” By oracle, I mean “a divine announcement.” The first seven oracles come from the mouth of angels, men, and women—all inspired by the Holy Spirit of God. The eighth and final oracle comes from the very mouth of God Himself.

1. On the day of his circumcision, Jesus was formerly named.
 - ? Take a moment to explore the meaning of Jesus’ (Joshua’s) name?
 - ? In what ways is Jesus like Joshua of the Old Testament?
 - ? In what ways is Jesus unlike Joshua of the Old Testament?
2. Eight days after birth, Jesus was circumcised.
 - ? Take a few minutes to explore the significance and symbolism of circumcision?

Paul teaches that

“he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: but he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God” (Romans 2.²⁸⁻²⁹).

- ? What does it mean, do you think, to “circumcise the heart”?

Luke 2.²⁵⁻³⁵

²⁵And, behold, there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon; and the same man was just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel: and the Holy Ghost was upon him. ²⁶And it was revealed unto him by the Holy Ghost, that he should not see death, before he had seen the Lord's Christ. ²⁷And he came by the Spirit into the temple: and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him after the custom of the law, ²⁸then took he him up in his arms, and blessed God, and said,

²⁹“Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace,
according to thy word:

³⁰for mine eyes have seen thy salvation,

³¹which thou hast prepared before the face of all people;

³²a light to lighten the Gentiles,

and the glory of thy people Israel.”

³³And Joseph and his mother marvelled at those things which were spoken of him. ³⁴And Simeon blessed them, and said unto Mary his mother,

“Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel;
and for a sign which shall be spoken against;

³⁵(Yea, a sword shall pierce through thy own soul also,)

that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.”

Questionary

Today's reading is the 23rd in a series of Advent readings that will continue throughout the month of December.

Today's reading also represents the fourteenth of sixteen related to Luke's introduction. After a four-verse preface to his work, Luke launched into the story he has to tell. Luke 1.⁵-2.⁵² can be read as a sort of introduction to his work. Luke does what most authors do in an introduction. He summarizes his work, his message, and what he hopes the reader will learn.

Luke's introduction comes in the form of eight narratives, each accompanied by an “oracle.” By oracle, I mean “a divine announcement.” The first seven oracles come from the mouth of angels, men, and women—all inspired by the Holy Spirit of God. The eighth and final oracle comes from the very mouth of God Himself. Today's reading contains the seventh oracle.

1. Luke informs us that Simeon was “waiting for the consolation of Israel.”
 - ? What does this mean to you?
 - ? How did Jesus serve to “console” Israel?
 - ? How has Jesus “consoled” you?
2. Simeon speaks of Jesus as “the glory of [the] people Israel.”
 - ? How is Jesus the “glory” of Israel?
3. Simeon also speaks of Jesus as being “set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel.”
 - ? How does Jesus serve to bring about “the fall” of many?
 - ? How does he serve to bring the “rising” of many?
4. Finally, Simeon speaks of Jesus as “a sign” that is both “spoken against” and that serves to “reveal” “the thoughts of many hearts.”
 - ? How does Jesus serve as a “sign,” and what does he “signify”?
 - ? What is meant by “the thoughts of” the “heart”?
 - ? How does Jesus serve to reveal an individual's true character?

Luke 2.³⁶⁻³⁹

³⁶And there was one Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Aser: she was of a great age, and had lived with an husband seven years from her virginity; ³⁷and she was a widow of about fourscore and four years, which departed not from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day. ³⁸And she coming in that instant gave thanks likewise unto the Lord, and spake of him to all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem.

³⁹And when they had performed all things according to the law of the Lord, they returned into Galilee, to their own city Nazareth.

Questionary

Today's reading represents the fifteenth of sixteen related to Luke's introduction. After a four-verse preface to his work, Luke launched into the story he has to tell. Luke 1.⁵-2.⁵² can be read as a sort of introduction to his work. Luke does what most authors do in an introduction. He summarizes his work, his message, and what he hopes the reader will learn.

Luke's introduction comes in the form of eight narratives, each accompanied by an "oracle." By oracle, I mean "a divine announcement." The first seven oracles come from the mouth of angels, men, and women—all inspired by the Holy Spirit of God. The eighth and final oracle comes from the very mouth of God Himself.

1. Anna, we are informed, "served God with fastings and prayers night and day."
 - ? How does fasting "serve God"?
 - ? How does praying "serve God"?
2. Upon seeing Jesus, Anna "spoke of him to all them that looked for redemption."
 - ? How do you feel and what do you think when you contemplate Anna's enthusiastic and forthright sharing concerning Jesus?
 - ? How might you follow Anna's example and speak more forthrightly and enthusiastically about Jesus and your own experiences with him?

Luke 2.⁴⁰⁻⁵²

⁴⁰And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom: and the grace of God was upon him. ⁴¹Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the feast of the passover. ⁴²And when he was twelve years old, they went up to Jerusalem after the custom of the feast. ⁴³And when they had fulfilled the days, as they returned, the child Jesus tarried behind in Jerusalem; and Joseph and his mother knew not of it. ⁴⁴But they, supposing him to have been in the company, went a day's journey; and they sought him among their kinsfolk and acquaintance. ⁴⁵And when they found him not, they turned back again to Jerusalem, seeking him.

⁴⁶After three days they found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them, and asking them questions. ⁴⁷And all that heard him were astonished at his understanding and answers. ⁴⁸And when they saw him, they were amazed: and his mother said unto him, "Son, why hast thou thus dealt with us? Behold, thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing."

⁴⁹And he said unto them,

"How is it that ye sought me?

Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?"

⁵⁰And they understood not the saying which he spake unto them.

⁵¹And he went down with them, and came to Nazareth, and was subject unto them: but his mother kept all these sayings in her heart. ⁵²And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man.

Questionary

Today's reading represents the sixteenth of sixteen related to Luke's introduction. After a four-verse preface to his work, Luke launched into the story he has to tell. Luke 1.⁵-2.⁵² can be read as a sort of introduction to his work. Luke does what most authors do in an introduction. He summarizes his work, his message, and what he hopes the reader will learn.

Luke's introduction comes in the form of eight narratives, each accompanied by an "oracle." By oracle, I mean "a divine announcement." The first seven oracles come from the mouth of angels, men, and women—all inspired by the Holy Spirit of God. The eighth and final oracle comes from the very mouth of God Himself. Today's reading contains the eighth oracle.

1. Jesus had no doubt spoken many a word during his first 12 years of life. He had apparently even spoken impressively as he sat in the temple with religious thinkers and leaders. But Luke chooses these as Jesus' first recorded words

"How is it that ye sought me?

Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?"

- ? Why, do you suppose, did Luke choose these words as Jesus' first recorded words?
 - ? What is the significance that Jesus' first words that Luke records come in the form of two questions?
 - ? What do these words tell you about Jesus?
 - ? What do these words tell you about Luke's purposes in writing his Gospel?
2. Each Gospel records Jesus' final words differently. But in Luke, they are these: "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit."
 - ? What do you learn when you consider that, in Luke, Jesus' first and last words spoke to his commitment to his Father?

Matthew and Mark record Jesus praying a Psalm as some of his final words spoken from the cross: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me" (22.¹). Jesus' final words spoken from the cross as recorded by Luke, "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit," are also from the Book of Psalms, 31.⁵.

- ? What do you think when you consider that the Psalms were of such significance in Jesus' life and in his thinking that he utilized them when expressing his deepest feelings in the midst of his greatest suffering?
- ? What experiences have you had with the Psalms? How have they spoken to your own thoughts and feelings about life, about God, and about your relationship with him?

Luke 3.¹⁻⁶

¹Now in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Cæsar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judæa, and Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip tetrarch of Ituræa and of the region of Trachonitis, and Lysanias the tetrarch of Abilene, ²Annas and Caiaphas being the high priests, the word of God came unto John the son of Zacharias in the wilderness. ³And he came into all the country about Jordan, preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins; ⁴as it is written in the book of the words of Esaias the prophet, saying,

“The voice of one crying in the wilderness,
Prepare ye the way of the Lord,
make his paths straight.
⁵Every valley shall be filled,
and every mountain and hill shall be brought low;
and the crooked shall be made straight,
and the rough ways shall be made smooth;
⁶and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.”

Q

uestionary

The first two lines might be divided differently than in today’s reading

“The voice of one crying,
‘In the wilderness, prepare ye the way of the Lord’ (‘prepare a path for the Lord in the desert’).

- ? How does the meaning differ in the two different line divisions?
- ? What would it mean to prepare a path in the desert—in both “literal” and “spiritual” terms?
- ? What is the significance of making this path straight rather than winding and flat rather than hilly?
- ? How are John’s audiences like a desert?
- ? How does John ease the way for Jesus’ ministry and for Jesus to be accepted?
- ? How do you feel about God’s desire to make it as easy as possible for Jesus to be accepted?
- ? How consistent with your own experiences and with your observation of other’s experiences is the idea that God makes it as easy as possible to accept Christ and come unto him? Why do you answer as you do?

Luke 3:7-14— just scripture

⁷Then said he to the multitude that came forth to be baptized of him,

“O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? ⁸Bring forth therefore fruits worthy of repentance, and begin not to say within yourselves, ‘We have Abraham to our father:’ for I say unto you, That God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham.

⁹And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: every tree therefore which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.”

¹⁰And the people asked him, saying, “What shall we do then?”

¹¹He answereth and saith unto them, “He that hath two coats, let him impart to him that hath none; and he that hath meat, let him do likewise.”

¹²Then came also publicans to be baptized, and said unto him, “Master, what shall we do?”

¹³And he said unto them, “Exact no more than that which is appointed you.”

¹⁴And the soldiers likewise demanded of him, saying, “And what shall we do?”

And he said unto them, “Do violence to no man, neither accuse any falsely; and be content with your wages.”

Q

uestionary

1. Today’s reading is taken from Luke’s account of John the Baptist’s ministry and the message of his ministry. I have placed this read, ponder, pray exercise under the category of “Just Scripture”— scriptures that focus on the attributes of just and unjust individuals and societies.
 - ? After reading and pondering today’s reading, how and why is it appropriate to the “Just Scripture” category?
 - ? What is the common element in John’s counsel to common people, tax collectors (read: government employees), and soldiers, or military personnel?
2. John’s counsel to military personnel is “Do violence to no man, neither accuse any falsely; and be content with your wages.”
 - ? What is the relationship between doing violence and being discontent with wages and serving as a false witness?

Soldiers involved in armed conflict often resort to violence against non-combatants by stealing and plundering in order to enhance their material wealth. Though they were in no way involved or familiar with court cases, Roman soldiers were often hired to provide perjured testimony for one party or the other—the defense or the plaintiff. We have seen both of these criminal behaviors in modern warfare.
 - ? How would being content with one’s wages serve to diminish unjust behaviors of the sort John discusses?
 - ? What was the tax collector’s objective in “exacting more than that which was appointed”?
3. Calling them “vipers,” John warns his audiences to “flee from the wrath to come”?
 - ? What role do economic injustices play in bringing about “the wrath to come”?
4. Calling them “vipers,” John encourages his audiences to “bring forth fruits worthy of repentance”?
 - ? How does economic injustice and inequality impact one’s ability to repent and be forgiven?
 - ? How do the following passages relate to and support John’s main focus?

“And now, for the sake of these things which I have spoken unto you—that is, for the sake of retaining a remission of your sins from day to day, that ye may walk guiltless before God—I would that ye should impart of your substance to the poor, every man according to that which he hath, such as feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, visiting the sick and administering to their relief, both spiritually and temporally, according to their wants” (Mosiah 4.²⁶).

“And now behold, my beloved brethren, I say unto you, do not suppose that this is all; for after ye have done all these things, if ye turn away the needy, and the naked, and visit not the sick and afflicted, and impart of your substance, if ye have, to those who stand in need—I say unto you, if ye do not any of these things, behold, your prayer is vain, and availeth you nothing, and ye are as hypocrites who do deny the faith. Therefore, if ye do not remember to be charitable, ye are as dross, which the refiners do cast out, (it being of no worth) and is trodden under foot of men” (Alma 34.²⁸⁻²⁹).

- ? How do you feel and what do you think when you consider John’s focus on economic justice when asked about avoiding “wrath to come” and “bringing forth fruits worthy of repentance”?
- ? How repentant is an individual who engages in economic injustice him or herself and countenances economic injustice by the surrounding society and government?
- ? What can you do from an economic perspective to avoid “the wrath to come” and “bringing forth fruits commensurate with repentance”?
- ? After John encourages people to avoid being “hewn down, and cast into the fire” by “bringing forth good fruit,” the people ask what they are to do to fulfill his encouragement. Three groups, three answers. What is his answer to each group?
- ? What is the significance that in every case, his answer is economic?
- ? What does this suggest about the centrality of economics and materialism in our spiritual lives?

Luke 3.¹⁵⁻²⁰

¹⁵And as the people were in expectation, and all men mused in their hearts of John, whether he were the Christ, or not; ¹⁶John answered, saying unto them all,

“I indeed baptize you with water; but one mightier than I cometh, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to unloose: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire: ¹⁷whose fan is in his hand, and he will throughly purge his floor, and will gather the wheat into his garner; but the chaff he will burn with fire unquenchable.”

¹⁸And many other things in his exhortation preached he unto the people.

¹⁹But Herod the tetrarch, being reproved by him for Herodias his brother Philip’s wife, and for all the evils which Herod had done, ²⁰Added yet this above all, that he shut up John in prison.

Q

uestionary

1. John declares himself to be unworthy to loosen and remove Jesus’ shoes.
 - ? How do you feel about John’s humility in the face of Jesus?
 - ? Is his humility warranted? Why do you answer as you do?
 - ? How do you think and feel knowing that every single prophet who has ever lived might and should say the same thing?
2. John is not only humble about his own personal life in comparison to Jesus, but of his ministry as well.
 - ? How does John show that his ministry is inferior to that of Jesus?
 - ? In what ways is John’s water baptism inferior to Jesus’ baptism “with the Holy Spirit and with fire”?
3. While discussing Jesus’ baptism “with the Holy Spirit and with fire, John also warns that Jesus will separate wheat from chaff after which Jesus will burn the chaff “with fire unquenchable.”
 - ? What or who is “chaff” in this analogy?
 - ? What is the relationship between the Holy Spirit and the violent removal of the chaff, or the unclean and unfruitful?
 - ? How do you feel about the Holy Spirit being so closely associated with the violent cleansing of the earth?

Luke 3.²¹⁻²²

²¹Now when all the people were baptized, it came to pass, that Jesus also being baptized, and praying, the heaven was opened, ²²and the Holy Ghost descended in a bodily shape like a dove upon him, and a voice came from heaven, which said,

“Thou art my beloved Son;
in thee I am well pleased.”

Questionary

1. Luke, with the other synoptic Gospels, informs us that “the Holy Ghost descended in a bodily shape like a dove upon him.”
 - ? We commonly hear that the dove is a symbol of peace. But why? Why is the dove a symbol of peace?
 - ? Is there something inherent in the dove as a species that signifies “peace”?
 - ? Can you think of a scripture passage or story in which the dove plays a role that is related to peace?
 - ? What did the dove signify in the story of Noah and the flood?

The dove, upon returning to the ark with a twig in its beak, signified to Noah that “the storm and flood was over.”

- ? How might the dove signify that in Jesus “the storm is past”?
- ? How does Jesus calm and sometimes even bring an end to the storms of life that we regularly face?

Luke 4.¹⁻⁴

¹And Jesus being full of the Holy Ghost returned from Jordan, and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, ²Being forty days tempted of the devil. And in those days he did eat nothing: and when they were ended, he afterward hungered.

³And the devil said unto him, “If thou be the Son of God, command this stone that it be made bread.”

⁴And Jesus answered him, saying, “It is written,

‘That man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God.’”

Q

uestionary

Today’s reading is the first of three that explore Jesus’ experiences during his 40-day fast in the wilderness as reported by Luke.

1. Luke tells us that Jesus 1) “was led by the Spirit into the wilderness” and 2) that here he was “forty days tempted of the devil.”
 - ? What, do you think, is the relationship between these two notices?
 - ? What role does and has the Holy Spirit played in assisting you in withstanding temptation?
 - ? What are your thoughts and feelings when you contemplate a forty-day period in which one experiences the personal attentions and temptations of Satan?
2. During his 40 days in the wilderness, Jesus “did eat nothing.”
 - ? What role, do you think, did fasting play in helping Jesus as he was so intensely bombarded with the attentions and temptations of Satan?
 - ? What experiences have you had with fasting, especially in relation to resisting temptation and doing God’s will?
3. In responding to Satan’s first temptation, Jesus responded with a passage of scripture.
 - ? With Satan’s attentions so focus on him, what role, do you think, did scripture play in Jesus resisting Satan’s temptations?
 - ? Jesus was familiar enough with scripture that he could use them to resist Satan’s temptation. What does this suggest to you about Jesus’ feelings about and study of scripture?
 - ? How thorough is your personal study of the scriptures and your ability to rely on them in your battles with temptation?
 - ? What do your scripture study habits say about your appreciation of the scriptures in general and the role they play in our resistance of Satan and his temptations in particular?
4. Satan’s first temptation aimed at Jesus was: “If thou be the Son of God, command this stone that it be made bread.”
 - ? How would you characterize the nature of this temptation?
 - ? Does it change your characterization to read the temptation as follows: “*Since* you are the Son of God, command this stone that it be made bread”?
 - ? How does Satan tempt us to use our power, prestige, authority, etc. (such as they are) for our own benefit?
 - ? How does Satan tempt us to think of physical needs and the financial/economic resources that we need to meet those needs as being of the highest priority in our lives?

In the LDS temple, Satan’s very first temptation aimed at Adam and Eve was, “You can have anything in this world for money.”

- ? How does this relate to Jesus’ first temptation?
- ? What comes to your mind as you contemplate the similarity between the first temptation leveled against Jesus and Adam and Eve?
- ? How strongly do you feel Satan’s temptation to put your own physical needs about any other

needs—your own and others’?

? How might you use the Holy Spirit, fasting, and scripture study to resist this first and, perhaps, most pervasive temptation that Satan employs against us?

5. Jesus’ quotation comes from Deuteronomy 8.³, which reads,

“And he humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna, which thou knewest not, neither did thy fathers know; that he might make thee know that man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord doth man live.”

? What additional insights does this original context provide into the nature this, the first of Jesus’ temptation? The nature of the temptations we face when we are asked to prioritize our lives?

Luke 4.⁵⁻⁸

⁵And the devil, taking him up into an high mountain, shewed unto him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. ⁶And the devil said unto him, “All this power will I give thee, and the glory of them: for that is delivered unto me; and to whomsoever I will I give it. ⁷If thou therefore wilt worship me, all shall be thine.”

⁸And Jesus answered and said unto him, “Get thee behind me, Satan: for it is written, ‘Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.’”

Q

uestionary

Today’s reading is the second of three that explore Jesus’ experiences during his 40-day fast in the wilderness as reported by Luke.

1. The devil “shewed [Jesus] all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time.”
 - ? What do you feel when you contemplate the fact that Satan has the kind of “insight” that allows him to 1) see “all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time,” and 2) that he had the kind of power that he can grant another to see “all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time”?
 - ? Close your eyes and imagine a vision in which you see “all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. What do you see? What do you feel? How do you characterize these kingdoms?
2. Satan claims that he can and will give Jesus all the power possessed in the world and all the glory of the world.
 - ? Is he telling the truth about 1) his ability to do so and 2) his willingness to do so? Why do you answer as you do?
3. Jesus’ first temptation was to prioritize personal physical comfort (economic well-being really). His second temptation is to prioritize personal power.
 - ? What role do these two temptations play in the world today? How well is the world, with all its kingdoms, doing at resisting them?
 - ? What role do these two temptations play in your life today? How well are you resisting them?
4. In order to have this power, all Jesus has to do is “worship” Satan.
 - ? How is prioritizing power (and economic security) in one’s life (and in a society’s existence) actually a manifestation of Satanic worship?
5. Once more, Jesus utilizes scripture as a defense against Satan’s temptation. Many see Deuteronomy 6.¹³⁻¹⁴ as the inspiration for this quote. Others see the first two of the Ten Commandments. Whatever scripture Jesus is alluding to, he is using scripture for the second time.
 - ? What do you think and feel when you contemplate the consistency with which Jesus utilizes scripture as a protection against temptation?
 - ? What could you do to more consistently and effectively use scripture as a protection against temptation?

Luke 4.⁹⁻¹³

⁹And he brought him to Jerusalem, and set him on a pinnacle of the temple, and said unto him, “If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down from hence: ¹⁰For it is written, ‘He shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee: ¹¹And in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone.’”

¹²And Jesus answering said unto him, “It is said,

‘Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.’”

¹³And when the devil had ended all the temptation, he departed from him for a season.

Q

uestionary

Today’s reading is the last of three that explore Jesus’ experiences during his 40-day fast in the wilderness as reported by Luke.

1. For his third temptation, Satan tempts Jesus to throw himself down from the top of the temple’s highest wall.
 - ? What, in your mind, is the nature of this temptation?
 - ? How does the scripture that Satan quotes to Jesus help in understanding the nature of the temptation?
 - ? How does Jesus’ answer to the temptation help you understand the temptation?
 - ? Once more, does the following reading of the temptation change your perspective concerning the nature of the temptation: “Since thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down from hence...”
 - ? How do you feel and what do you think when you contemplate the temptation for Jesus to test his Father’s love and commitment to him?
2. For his final temptation, Satan makes use of scripture and quotes from Psalm 91.¹¹⁻¹² in which the Psalmist describes the secure life that comes to one who trusts God.
 - ? How do you feel about Satan using the scriptures to tempt Jesus?
 - ? What does this tell you about what Satan has learned about Jesus from the first two temptations and Jesus’ way of responding to them?
 - ? How do you feel and what do you think when you consider the fact that Satan chose this particular scripture?
 - ? How do you feel about Satan’s insinuation that if Jesus really trusted God, he would throw himself down?
3. In resisting the devil’s third temptation, Jesus quotes from Deuteronomy 6.16, “Ye shall not tempt the Lord your God,” as ye tempted him in Massah.” We should have a look at Israel’s experience at Massah.

“And all the congregation of the children of Israel journeyed from the wilderness of Sin, after their journeys, according to the commandment of the Lord, and pitched in Rephidim: and there was no water for the people to drink. Wherefore the people did chide with Moses, and said, ‘Give us water that we may drink.’

And Moses said unto them, ‘Why chide ye with me? Wherefore do ye tempt the Lord?’

And the people thirsted there for water; and the people murmured against Moses, and said, ‘Wherefore is this that thou hast brought us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our cattle with thirst?’

And Moses cried unto the Lord, saying, ‘What shall I do unto this people? They be almost ready to stone me.

And the Lord said unto Moses, ‘Go on before the people, and take with thee of the elders of Israel; and thy rod, wherewith thou smotest the river, take in thine hand, and go. Behold, I will stand before thee there upon the rock in Horeb; and thou shalt smite the rock, and there shall come water out of it, that the people may drink.’

And Moses did so in the sight of the elders of Israel.

And he called the name of the place Massah, and Meribah, because of the chiding of the children of Israel, and because they tempted the Lord, saying, 'Is the Lord among us, or not?' (Exodus 17.1-7)

- ? How does understanding the original context of Jesus' quotation help you better understand both the nature of the temptation that Jesus faced and his resistance to it?
- ? How do we today, tempt God and ask him to prove that he is "among us" and interested in us?
- ? How do the prayers we offer and the requests we make in them often amount to a "temptation" of God to prove himself to us?
- ? How do we avoid falling into this sin which is really a sort of challenge and questioning of God's commitment to us?

Luke 4.¹⁴⁻²²— atonement

¹⁴And Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit into Galilee: and there went out a fame of him through all the region round about. ¹⁵And he taught in their synagogues, being glorified of all.

¹⁶And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up: and, as his custom was, he went into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and stood up for to read. ¹⁷And there was delivered unto him the book of the prophet Esaias. And when he had opened the book, he found the place where it was written,

¹⁸“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor;
he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted,
to preach deliverance to the captives,
and recovering of sight to the blind,
to set at liberty them that are bruised,
¹⁹To preach the acceptable year of the Lord.”

²⁰And he closed the book, and he gave it again to the minister, and sat down. And the eyes of all them that were in the synagogue were fastened on him. ²¹And he began to say unto them, “This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears.”

²²And all bare him witness, and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth. And they said, “Is not this Joseph’s son?”

Q

uestionary

1. We are utilizing today’s passage under the title of “Grace: The Savior’s Generous and Earnest Invitation” as part of Atonement series.
 - ? How does Jesus’ announcement that his ministry will partake of the same spirit that is found in the Isaiah passage serve to emphasize his grace?
 - ? How does Jesus’ announcement that his ministry will partake of the same spirit that is found in the Isaiah passage serve to emphasize his generosity?
 - ? How does Jesus’ announcement that his ministry will partake of the same spirit that is found in the Isaiah passage serve to emphasize his earnestness?
2. Jesus makes promises to the “poor,” “brokenhearted,” “captives,” “blind,” and “bruised.”
 - ? What do these groups have in common?
3. Jesus promises to “preach the gospel” or to “bring good news” to the poor.
 - ? What kind of news would be good news to the poor?
4. Jesus promises to “heal the brokenhearted.” We often hear in scripture of those who have a “broken heart and contrite spirit” (See, for example, Ps. 34.¹⁸; Ps. 51.¹⁷; 2 Ne. 2.⁷; 3 Ne. 9.²⁰; DC 20.³⁷).
 - ? What is the relationship between the “brokenhearted” spoken of by Isaiah and those who have a “broken heart” in other scriptures?
5. By utilizing Isaiah, Jesus promises “to preach the acceptable year of the Lord.”
 - ? What do you understand the nature of this promise to be?
 - ? How does it impact your understanding of this promise if we read, “proclaim the time of Yahweh’s acceptance”?
- ? What would it mean to each of these groups—the “poor,” “brokenhearted,” “captives,” “blind,” and “bruised” to find acceptance to God?
- ? How do the promises that Jesus makes to each group serve as invitation for them to come unto him and trust him?
- * The following ten titles are part of our atonement series:

“Fall: Our Need of Atonement”

“Grace: The Savior’s Generous and Earnest Invitation”

“At-one-ment: The Savior’s unity and connectedness with us”

“Sacrifice: What Jesus Suffered for Us”

“Glorification: The Savior’s Resurrection, Ascension, and Enthronement”

“Justification: How We Repent and Change”

“Renewal: The Hope, Joy, Peace, and Power of Atonement”

“Sanctification: Imitating and living Jesus’ life of Atonement”

“Thanksgiving: In Praise of Atonement”

“The Song of the Righteous: A Song unto Me”

Luke 4.²³⁻³⁰

²³And he said unto them, “Ye will surely say unto me this proverb, ‘Physician, heal thyself: whatsoever we have heard done in Capernaum, do also here in thy country.’” ²⁴And he said, “Verily I say unto you, No prophet is accepted in his own country. ²⁵But I tell you of a truth, many widows were in Israel in the days of Elias, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, when great famine was throughout all the land; ²⁶But unto none of them was Elias sent, save unto Sarepta, a city of Sidon, unto a woman that was a widow. ²⁷And many lepers were in Israel in the time of Eliseus the prophet; and none of them was cleansed, saving Naaman the Syrian.”

²⁸And all they in the synagogue, when they heard these things, were filled with wrath, ²⁹And rose up, and thrust him out of the city, and led him unto the brow of the hill whereon their city was built, that they might cast him down headlong. ³⁰But he passing through the midst of them went his way...

Q

uestionary

1. Jesus warns his audience in Nazareth about rejecting him.
 - ? How does he do this?
2. Jesus refers to a Sidonian widow and a Syrian leper who accepted and were blessed by the ministry of the Hebrew prophets Elijah and Elisha.
 - ? What do you know about the kingdoms of Sidon and Syrian in their relationship with Israel?
 - ? What do you think about Jesus using individuals from an enemy nation as examples for “chosen” Israelites to follow?
 - ? What do you think about Jesus at the same time using Israelites as bad examples that should not be followed?
 - ? Jesus could have used Israelites as both good and bad examples. Why, do you think, would he choose to be more controversial and offensive in his selection of good and bad examples?
3. In response to the crowd’s murderous intentions, we are told simply that Jesus “passing through the midst of them went his way.”
 - ? Why, do you think, is Jesus’ escape from harm stated in such an understated and unclear manner?
 - ? Jesus’ “miracles” are seldom performed for his own benefit. What do you learn about Jesus and “miracles” in general from this observation?

Luke 4.³¹⁻³⁶

³¹And came down to Capernaum, a city of Galilee, and taught them on the sabbath days. ³²And they were astonished at his doctrine: for his word was with power.

³³And in the synagogue there was a man, which had a spirit of an unclean devil, and cried out with a loud voice, ³⁴saying, "Let us alone; what have we to do with thee, thou Jesus of Nazareth? Art thou come to destroy us? I know thee who thou art; the Holy One of God."

³⁵And Jesus rebuked him, saying, "Hold thy peace, and come out of him."

And when the devil had thrown him in the midst, he came out of him, and hurt him not. ³⁶And they were all amazed, and spake among themselves, saying, "What a word is this! for with authority and power he commandeth the unclean spirits, and they come out."

Questionary

1. Even before Jesus had healed the man of his affliction, the people were "astonished at his doctrine: for his word was with power."
 - ? What was the nature of Jesus' "doctrine"?
 - ? When you think of the "word" being accompanied "with power" what comes to your mind?
2. The "unclean devil" is reported to have said, "Let us alone; what have we to do with thee, thou Jesus of Nazareth? Art thou come to destroy us? I know thee who thou art; the Holy One of God."
 - ? What, do you think, is the meaning and tone of the question: "What have we to do with thee"?
 - ? How would you feel and think if we suggested that whatever these words meant to "the unclean devil," these words reflect the man's true feeling of not being worthy of association with Jesus?
 - ? What do you learn about Jesus from the fact that Jesus was willing to associate and engage with an unworthy man?
 - ? To what degree have you found Jesus willingness to associate and engage with you in your unworthiness?
3. After Jesus had healed the afflicted man, those present "were all amazed." This comes after the initial notice that the people "were astonished at his doctrine."
 - ? Take a few minutes to scan Luke's first four chapters. How often do you find Luke referencing "wonder," "amazement," and "astonishment"?
 - ? What is the significance of Luke's regular notices of "wonder," "amazement," and "astonishment"?
 - ? How much of a spirit of "wonder," "amazement," and "astonishment" do you possess as you think of Jesus and the presence he has in your life?
 - ? How do the following sentiments expressed by the hymnist relate to Luke's and your own sense of wonder at Jesus?

"I stand all amazed at the love Jesus offers me,
Confused at the grace that so fully he proffers me..."

"I marvel that he would descend from his throne divine..." (Hymn #193, "I Stand All Amazed).

Luke 4.³⁷⁻³⁹

³⁷And the fame of him went out into every place of the country round about. ³⁸And he arose out of the synagogue, and entered into Simon's house. And Simon's wife's mother was taken with a great fever; and they besought him for her. ³⁹And he stood over her, and rebuked the fever; and it left her: and immediately she arose and ministered unto them.

Q

1. Luke tells us that Jesus' "fame... went out into every place of the country round about."
 - ? What do you feel and sense about Jesus when you read this?
 - ? How would you characterize Jesus' "fame" today?
 - ? What role do you play in proclaiming him and contributing to his "fame"?
2. Peter's mother-in-law was healed "immediately." When Jesus touched a leper, Luke tells us that "immediately the leprosy departed from him" (Lk. 5.¹³). We are told that a woman with an female bleeding ailment "was healed immediately" upon teaching Jesus (Lk. 8.⁴⁷)
 - ? What comes to your mind when you think of that "immediately"?

In the Book of Mormon, Alma teaches:

"Yea, I would that ye would come forth and harden not your hearts any longer; for behold, now is the time and the day of your salvation; and therefore, if ye will repent and harden not your hearts, *immediately shall the great plan of redemption be brought about unto you*" (Al. 34.³¹).

- ? What does Alma's "immediately" mean to you?
- ? What does it mean to have the "great plan of redemption... brought about" "immediately"?

Luke 4.⁴⁰⁻⁴⁴

⁴⁰Now when the sun was setting, all they that had any sick with divers diseases brought them unto him; and he laid his hands on every one of them, and healed them. ⁴¹And devils also came out of many...

⁴²And when it was day, he departed and went into a desert place: and the people sought him, and came unto him, and stayed him, that he should not depart from them. ⁴³And he said unto them, "I must preach the kingdom of God to other cities also: for therefore am I sent."

⁴⁴And he preached in the synagogues of Galilee.

Questionary

Today's reading is the 19th in a series of Advent readings that will continue throughout the month of December.

1. We all remember the anticipation we felt as children with the approach of Christmas. Perhaps we have all felt the small let down as the season of joy and giving and increased family time ends. In today's reading, we sense the people's excitement at being in Jesus' presence.
 - ? What do you see in your mind as you picture the people "staying" Jesus so that he "should not depart"?
 - ? What might they hope to feel and experience in having more time with him?
 - ? What role might the healings of the night before have played in the people's interest in having Jesus stay with them?
 - ? What impact does it have on you to know that the people to whom he ministered found him to be so attractive?
 - ? How attracted to him are you?
 - ? What do you do to "seek" him, "come unto" him, and "stay" him that "he should not depart"?

Matthew 4.²³; 9.³⁵ & Luke 4.⁴³— Jesus and the kingdom or rule of God (questionary 4)

²³And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all manner of sickness and all manner of disease among the people.

³⁵And Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people.

⁴³And he said unto them, I must preach the kingdom of God to other cities also: for therefore am I sent.

Jesus speaks of God's kingdom some forty times in the Gospel of Matthew. Jesus' announcement of God's kingdom were Jesus' first words as recorded in the Gospel of Mark. In the idea of God's kingdom, Jesus found a primary and motivational principle and value. In this series of questionnaires entitled, "Jesus and God's Kingdom or Rule," we examine Jesus' sayings about the kingdom of God and what he hoped and intended to happen as a consequence of his focus on God's kingdom. This questionnaire is the fourth in this series.

1. We saw in our first reading that Jesus' ministry was characterized as being focused on the kingdom of God and its imminent inauguration. In Luke 4.⁴³, Jesus expresses his belief that God sent him for the very purpose of proclaiming God's kingdom or rule and its imminent inauguration.
 - ? What do you think and feel when you contemplate that the proclamation and inauguration of the kingdom of God was one of, if not the most central aspects and purposes of Jesus' ministry?
2. In both 4.²³ and 9.³⁵, Matthew pairs Jesus' proclamation of God's kingdom or rule with his healing all manner of sickness and... disease.
 - ? What, do you think, is the significance of this pairing?
 - ? How does God's kingdom or rule relate to healing?
 - ? We can think of God's kingdom or rule in terms of His taking control over things formerly out of control or things controlled by other agents—individual or societal. How do healings demonstrate God's control?

(edition: November 24, 2024)

Luke 5:1-11

¹*As the people pressed upon him to hear the word of God, he stood by the lake of Gennesaret, ²and saw two ships standing by the lake: but the fishermen were gone out of them, and were washing their nets. ³And he entered into one of the ships, which was Simon's, and prayed him that he would thrust out a little from the land. And he sat down, and taught the people out of the ship. ⁴Now when he had left speaking, he said unto Simon, "Launch out into the deep, and let down your nets for a draught."

⁵And Simon answering said unto him, "Master, we have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing: nevertheless at thy word I will let down the net."

⁶And when they had this done, they inclosed a great multitude of fishes: and their net brake. ⁷And they beckoned unto their partners, which were in the other ship, that they should come and help them. And they came, and filled both the ships, so that they began to sink. ⁸When Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord."

⁹For he was astonished, and all that were with him, at the draught of the fishes which they had taken: ¹⁰and so was also James, and John, the sons of Zebedee, which were partners with Simon. And Jesus said unto Simon, "Fear not; from henceforth thou shalt catch men."

¹¹And when they had brought their ships to land, they forsook all, and followed him.

Questionary

1. At the end of the previous chapter, Luke informed us that "the fame of him went out into every place of the country round about." In today's reading, Luke informs us that "the people pressed upon him to hear the word of God."

- ? What do you see when you see "people pressing upon" Jesus?
- ? What do you see on their faces?
- ? How anxiously do you seek Jesus?
- ? How anxiously do you seek to "hear the word of God," wherever you may think you may find it?
- ? How do the following words of the Psalmist relate to the crowds' desire to meet and associate with Jesus?

"As the hart panteth after the water brooks,
so panteth my soul after thee, O God.
My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God:
when shall I come and appear before God?" (Ps. 42.¹⁻²)

- ? How well do the Psalmist's sentiments correspond to your own desire to meet and associate with Jesus? Why do you answer as you do?
- ? How well and accurately do the following words of the Psalmist reflect your own desire for "the word of God," wherever you may think to find it?

"The law of thy mouth is better unto me
Than thousands of gold and silver" (Ps. 119.⁷²).

- ? What do you offer as evidence that your desire for "the word of God" is reflected in your daily life?
2. After spending an entire night of unsuccessful fishing, notwithstanding their very best efforts, upon following Jesus' directions the fishermen immediately "inclosed a great multitude of fishes," such that "their net brake."
 - ? What lesson/s, do you think, did the fishermen take from their experience?
 - ? What do you learn from the fishermen's experience that you could apply to your life?
 - ? How would you feel if we suggested that one of the lessons Peter learned was, "I am a sinful man, O Lord"?
 - ? How did Peter's fishing experiences before and after this encounter with Jesus illustrate his

- own “sinfulness” or inadequacy?
- ? How, do you suppose, did the lessons learned—that 1) he, Peter, was a sinner and inadequate to the task; and 2) that by following Jesus’ direction he could accomplish things that he could not accomplish on his own—impact and benefit Peter in his ministry in the church and in the world at large?
 - ? How might these lessons impact and benefit you as you seek to minister to others?
- Jesus does not contradict Peter’s confession, “I am a sinful man,” but reassures him with his, “Fear not; from henceforth thou shalt catch men.”
- ? How do you feel about Jesus and about his reassurance?
 - ? How do you feel about Jesus when you contemplate his ability and willingness to invite sinful people into his work of salvation?

Luke 5.¹²⁻¹⁶— atonement

¹²*When he was in a certain city, behold a man full of leprosy: who seeing Jesus fell on his face, and besought him, saying, “Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean.”

¹³And he put forth his hand, and touched him, saying, “I will: be thou clean.”

And immediately the leprosy departed from him. ¹⁴And he charged him to tell no man: but go, and shew thyself to the priest, and offer for thy cleansing, according as Moses commanded, for a testimony unto them.

¹⁵But so much the more went there a fame abroad of him: and great multitudes came together to hear, and to be healed by him of their infirmities. ¹⁶And he withdrew himself into the wilderness, and prayed.

Questionary

This reading is one in a series of readings on Atonement that we entitle, “At-one-ment: The Savior’s unity and connectedness with us.” *

Narratives recording Jesus’ healing of the leper can also be found in Mark 1.⁴⁰⁻⁴⁵ and Matthew 8.¹⁻⁴.

One of my central understandings of Jesus Christ and his ministry is that he and it represented a witness of God’s feelings of connectedness, attachment, linkage, participation, and unity with humankind. Rather than understanding the basic meaning of at-one-ment to be something like “expiation,” or “propitiation” or “sacrifice,” etc., I understand its basic meaning as “connectedness,” “attachment,” “unity,” “oneness,” etc.

- ? As you consider the following questions remember to consider how Jesus become one, connected, attached, and unified himself to and with the leper.
- ? What do you know about the social and religious status of a leper in Israel? Consider the following scriptures as you consider this question.

Leviticus 13.²⁻³

Leviticus 13.⁴⁵⁻⁴⁶

Numbers 5.²⁻³

- ? How, do you think, did the leper feel about him or herself? What did they think God felt toward them?
1. Luke describes the leper as “a man full of a leprosy” or “covered with leprosy.”
 - ? What do you envision when you consider the man’s extreme case of leprosy?
 - ? What does it suggest the powers that Jesus possesses?
 - ? Given that leprosy is associated with sin, what does this suggest about Jesus’ capacity to deal with even the worst of sin?
 2. The leper says, “If you want to, you can cleanse me.”
 - ? Do you hear in these words a statement or question?
 - ? What, do you think, is the nature of the leper’s uncertainty: Jesus willingness or Jesus’ capacity?
 - ? Can you relate to the leper’s uncertainty about Jesus’ willingness to act in an imperfect, unclean life?
 - ? Why would he NOT be willing to respond to a heart-felt request?
 - ? How do you feel when you hear Jesus’ respond to the leper’s uncertainty with “I do want to”?
 - ? How can the leper’s experience help you the next time you question Jesus’ willingness to act in your messy life?
 3. Luke records that Jesus “put forth his hand, and touched” the leper.
 - ? What kind of “touch” do you envision?

The Greek word that Luke uses for “touch” is used of the kind of “touching” that wrestlers do in an arena or that lovers use in intimacy. It might better be translated, “grasp” or “embrace.”

? Does this change the way you envision Jesus’ touch? How?

? How do you feel about Jesus using such an intense “touch” with an unclean leper?

4. Luke records that “immediately the leprosy departed.”

? What is the significance of this “immediately”?

? How does the following passage relate?

“Yea, I would that ye would come forth and harden not your hearts any longer; for behold, now is the time and the day of your salvation; and therefore, if ye will repent and harden not your hearts, immediately shall the great plan of redemption be brought about unto you” (Alma 34.³¹).

? Take a few minutes to reflect on today’s reading and reconsider how it is a reflection of “atonement” or the Savior’s happy and willing attachment to us?

* The following ten titles are part of our atonement series:

“Fall: Our Need of Atonement”

“Grace: The Savior’s Generous and Earnest Invitation”

“At-one-ment: The Savior’s unity and connectedness with us”

“Sacrifice: What Jesus Suffered for Us”

“Glorification: The Savior’s Resurrection, Ascension, and Enthronement”

“Justification: How We Repent and Change”

“Renewal: The Hope, Joy, Peace, and Power of Atonement”

“Sanctification: Imitating and living a life of Atonement”

“Thanksgiving: In Praise of Atonement”

“Song of the Righteous: A Song unto Me”

Luke 5. 17-26

¹⁷*On a certain day, as he was teaching, there were Pharisees and doctors of the law sitting by, which were come out of every town of Galilee, and Judæa, and Jerusalem: and the power of the Lord was present to heal them. ¹⁸And, behold, men brought in a bed a man which was taken with a palsy: and they sought means to bring him in, and to lay him before him. ¹⁹And when they could not find by what way they might bring him in because of the multitude, they went upon the housetop, and let him down through the tiling with his couch into the midst before Jesus. ²⁰And when he saw their faith, he said unto him, "Man, thy sins are forgiven thee."

²¹And the scribes and the Pharisees began to reason, saying, "Who is this which speaketh blasphemies? Who can forgive sins, but God alone?"

²²But when Jesus perceived their thoughts, he answering said unto them, "What reason ye in your hearts? ²³Whether is easier, to say, 'Thy sins be forgiven thee;' or to say, 'Rise up and walk?' ²⁴But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power upon earth to forgive sins, (he said unto the sick of the palsy,) 'I say unto thee, Arise, and take up thy couch, and go into thine house.'"

²⁵And immediately he rose up before them, and took up that whereon he lay, and departed to his own house, glorifying God. ²⁶And they were all amazed, and they glorified God, and were filled with fear, saying, "We have seen strange things to day."

Questionary

1. The palsied man's experience with Jesus is also recounted in Matthew 9.²⁻⁸ and Mark 2.¹⁻¹². In examining the encounter in Mark, we broke the longer account into smaller readings. Feel free to have a look at that *Read, Ponder, Pray* as well.
 - ? What do you see in your mind's eye when you imagine a man who has such a severe case of palsy that he cannot walk, but be born about on a couch by others?

In describing the leper, Luke speaks of him as "a man full of leprosy." Here, the man's palsy is crippling.

 - ? What, do you think, is the significance of the fact that so many that Jesus healed were afflicted by the severest forms of whatever ailment it was that afflicted them?
2. In healing the man, we might have anticipated Jesus' saying something like, "Man, thy palsy is healed." Instead, Jesus said, "Man, thy sins are forgiven thee."
 - ? What do you make of Jesus' response to the man's palsy?
 - ? What does Jesus' response suggest about the man's attitude toward his palsy?
3. Hearing Jesus' promise of forgiveness, the religious leaders accuse Jesus of blasphemy and ask, "Who can forgive sins, but God alone?"
 - ? Is it really true that "God alone" can "forgive sins"? Why do you answer as you do?
 - ? Would you consider it "blasphemous" to suggest that all of us can and must "forgive sins" committed by others? Why do you answer as you do?
 - ? How can your forgiving of another their sins empower them, change them, save them, and give them a sense of release or catharsis from the pain and guilt of sin?
 - ? How do you feel knowing that you have such power?
4. In response to the religious leader's complaint, Jesus asks, "Whether is easier, to say, 'Thy sins be forgiven thee;' or to say, 'Rise up and walk?'"
 - ? Which is easier? Why do you answer as you do?
 - ? What is the evidence that one is healed of palsy? What is the evidence that one is forgiven? Which is easiest to observe?
5. Jesus prefaces his command that the man arise and walk with "that ye may know that the Son of man hath power upon earth to forgive sins."
 - ? What does this tell you about what Jesus considered to be the greatest lesson to learn from his

healing of the palsied man?

- ? How convinced are you that Jesus has the power to heal a soul of sin as easily as he can heal a body of disease?
- ? To what extent has your soul been healed of sin? Why do you answer as you do?

Luke 5:27-32

²⁷And after these things he went forth, and saw a publican, named Levi, sitting at the receipt of custom: and he said unto him, "Follow me."

²⁸And he left all, rose up, and followed him. ²⁹And Levi made him a great feast in his own house: and there was a great company of publicans and of others that sat down with them. ³⁰But their scribes and Pharisees murmured against his disciples, saying, "Why do ye eat and drink with publicans and sinners?"

³¹And Jesus answering said unto them, "They that are whole need not a physician; but they that are sick. ³²I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."

Questionary

1. In today's reading Jesus enters the home of Levi, a tax collector, and shares a meal with "publicans and sinners."
 - ? What do you know about table-fellowship in Jewish society of Jesus' times?
 - ? How would you describe the "intimacy" of table-fellowship?
 - ? What does your own choice of those whom you invite into your home for dinner say about you and about those you invite?
 - ? What would it say about you if you invited individuals to dinner whom your society, your church, your neighborhood looked down upon as somehow undesirable or even sinful, guilty of breaches of societal norms?
 - ? What does it say about Jesus that he comfortably engages in intimate table-fellowship with individuals deemed undesirable?

2. Jesus says, "I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."
 - ? Are there, in fact, any who do not need to repent? If not, why would Jesus not "call the righteous... to repentance"?
 - ? How do "the righteous" manifest a belief that they need no repentance?
 - ? How much in need of a spiritual physician are you?
 - ? Which group is a beneficiary of Jesus' ministrations... "the righteous" or "sinners"?
 - ? After considering today's reading, with which group do you identify and to which group would you prefer to belong: "the righteous" or "sinners"?

Luke 5.³³⁻³⁹

³³And they said unto him, “Why do the disciples of John fast often, and make prayers, and likewise the disciples of the Pharisees; but thine eat and drink?”

³⁴And he said unto them, “Can ye make the children of the bridechamber fast, while the bridegroom is with them? ³⁵But the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken away from them, and then shall they fast in those days.”

³⁶And he spake also a parable unto them; “No man putteth a piece of a new garment upon an old; if otherwise, then both the new maketh a rent, and the piece that was taken out of the new agreeth not with the old. ³⁷And no man putteth new wine into old bottles; else the new wine will burst the bottles, and be spilled, and the bottles shall perish. ³⁸But new wine must be put into new bottles; and both are preserved. ³⁹No man also having drunk old wine straightway desireth new: for he saith, ‘The old is better.’”

Q

uestionary

1. Jesus was asked why his disciples did not fast and pray as disciples of John the Baptist and disciples of the Pharisees did.

? Why did the disciples of John and of the Pharisees pray?

Jesus seems to suggest that as long as he was present, his disciples were not in need of concerted fasting and prayer.

? Why would this be?

? What does this say about Jesus’ presence and the disciples dependence upon him?

2. Jesus provides two parable that seem to illustrate the immaturity and present unpreparedness of his disciples to fully understand and apply his challenging new gospel and thus, an explanation for why he mentor’s them different from traditional methods.

? How do the parables do this?

? How does Jesus work to prepare his disciples differently than a more traditional approach such as that of John the Baptist or the Pharisees?

3. Jesus observes that “no man also having drunk old wine straightway desireth new: for he saith, ‘The old is better.’”

? How do long-held views and traditions keep one from accepting new ideas?

? What evidences do the New Testament Gospels provide that demonstrate how difficult the disciples were finding it to comprehend and accept Jesus’ radically new ideas?

Luke 6.¹⁻⁵

¹On the second sabbath after the first, he went through the corn fields; and his disciples plucked the ears of corn, and did eat, rubbing them in their hands. ²And certain of the Pharisees said unto them, “Why do ye that which is not lawful to do on the sabbath days?”

³And Jesus answering them said, “Have ye not read so much as this, what David did, when himself was an hungred, and they which were with him; ⁴How he went into the house of God, and did take and eat the shewbread, and gave also to them that were with him; which it is not lawful to eat but for the priests alone?” ⁵And he said unto them, “That the Son of man is Lord also of the sabbath.”

Q

uestionary

1. After observing Jesus’ disciples “harvesting” wheat, the Pharisees ask them, “why do ye that which is not lawful to do on the sabbath days?”
 - ? What is the nature of their objection to the disciples’ actions?
 - ? How is this episode related to the previous (Luke 5.³³⁻³⁹) episode in which the Pharisees questioned the way in which Jesus was tutoring and preparing his disciples?
2. In response to the Pharisees’ criticism, Jesus tells a story about David doing something that was unlawful.
 - ? What is Jesus’ point?
 - ? How does human vulnerability and need take precedence over religious legalistic and ritualistic requirements?
 - ? How would you apply Jesus’ teaching to your own life, your desire to be “legalistically” obedient, and your obligation to serve others and alleviate need and suffering?
3. Jesus ends by saying that he “is Lord also of the sabbath.”
 - ? What is Jesus’ point, especially in light of the disciples’ actions and the criticism they faced for it?
 - ? How do you feel if we understand Jesus to be saying that his priorities to serve and relieve and save take priority over any questions concerning “legalistic” behavior?

Luke 6.⁶⁻¹¹

⁶*On another sabbath, he entered into the synagogue and taught: and there was a man whose right hand was withered. ⁷And the scribes and Pharisees watched him, whether he would heal on the sabbath day; that they might find an accusation against him. ⁸But he knew their thoughts, and said to the man which had the withered hand, "Rise up, and stand forth in the midst."

And he arose and stood forth. ⁹Then said Jesus unto them, "I will ask you one thing; Is it lawful on the sabbath days to do good, or to do evil? to save life, or to destroy it?"

¹⁰And looking round about upon them all, he said unto the man, "Stretch forth thy hand."

And he did so: and his hand was restored whole as the other. ¹¹And they were filled with madness; and communed one with another what they might do to Jesus.

Questionary

1. During Jesus' day, there was a religious law on the books that forbade healers to heal on the sabbath—largely because healers often "charged" for their services.

? How do you feel about such a law being on the books? Why do you answer as you do?

2. Jesus had the man with the withered hand to "rise up, and stand forth in the midst."

? Why do you think Jesus had the man stand for all to see?

? How might this action help to "humanize" and "personalize" the man's condition?

? How do "policies" often serve to de-humanize and de-personalize individuals, making it easier to dismiss their needs and vulnerabilities?

3. In verse 9, Jesus asked a question that had an obvious answer.

? What did Jesus hope to accomplish with this seemingly rhetorical question?

4. Upon Jesus' healing the man's withered hand, we are told that "his hand was restored whole as the other." The record might have simply reported that the man's hand was healed.

? What is the significance of the notice that his bad hand was now as healthy and useful as his good hand.

We have seen Jesus heal individual's physical ailment as evidence of his ability to heal inner, spiritual ailments.

? What does this notice that "his hand was restored whole as the other," suggest about the soul of a sinner whose sins Jesus has forgiven?

5. Luke tells us that after Jesus had healed the man's withered hand the religious leaders "were filled with madness." The Greek word translated as "madness" is *anoia* (our word, annoy, comes from this word). The Greek literally means "to be without a mind," or "be out of one's mind."

? What, do you think, are the religious leaders experiencing?

? What type of twisted religious morality and perspective causes one to be annoyed when they see something good and healing happen to a weak, sick, vulnerable individual?

? How do we see such twisted religious morality and perspective manifest in today's world?

? What do you think and feel when you witness how often Americans, many supposedly "Christian," feel annoyed, offended, and put out when they see America's poor and vulnerable assisted through private or public assistance?

? How do you feel about our equating such American attitudes toward assisting the poor to the clearly reprehensible attitude and conduct of the religious leaders who opposed and ultimately killed Jesus?

? What are the causes of such "mindlessness"?

? How can you avoid falling into the mindless trap that caused outrage at a kindness shown to a vulnerable soul?

Luke 6.¹²⁻¹⁶

¹²*In those days, he went out into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God. ¹³And when it was day, he called unto him his disciples: and of them he chose twelve, whom also he named apostles;

¹⁴Simon, (whom he also named Peter,)

and Andrew his brother,

James

and John,

Philip

and Bartholomew,

¹⁵Matthew

and Thomas,

James the son of Alphæus,

and Simon called Zelotes,

¹⁶And Judas the brother of James,

and Judas Iscariot, which also was the traitor.

Q

uestionary

1. In today's reading, Jesus calls 12 disciples as "apostles" after a night of prayer?
 - ? What is the significance of Jesus' prolonged prayer?
 - ? What is an "apostle"?

The Greek is indicative of someone "sent out," "commissioned;" an "envoy."

- ? What are Jesus' apostles in all ages "commissioned" or "sent out" to do?
2. We know little to nothing about several of these disciples/apostles.
 - ? What do you know about each of them?

Luke 6.¹⁷⁻¹⁹

¹⁷And he came down with them, and stood in the plain, and the company of his disciples, and a great multitude of people out of all Judæa and Jerusalem, and from the sea coast of Tyre and Sidon, which came to hear him, and to be healed of their diseases; ¹⁸and they that were vexed with unclean spirits: and they were healed. ¹⁹And the whole multitude sought to touch him: for there went virtue out of him, and healed them all.

Questionary

1. Luke tells us of “a great multitude” seeking Jesus out and of a “whole multitude” that “sought to touch him.”
 - ? What do you see in your mind when you imagine this scene?
 - ? How do you feel when you contemplate how attractive Jesus was to those who heard of him during his ministry?
 - ? How would you describe your feeling of attraction to Jesus?
 - ? How is that attraction to Jesus manifest in your daily life?
2. Luke also tells us that “there went virtue out of him.”
 - ? What is the nature of “virtue” in this passage?
The word might be better translated as “power” or “strength.”
 - ? How has Jesus’ “power” or “strength” been manifest in your life?

Luke 6.²⁰ & Matthew 5.³— (part 1) Jesus & the kingdom or rule of God (questionary 6)

²⁰Blessed be ye poor: for yours is the kingdom of God.

³Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Jesus speaks of kingdom of God¹ some forty times in the Gospel of Matthew. Jesus' announcement of the kingdom were Jesus' first words as recorded in the Gospel of Mark. In the idea of God's kingdom, Jesus found a primary and motivational principle and value. It was a central feature of his ministry. In this series of questionnaires entitled, "Jesus and the Kingdom of God," we examine Jesus' sayings about the kingdom of God and what he hoped and intended to happen as a consequence of his focus and teachings on God's kingdom. This questionnaire is the sixth in this series.

In introducing Jesus' ministry, Mark characterizes Jesus as "preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God." We might translate, "preaching the positive proclamation about God's kingdom." Matthew not only introduces the beginning of Jesus' ministry as one focused on "the kingdom of heaven," but says that "*from that time* Jesus began to preach... the kingdom of heaven," suggesting that the kingdom of God remained a central feature of Jesus' teachings and intentions throughout his ministry.

In our first 5 questionnaires, we have attempted to show that 1) the kingdom of God should be thought of as that group or society that adopts God's rule over it, i.e. accepts and lives by the principles and values by which He, Himself, lives and governs, and by which individuals and societies endure; 2) in proclaiming the kingdom of God, Jesus hoped and intended to change this world and the principles and values by which it governed and by which it lived. The kingdom of God on earth was in preparation for a kingdom of God in heaven, but he intended that life on earth be improved and that the kingdom of God become an experience of human history on earth; 3) Jesus expected a personal response to his message of the kingdom, that response being repentance/ a change in one's perspective and world view, and belief in Jesus' message of the imminent coming of the kingdom of God; and 4) that God sent Jesus for the express purpose of proclaiming the good news about the kingdom and that the healing of the sick was an integral part of the kingdom of God since it demonstrated God's taking control of things previously out of control.

This reading is the first of several from the Sermon on the Mount in which Jesus speaks of the kingdom. This first reading begins both the sermon and Jesus' Beatitudes.

1. In these two passages, Jesus identifies the poor as those who possess and inhabit the kingdom of God. It might seem that Matthew and Luke have slightly different takes on this first Beatitude and what is meant by "poor." Some read Matthew's version in a spiritual sense and Luke's in a temporal sense.
 - ? Do you think Matthew and Luke understand Jesus' statement differently or can you harmonize the two? Why do you answer as you do?
 - ? If you harmonize them, do you harmonize to the spiritual or to the temporal? Why?
 - ? How would you feel if we harmonized the two so as to understand Luke's "poor" and Matthew's "poor in spirit" as both referring to those who experience temporal poverty? Why do you feel this way?
 - ? What attitudes or beliefs would one have toward poverty, real destitution, and those who experience it that they would reject the consolation ("invitation" or "comfort") that Jesus offers the poor when he says that they are the kind of people who inherit the kingdom of God/ heaven?

¹ Where the other Gospel writers speak of the "kingdom of God," Matthew speaks of the "kingdom of heaven." It is generally thought that Matthew speaks of the "kingdom of *heaven*" rather than the "kingdom of *God*" out of a disinclination to refer to God directly out of respect for God, much as Jews avoid speaking the name of Yahweh, replacing it with LORD. Therefore Matthew's "kingdom of heaven" should be understood as being precisely the same as the "the kingdom of God" spoken of elsewhere.

Consider the following.

The Greek word used for “poor” in Matthew’s “poor in spirit” and Luke’s “poor” is *ptōchos*. It means “destitute, impoverished, mendicant.” Related verbs are *ptōssō*, “to crouch, be prostrate, bow down timidly,” and *ptōcheuō*, “to become a beggar, be indigent.” While another word, *penes*, for “poor” “denotes one who has to earn his living because he has no property, *ptōchos* denotes the complete destitution which forces the poor to seek the help of others by begging... It is the fate of a *ptōchos* to have nothing... but that of a *penes* to live frugally” (*TDOT*).

Now, consider the word, “spirit.” We sometimes speak of “school spirit.” We also speak of someone having their spirit broken. When we speak of someone having “school spirit” we mean that they have enthusiasm and are energetic and active for their school. When we speak of someone having their “spirit broke,” we mean their will to continue is weakened; they have become discouraged.

- ? How might you apply these observations to the idea of being “poor in spirit” or “poor in relation or relation to spirit”?
- ? Is it accurate to say that those who are temporally poor—truly poor, beggaredly so— often experience a serious lack of zest for life; that they can feel a lack of vitality and hope; that they can struggle to find a will to go?
- ? How do you respond to the assertion that all of this is what Jesus means when he speaks of the “poor in spirit”?

(*edition: December 4, 2024*)

²⁰Blessed be ye poor: for yours is the kingdom of God.

³Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Jesus speaks of kingdom of God² some forty times in the Gospel of Matthew. Jesus' announcement of the kingdom were Jesus' first words as recorded in the Gospel of Mark. In the idea of God's kingdom, Jesus found a primary and motivational principle and value. It was a central feature of his ministry. In this series of questionnaires entitled, "Jesus and the Kingdom of God," we examine Jesus' sayings about the kingdom of God and what he hoped and intended to happen as a consequence of his focus and teachings on God's kingdom. This questionnaire is the seventh in this series.

In introducing Jesus' ministry, Mark characterizes Jesus as "preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God." We might translate, "preaching the positive proclamation about God's kingdom." Matthew not only introduces the beginning of Jesus' ministry as one focused on "the kingdom of heaven," but says that "from that time Jesus began to preach... the kingdom of heaven," suggesting that the kingdom of God remained a central feature of Jesus' teachings and intentions throughout his ministry.

In our first 5 questionnaires, we have attempted to show that 1) the kingdom of God should be thought of as that group or society that adopts God's rule over it, i.e. accepts and lives by the principles and values by which He, Himself, lives and governs, and by which individuals and societies endure; 2) in proclaiming the kingdom of God, Jesus hoped and intended to change this world and the principles and values by which it governed and by which it lived. The kingdom of God on earth was in preparation for a kingdom of God in heaven, but he intended that life on earth be improved and that the kingdom of God become an experience of human history on earth; 3) Jesus expected a personal response to his message of the kingdom, that response being repentance/ a change in one's perspective and world view, and belief in Jesus' message of the imminent coming of the kingdom of God; and 4) that God sent Jesus for the express purpose of proclaiming the good news about the kingdom and that the healing of the sick was an integral part of the kingdom of God since it demonstrated God's taking control of things previously out of control.

The passages of this questionnaire are the first of several from the Sermon on the Mount in which Jesus speaks of the kingdom. In the case of Matthew, the passage begins both the sermon and Jesus' Beatitudes. In our first questionnaire in which we explore these two passages from the Sermon on the Mount, we asserted that Matthew's "poor in spirit" and Luke's simple "poor" both reflected the same class of people: those who were *temporally* poor, financially and economically destitute and beggarly.

1. Jesus' statement to the poor may be read as "consolation." Consolation can mean both "invitation" and "comfort"—it is easy to see how they are related since invitation often brings the one receiving the invitation a sense of comfort.
 - ? How do you feel about Jesus inviting the poor into "the kingdom of God/ heaven?"
 - ? How do you feel about Jesus offering the poor/ those discouraged and hopeless through temporal destitution comfort through this kingdom of God statement?
2. Jesus says to the poor, "yours *is* the kingdom of God." The verb *is* is in the present tense.
 - ? What do you make of this observation?
 - ? Do you think of Jesus' invitation to enter the kingdom of God/heaven as an invitation to enter

² Where the other Gospel writers speak of the "kingdom of God," Matthew speaks of the "kingdom of heaven." It is generally thought that Matthew speaks of the "kingdom of *heaven*" rather than the "kingdom of *God*" out of a disinclination to refer to God directly out of respect for God, much as Jews avoid speaking the name of Yahweh, replacing it with LORD. Therefore Matthew's "kingdom of heaven" should be understood as being precisely the same as the "the kingdom of God" spoken of elsewhere.

into the kingdom at some far off, future, perhaps even other worldly time and place or as an invitation to enter immediately? Why do you answer as you do?

- ? Consider both these possibilities. What do you learn from each of them? How does each impact the way you think of the kingdom of God? Of the poor?
- ? What does it say about God and His kingdom that it is very specifically a place in which the poor are invited and where they can find comfort?

Jesus', "yours is the kingdom of God," could be read as descriptive rather than invitation. We might accurately translate Jesus' statement as, "the kingdom of God belongs to you." The poor are not simply invited out of compassion, but because they are the very kind of people who belong in the kingdom, the very kind of people for whom it was created.

- ? What do you think and feel when you contemplate this possibility?

(edition: December 7, 2024)

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In our first 5 questionnaires, we have attempted to show that 1) the kingdom of God should be thought of as that group or society that adopts God's rule over it, i.e. accepts and lives by the principles and values by which He, Himself, lives and governs, and by which individuals and societies endure; 2) in proclaiming the kingdom of God, Jesus hoped and intended to change this world and the principles and values by which it governed and by which it lived. The kingdom of God on earth was in preparation for a kingdom of God in heaven, but he intended that life on earth be improved and that the kingdom of God become an experience of human history on earth; 3) Jesus expected a personal response to his message of the kingdom, that response being repentance/ a change in one's perspective and world view, and belief in Jesus' message of the imminent coming of the kingdom of God; and 4) that God sent Jesus for the express purpose of proclaiming the good news about the kingdom and that the healing of the sick was an integral part of the kingdom of God since it demonstrated God's taking control of things previously out of control.

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1. Consider the following passage.

"Behold, verily I say unto you, for this cause I have sent you... that a feast of fat things might be prepared for the poor; yea, a feast of fat things, of wine on the lees well refined, that the earth may know that the mouths of the prophets shall not fail; yea, a supper of the house of the Lord, well prepared, unto which all nations shall be invited. First, the rich and the learned, the

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wise and the noble; and after that cometh the day of my power; then shall the poor, the lame, and the blind, and the deaf, come in unto the marriage of the Lamb, and partake of the supper of the Lord, prepared for the great day to come” (DC 58.^{6, 8-11}).

- ? How does this passage relate to the idea of the poor being especially invited to enter the kingdom of God and there find comfort from their destitution and the worries, discouragements, and hopelessness that deep poverty so often brings?

2. Take a few minutes to consider one of Jesus’ kingdom of God/ heaven parables—this one the parable of the wedding feast found in Matthew 22.²⁻¹⁴.

“The kingdom of heaven is like unto a certain king, which made a marriage for his son, And sent forth his servants to call them that were bidden to the wedding: and they would not come. Again, he sent forth other servants, saying, ‘Tell them which are bidden, Behold, I have prepared my dinner: my oxen and my fatlings are killed, and all things are ready: come unto the marriage.’

“But they made light of it, and went their ways, one to his farm, another to his merchandise: and the remnant took his servants, and entreated them spitefully, and slew them. But when the king heard thereof, he was wroth: and he sent forth his armies, and destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city. Then saith he to his servants, ‘The wedding is ready, but they which were bidden were not worthy. Go ye therefore into the highways, and as many as ye shall find, bid to the marriage.’

“So those servants went out into the highways, and gathered together all as many as they found, both bad and good: and the wedding was furnished with guests. And when the king came in to see the guests, he saw there a man which had not on a wedding garment: And he saith unto him, ‘Friend, how camest thou in hither not having a wedding garment?’

“And he was speechless. Then said the king to the servants, ‘Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. For many are called, but few are chosen.’”

- ? How does the DC passage relate to this parable?
- ? How do they both relate to the two verses explored in this questionnaire?

In the DC passage, “First, the rich and the learned, the wise and the noble were invited to the “feast of fat things” and the “marriage of the Lamb.” In the parable found in Matthew, the same class, the wealthy—represented in the parable by landowners and merchants (vs. 5)—were first to be invited.

- ? What was the response of the landowners and merchants?
- ? Could we understand the DC’s “rich and the learned, the wise and the noble” to have similarly responded negatively to the invitation? Why do you answer as you do?
- ? What do you think and feel when we suggest that in both passages, those who are mentioned as having been invited “first” were not invited first because they were preferred or spiritually privileged—rather, the mention of their having been invited first is focused on the fact that they rejected the invitation?

3. In Luke’s Gospel, Jesus offered a contrast to his, “blessed be ye poor.” That contrast was, “But woe unto you that are rich! For ye have received your consolation [comfort or invitation or both]” (Lk. 6.²⁴).

- ? How do you feel about Jesus’ statement toward the rich?
- ? How does Luke’s contrast clarify the nature of the poverty and the poor to which Jesus speaks?

One could understand that the rich have already been consoled in this life through their ease. One could understand that the rich have already been invited into the kingdom and refused the invitation. Or, finally, one could understand that the kingdom of God simply wasn’t created for the rich; that they were not the type of people who belonged in the kingdom; or the type of people to whom the kingdom of God and the ideals and principles by which it existed appealed or to which they would conform.

- ? Consider each of these. What does each teach you about the poor? About the rich? About the nature of the kingdom?
- ? As you think of the last possible meaning—that the kingdom of God simply wasn't created for the rich; that they were not the type of people who belonged in the kingdom; or the type of people to whom the kingdom of God and the ideals and principles by which it existed appealed or to which they would conform—what would it be about the kingdom and its ideals and principles that the rich might find unappealing? (This question is one to keep in mind as we continue to explore the meaning and nature of the kingdom of God.)

(edition: December 11, 2024)

Luke 6.²⁰⁻²⁶ — just scripture

²⁰Blessed be ye poor: for yours is the kingdom of God.

²¹Blessed are ye that hunger now: for ye shall be filled.

Blessed are ye that weep now: for ye shall laugh.

²²Blessed are ye, when men shall hate you, and when they shall separate you from their company, and shall reproach you, and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of man's sake.

²³Rejoice y in that day, and leap for joy: for, behold, your reward is great in heaven: for in the like manner did their fathers unto the prophets.

²⁴But woe unto you that are rich! for ye have received your consolation.

²⁵Woe unto you that are full! for ye shall hunger.”

Woe unto you that laugh now! for ye shall mourn and weep.

²⁶Woe unto you, when all men shall speak well of you!

For so did their fathers to the false prophets.

Questionary

1. We are familiar with Matthew's version,

“Blessed are the poor in spirit...”

? How do you feel about Luke's more temporal imagining of Jesus' statement compared to Matthew's more seeming “spiritual” imagining?

? With which do you relate Most? Why?

? How does Luke's contrast add weight to Luke's temporal imagining?

Blessed be ye poor: for yours is the kingdom of God.

Vs.

But woe unto you that are rich!

? How do the other contrasts lend weight to the temporal imagining?

Blessed are ye that hunger now...

Vs.

Woe unto you that are full!

Blessed are ye that weep now...

Vs.

Woe unto you that laugh now!

2. In Luke's imagining of Jesus' statement the poor are “consoled” (see verse 24's contrast) by inheriting “the kingdom of God.”

? What is meant by “the kingdom of God” and how is it a consolation to the poor?

Certainly we can think of “the kingdom of God” in terms of glory and everlasting life.

However...

? Can we also think of “the kingdom of God” has something inherited in mortality as well?

? How would you feel about imagining “the kingdom of God” as that state in which God honors, values, and enfranchises the poor, as opposed to the kingdoms of this world that dishonor, devalue, and disenfranchise the poor.

3. Consider Luke's portrait of the poor as hungry and inclined to sorrow, and the portrait of the rich as full and happy.

? How do you feel about these portraits?

4. Mary had this insight into the nature and purpose of her son's, Jesus, ministry.

“He hath put down the mighty from their seats,

and exalted them of a low degree.
He hath filled the hungry with good things;
and the rich he hath sent empty away” (Luke 1.⁵²⁻⁵³).

- ? How does this confirm and enhance Luke’s imagining of Jesus’ statements found in today’s reading?
- ? Which word would most accurately describe your feelings about the promise of consolation made to the poor?

Pleased
Happy
Confused
Skeptical
Resistant

- ? Why do you answer as you do?
- ? What feelings do you have when you consider God’s intent to recompense the poor/hungry for their earthly sufferings?
- ? What part do/can you play in this work of God?
- ? How do the more advantaged “separate [the poor] from their company,” and “reproach” them?
- ? What are your impressions when you compare and contrast Luke’s version of the Beatitudes with Matthew’s better-known version?
- ? How do the parallel woes, absent in Matthew, alter or enhance your understanding of these Beatitudes?
- ? Some chaff at Luke’s much more “physical” and “temporal” thoughts about real challenges faced in this life as opposed to the more “spiritual” approach Matthew took?
- ? How about you?

Luke 6.²⁷⁻³⁰

²⁷“But I say unto you which hear,
Love your enemies,
do good to them which hate you,
²⁸bles them that curse you,
and pray for them which despitefully use you.
²⁹And unto him that smiteth thee on the one cheek
offer also the other;
and him that taketh away thy cloke
forbid not to take thy coat also.
³⁰Give to every man that asketh of thee;
and of him that taketh away thy goods ask them not again.

Qquestionary

1. In verses 27 and 28, Jesus asks that we do four things in relation to our “enemy.”
 - ? What earned others the designation of “enemy”?
 - ? Do you have enemies? How did they become such?
 - ? What does it mean to “love them,” “bless them,” “pray for them,” and “doing good to them”?
 - ? How do you feel about being asked to “love them,” “bless them,” “pray for them,” and “doing good to them”?
 - ? What does all of this look like in real life?
2. Jesus suggests that “unto him that smiteth thee on the one cheek offer also the other.”
 - ? How does Luke’s report of Jesus’ statement differ from that of Matthew?
 - ? What is the significance of Matthew’s “right cheek”?

Being struck on the “right check,” the attacker thus backhanding with their left hand, is less an attempt to inflict physical harm and more an attempt to humiliate.

- ? What do you take from this observation?
- ? What do you make of Luke’s choice to leave this out of his reportage?
- ? How is Luke’s statement more strident and difficult than Matthew’s?
- ? What might be the impact on others of following Jesus’ admonitions found in today’s reading?
- ? What is the impact on us as we follow Jesus’ admonitions found in today’s reading?
- ? To what degree do Jesus and his Father follow this counsel in their relationship with humankind? Why do you answer as you do?
- ? Is there some personal or societal relationship in your life that needs to change based upon Jesus’ counsel? What will you do to make the change?

Luke 6.³¹⁻³⁶

³¹“And as ye would that men should do to you,
do ye also to them likewise.

³²For if ye love them which love you,
what thank have ye?

For sinners also love those that love them.

³³And if ye do good to them which do good to you,
what thank have ye?

For sinners also do even the same.

³⁴And if ye lend to them of whom ye hope to receive,
what thank have ye?

For sinners also lend to sinners,
to receive as much again.

³⁵“But love ye your enemies,
and do good, and lend,
hoping for nothing again;
and your reward shall be great,
and ye shall be the children of the Highest:
for he is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil.

³⁶Be ye therefore merciful,
as your Father also is merciful.

Questionary

1. While Luke ends with his admonition, “Be ye therefore merciful,” Matthew ends with, “Be ye therefore perfect.”
 - ? What do each of these admonitions expect of you?
 - ? How is being merciful related to perfection?
 - ? What is the impact and meaning of “therefore”?
 - ? How does being merciful serve as a means of fulfilling or completing the admonitions that precede it? For example,
 - Lending to those who can not repay.
 - Loving those who may not necessarily return the love.
 - Doing good to those who may not return the good.
2. Luke asserts that God “is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil.”
 - ? To what evidences would you point as proof of this assertion?
 - ? How do you feel about the aspect of God’s character?
 - ? Have you ever been the beneficiary of this aspect of God’s character? What were the circumstances?
3. While Luke’s emphasis throughout today’s reading is that we ought to do the right thing without concern about “what’s in it for us,” he does mention one “reward.”
 - ? What is that reward?
 - ? How do you feel about a reward of being thought of as a “child of the Highest”?

Luke 6.³⁷⁻³⁸

³⁷“Judge not, and ye shall not be judged:
condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned:
forgive, and ye shall be forgiven:

³⁸Give, and it shall be given unto you;
good measure, pressed down, and shaken together,
and running over, shall men give into your bosom.
For with the same measure that ye mete
withal it shall be measured to you again.”

Questionary

1. In the previous 10 verses (27-36), Jesus has encouraged a generosity of attitude and action toward others.
? How does this reading continue this encouragement of generosity?
2. Jesus encourages his audience to “judge not.”
? Given that we must all judge, or evaluate the world around us and determine who and how we will associate with other individuals and ideas, what does Jesus mean when he says “Judge not”?
? How does Jesus’ follow up “condemn not” and “forgive” clarify his meaning of judging?
3. Jesus says that we will be measured by the same standard that we measure others.
? Based upon this reality, how are you measured by others?

Consider the following passage.

“Yea, verily, to seal them up unto the day when the wrath of God shall be poured out upon the wicked without measure—unto the day when the Lord shall come to recompense unto every man according to his work, and measure to every man according to the measure which he has measured to his fellow man” (DC 1.⁹⁻¹⁰).

- ? Given that individuals are measured as they measure, what does it say about those who experience “wrath” beyond measuring?
- ? What evidences do you see that hostility (wrath) toward others is “beyond measuring,” thus endangering all of us with consequences that are “beyond measuring”?
- ? What dangers to our society do such exaggerated hostilities present?

Luke 6.³⁹⁻⁴²

³⁹And he spake a parable unto them,
“Can the blind lead the blind?
Shall they not both fall into the ditch?
⁴⁰The disciple is not above his master:
but every one that is perfect shall be as his master.
⁴¹“And why beholdest thou the mote
that is in thy brother’s eye,
but perceivest not the beam
that is in thine own eye?
⁴²Either how canst thou say to thy brother,
‘Brother, let me pull out the mote
that is in thine eye,’
when thou thyself beholdest not the beam
that is in thine own eye?
Thou hypocrite, cast out first the beam out
of thine own eye,
and then shalt thou see clearly to pull out the mote
that is in thy brother’s eye.

Q

uestionary

1. Jesus speaks the obvious truth that blind people can not lead or direct other blind people, and that people with a “beam” in their eye cannot properly diagnose another’s failings.
 - ? What is a “beam”?
 - ? How does thinking of the “beam” as the mast of a ship or the joists of a home, impact your understanding of Jesus’ warning?
 - ? What do you think when you compare the size of a beam to that of a splinter?
 - ? What does “the beam” have to do with a blindness that removes the capacity to lead or direct?
 - ? Does it follow that everyone who sees splinters in other’s eyes necessarily has a beam in their own? Why do you answer as you do?
 - ? If Jesus would not have us ignore another’s debilitating splinter, but help “pull it out,” what would he have us do to avoid falling into the trap of becoming an “hypocrite”?

Luke 6.⁴³⁻⁴⁵

⁴³“For a good tree bringeth not forth corrupt fruit;
neither doth a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit.

⁴⁴For every tree is known by his own fruit.
For of thorns men do not gather figs,
nor of a bramble bush gather they grapes.

⁴⁵“A good man out of the good treasure of his heart
bringeth forth that which is good;
and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart
bringeth forth that which is evil:
for of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaketh.

Questionary

1. A tree produces fruit. Wild bushes, including those with thorns, do not produce figs or grapes. The logic is inescapable.
 - ? What unassailable truths about people does Jesus teach with these unassailable truths of nature?
 - ? In your experiences, are people so clearly either bad or good?
 - ? Have you seen “good people” do things that are bad and “bad people” do something good?
 - ? In speaking of “fruits” and other harvests, then, Jesus seems to be speaking about something more profound than individual acts of goodness or evil. What is the “fruit,” if not individual acts?
2. According to Jesus’ teachings here, we can fairly and accurately evaluate another’s inner character by their outward behavior and the consequences those behaviors have on them and those around them.
 - ? What do you think and feel when you contemplate this truth?
 - ? Do you possess any reservations about this assertion? If so, why?
3. Jesus suggests that we can even make determinations about another’s character by the words that come from their mouth and the way they impact other individuals and societies.
 - ? How do you feel about this observation?
 - ? To what examples can you point when one individual’s words had a negative impact on an individual?
 - ? To what examples can you point when one individual’s words had a negative impact on a society—family, church, state, nation, etc.?

Luke 6.⁴⁶⁻⁴⁹

⁴⁶“And why call ye me, ‘Lord, Lord,’
and do not the things which I say?”

⁴⁷Whosoever cometh to me,
and heareth my sayings,
and doeth them,

I will shew you to whom he is like:

⁴⁸he is like a man which built an house,
and digged deep, and laid the foundation on a rock:
and when the flood arose,
the stream beat vehemently upon that house,
and could not shake it:
for it was founded upon a rock.

⁴⁹But he that heareth, and doeth not,
is like a man that without a foundation
built an house upon the earth;
against which the stream did beat vehemently,
and immediately it fell;
and the ruin of that house was great.”

Q

uestionary

1. Jesus makes appeal to analogy to describe cause and effect.
 - ? In the analogy, why does the house stand or fall?
 - ? What part does God play in the house’s standing or falling?
2. The house that falls does not do so because God engages as an active agent in “making” or “causing” it to fall. The house that endures does not do so because God engages as an active agent in “making” or “causing” it stand. Rather, whether the house stands or falls is a logical and explainable phenomenon that is the result of natural “cause and effect.”
 - ? What do you think and feel when you consider this?
 - ? How is this applied to your life?
 - ? Why, when “houses fall” because they are built on poor foundations do we so often interpret the fall as indicative of direct action on the part of God—punishment?
 - ? Why, when “houses stand” because they were built on a good foundation do we so often interpret the standing as indicative of direct action on the part of God—blessing?
3. Consider the following passage and how it relates to today’s reading.

“For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; every man’s work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man’s work of what sort it is. If any man’s work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man’s work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire” (1 Cor. 3.¹¹⁻¹⁵).

Luke 7.³⁶⁻⁵⁰— atonement

³⁶And one of the Pharisees desired him that he would eat with him. And he went into the Pharisee's house, and sat down to meat. ³⁷And, behold, a woman in the city, which was a sinner, when she knew that Jesus sat at meat in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster box of ointment, ³⁸And stood at his feet behind him weeping, and began to wash his feet with tears, and did wipe them with the hairs of her head, and kissed his feet, and anointed them with the ointment.

³⁹Now when the Pharisee which had bidden him saw it, he spake within himself, saying, "This man, if he were a prophet, would have known who and what manner of woman this is that toucheth him: for she is a sinner."

⁴⁰And Jesus answering said unto him, "Simon, I have somewhat to say unto thee."

And he saith, "Master, say on."

⁴¹"There was a certain creditor which had two debtors: the one owed five hundred pence, and the other fifty. ⁴²And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both. Tell me therefore, which of them will love him most?"

⁴³Simon answered and said, "I suppose that he, to whom he forgave most."

And he said unto him, "Thou hast rightly judged."

⁴⁴And he turned to the woman, and said unto "Simon, Seest thou this woman? I entered into thine house, thou gavest me no water for my feet: but she hath washed my feet with tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head. ⁴⁵Thou gavest me no kiss: but this woman since the time I came in hath not ceased to kiss my feet. ⁴⁶My head with oil thou didst not anoint: but this woman hath anointed my feet with ointment. ⁴⁷Wherefore I say unto thee, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little."

⁴⁸And he said unto her, "Thy sins are forgiven."

⁴⁹And they that sat at meat with him began to say within themselves, "Who is this that forgiveth sins also?"

⁵⁰And he said to the woman, "Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace."

Q

This reading is one in a series of readings on Atonement that we entitle, "At-one-ment: The Savior's unity and connectedness with us." *

One of my central understandings of Jesus Christ and his ministry is that he and it represented a witness of God's feelings of connectedness, attachment, linkage, participation, and unity with humankind. Rather than understanding the basic meaning of at-one-ment to be something like "expiation," or "propitiation" or "sacrifice," etc., I understand its basic meaning as "connectedness," "attachment," "unity," "oneness," etc.

- ? How does Jesus demonstrate and form his attachment to, his connectedness to, his willing participation with the woman, who was guilty of *many* sins, according to Jesus' discernment?
1. The narrator identifies the woman as a "sinner." Then, within the narrative, Simon identifies her as a "sinner." Jesus confirms her status as a "sinner" in saying that her sins "are many."
 - ? Using your imagination, what kind of woman do you imagine her to be?
 - ? Knowing that she is a "sinner," how would you feel if she engaged in the kind of intimate physical touch with you that she did with Jesus?
 2. Jesus says of the woman, "Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little."
 - ? Was the woman forgiven because she loved much or did she love much because she was forgiven?
 - ? How does the parable of verses 41-42 help?

"There was a certain creditor which had two debtors: the one owed five hundred pence,

and the other fifty. And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both. Tell me therefore, which of them will love him most?"

3. Even though Jesus had announced to Simon and all who were present that the woman's sins were forgiven, he nevertheless turned and addressed the woman herself directly: "Thy sins are forgiven."

? Why, do you think, did Jesus go to this "trouble" of repetition?

? What does it suggest about Jesus' interest in the individual?

? How does this demonstrate Jesus' atonement, or his interest in forming personal connections with individuals?

4. Finally, Jesus said to the woman, "Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace."

? What, do you think, does Jesus mean by "saved"?

? What is the relationship between the forgiveness of sins and being "saved"?

- * The following ten titles are part of our atonement series:

"Fall: Our Need of Atonement"

"Grace: The Savior's Generous and Earnest Invitation"

"At-one-ment: The Savior's unity and connectedness with us"

"Sacrifice: What Jesus Suffered for Us"

"Glorification: The Savior's Resurrection, Ascension, and Enthronement"

"Justification: How We Repent and Change"

"Renewal: The Hope, Joy, Peace, and Power of Atonement"

"Sanctification: Imitating and living Jesus' life of Atonement"

"Thanksgiving: In Praise of Atonement"

"The Song of the Righteous: A Song unto Me"

Luke 8.²⁶⁻³⁹ — Atonement

²⁶And they arrived at the country of the Gadarenes, which is over against Galilee. ²⁷And when he went forth to land, there met him out of the city a certain man, which had devils long time, and ware no clothes, neither abode in any house, but in the tombs. ²⁸When he saw Jesus, he cried out, and fell down before him, and with a loud voice said, "What have I to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of God most high? I beseech thee, torment me not." ²⁹(For he had commanded the unclean spirit to come out of the man. For oftentimes it had caught him: and he was kept bound with chains and in fetters; and he brake the bands, and was driven of the devil into the wilderness.)

³⁰And Jesus asked him, saying, "What is thy name?"

And he said, "Legion:" because many devils were entered into him.

³¹And they besought him that he would not command them to go out into the deep. ³²And there was there an herd of many swine feeding on the mountain: and they besought him that he would suffer them to enter into them. And he suffered them. ³³Then went the devils out of the man, and entered into the swine: and the herd ran violently down a steep place into the lake, and were choked.

³⁴When they that fed them saw what was done, they fled, and went and told it in the city and in the country. ³⁵Then they went out to see what was done; and came to Jesus, and found the man, out of whom the devils were departed, sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed, and in his right mind: and they were afraid. ³⁶They also which saw it told them by what means he that was possessed of the devils was healed.

³⁷Then the whole multitude of the country of the Gadarenes round about besought him to depart from them; for they were taken with great fear: and he went up into the ship, and returned back again. ³⁸Now the man out of whom the devils were departed besought him that he might be with him: but Jesus sent him away, saying, ³⁹"Return to thine own house, and shew how great things God hath done unto thee."

And he went his way, and published throughout the whole city how great things Jesus had done unto him.

Q

uestionary

This reading is one in a series of readings on Atonement that we entitle, "Renewal: The Hope, Joy, Peace, and Power of Atonement." *

1. Luke describes "a certain man" that met Jesus when he "arrived at the country of the Gadarenes."

? How does Luke characterize him?

? What do Matthew and Mark add to the description?

"And when he was come to the other side into the country of the Gergesenes, there met him two possessed with devils, coming out of the tombs, exceeding fierce, so that no man might pass by that way" (Matthew 8:²⁸).

"Who had his dwelling among the tombs; and no man could bind him, no, not with chains: ⁴ Because that he had been often bound with fetters and chains, and the chains had been plucked asunder by him, and the fetters broken in pieces: neither could any man tame him. ⁵ And always, night and day, he was in the mountains, and in the tombs, crying, and cutting himself with stones" (Mark 5:³⁻⁵).

? What do the following descriptions of the man suggest about his psychological state?

- He "ware no clothes."
- He "neither abode in any house, but in the tombs."
- He "was kept bound with chains and in fetters; and he brake the bands."
- He "was driven of the devil into the wilderness."
- He was "exceeding fierce."
- "Neither could any man tame him."

- He “cut himself with stones.”
 - ? How does the man feel about himself?
 - ? How does he feel about others?
 - ? How do you feel and what do you think when we suggest that in his living in the tombs and cutting himself with stones, the man evidences a desire to be dead and attempted suicide?
2. The man’s initial response to Jesus’ presence was, “What have I to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of God most high? I beseech thee, torment me not.”
 - ? What do you think and feel when you consider that this feeling of unworthiness was not only possessed by “the legions of devils” but also by the man himself?
 - ? What do you think and feel when you consider that the man himself thought of Jesus as a “tormentor”?
 - ? How do we often possess the same feelings of unworthiness and distrust of Jesus’ love and commitment to us that this man felt?
 3. We have examined the character and manner of life of the man with a legion of devils and how he felt about himself before his encounter with Jesus.
 - ? Now, make a list of how the man is described after his encounter with Jesus?
 - ? How, do you think, does the man now think of himself? Why do you answer as you do?

After his encounter with Jesus, the man...

is found “sitting at the feet of Jesus.”

is found “clothed.”

is found to be “in his right mind.”

- ? What do you think and feel as you contemplate the transformation between what the man was before and after his encounter with Jesus?
 - ? What might Luke want you to learn from this dramatic difference from “before” and “after”?
4. Compare the man’s feelings about being in the presence of Jesus before (vs. 28) and after (vs. 38) his encounter with Jesus.
 - ? How do you feel about this change?
 - ? What other scriptural accounts come to mind as you consider the man’s changed attitude about God and God’s acceptance of him?
 - ? What thoughts and feelings do you have when you compare the man’s changed attitude about being in Jesus’ presence with Alma the younger’s changed attitude?

Alma, before his prayer for mercy:

“... the very thought of coming into the presence of my God did rack my soul with inexpressible horror. Oh, thought I, that I could be banished and become extinct both soul and body, that I might not be brought to stand in the presence of my God, to be judged of my deeds” (Alma 36.¹⁴⁻¹⁵).

Alma, after his prayer for mercy:

“Yea, methought I saw, even as our father Lehi saw, God sitting upon his throne, surrounded with numberless concourses of angels, in the attitude of singing and praising their God; yea, and my soul did long to be there” (Alma 36.²²).

- ? What might this change of feelings about being in the presence of God and in the presence of the Savior teach you about your own ability to have the Savior’s presence in your life?
5. We have not mentioned or asked any questions about swine.

- ? Why do you think that is?
- ? What is the “moral” of the story without the pigs?
- ? Does the moral of the story change if notice is given to the pigs? If so how do the pigs change or impact the moral of the story?
- ? Is there a “moral” to the story that demands the notice about the swine? If so, what is it?
- * The following ten titles are part of our atonement series:
 - “Fall: Our Need of Atonement”
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 - “The Song of the Righteous: A Song unto Me”

Luke 8.³⁴⁻³⁹

³⁴When they that fed them saw what was done, they fled, and went and told it in the city and in the country. ³⁵Then they went out to see what was done; and came to Jesus, and found the man, out of whom the devils were departed, sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed, and in his right mind: and they were afraid. ³⁶They also which saw it told them by what means he that was possessed of the devils was healed.

³⁷Then the whole multitude of the country of the Gadarenes round about besought him to depart from them; for they were taken with great fear: and he went up into the ship, and returned back again. ³⁸Now the man out of whom the devils were departed besought him that he might be with him: but Jesus sent him away, saying, ³⁹“Return to thine own house, and shew how great things God hath done unto thee.”

And he went his way, and published throughout the whole city how great things Jesus had done unto him.

Questionary

1. In our previous reading from Luke 8.²⁶⁻³³, we examined the character and manner of life of the man with a legion of devils and how he felt about himself before his encounter with Jesus.
 - ? Take a moment to review the nature of the man and his life before his encounter with Jesus?
 - ? Now, make a list of how the man is described after his encounter with Jesus?
 - ? How, do you think, does the man now think of himself? Why do you answer as you do?

After his encounter with Jesus, the man...

is found “sitting at the feet of Jesus.”

is found “clothed.”

is found to be “in his right mind.”

- ? What do you think and feel as you contemplate the transformation between what the man was before and after his encounter with Jesus?
 - ? What might Luke want you to learn from this dramatic difference from “before” and “after”?
2. Compare the man’s feelings about being in the presence of Jesus before (vs. 28) and after (vs. 38) his encounter with Jesus.
 - ? How do you feel about this change?
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“Yea, methought I saw, even as our father Lehi saw, God sitting upon his throne, surrounded with numberless concourses of angels, in the attitude of singing and praising their God; yea, and my soul did long to be there” (Alma 36.²²).

- ? What might this change of feelings about being in the presence of God and in the

presence of the Savior teach you about your own ability to have the Savior's presence in your life?

3. We have not mentioned, or asked any questions about swine.
 - ? Why do you think that is?
 - ? What is the "moral" of the story without the pigs?
 - ? Does the moral of the story change if notice is given to the pigs? If so how do the pigs change or impact the moral of the story?
 - ? Is there a "moral" to the story that demands the notice about the swine? If so, what is it?

Luke 9.^{28-36, 44-45}

²⁸*About an eight days after these sayings, he took Peter and John and James, and went up into a mountain to pray. ²⁹And as he prayed, the fashion of his countenance was altered, and his raiment was white and glistering. ³⁰And, behold, there talked with him two men, which were Moses and Elias: ³¹who appeared in glory, and spake of his decease which he should accomplish at Jerusalem. ³²But Peter and they that were with him were heavy with sleep: and when they were awake, they saw his glory, and the two men that stood with him.

³³*As they departed from him, Peter said unto Jesus, "Master, it is good for us to be here: and let us make three tabernacles; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias:" not knowing what he said. ³⁴While he thus spake, there came a cloud, and overshadowed them: and they feared as they entered into the cloud. ³⁵And there came a voice out of the cloud, saying, "This is my beloved Son: hear him." ³⁶And when the voice was past, Jesus was found alone. And they kept it close, and told no man in those days any of those things which they had seen....

⁴⁴"Let these sayings sink down into your ears: for the Son of man shall be delivered into the hands of men." ⁴⁵But they understood not this saying, and it was hid from them, that they perceived it not: and they feared to ask him of that saying.

Q

uestionary

Today's is the fourth in a series of readings focused on "True Greatness and the Godly Use of Power" (Matthew 16.¹³⁻²¹; Matthew 16.²²⁻²³; Matthew 16.²⁴⁻²⁶; Luke 9.^{28-36, 44-45}; Mark 9.³³⁻³⁵ & Matthew 18.²⁻⁴; Luke 9.⁵¹⁻⁵⁶; Mark 10.³⁵⁻⁴⁵; Matthew 21.¹⁻⁵; Revelation 5.¹⁻⁷). According to Luke's chronology, the events of today's reading, took place just a week after those examined in our previous three readings.

In the first reading (Matthew 16.¹³⁻²¹), in reply to Jesus' inquiry concerning what his disciples thought of him, Peter uttered his famous confession, "Thou art the Christ. The Son of the living God." Sensing, perhaps, that Peter misunderstood the meaning of his Messiahship, and the true nature of his greatness, Jesus issued his first warning that he would be rejected and killed.

In the second reading (Matthew 16.²²⁻²³), Peter rebukes Jesus for his warning. Jesus replies with his own rebuke of Peter, suggesting that Peter's rebuke was satanic and driven by selfish desires rather than the will of God.

In the third reading (Matthew 16.²⁴⁻²⁶), Jesus follows up his rebuke of Peter with instruction concerning the true nature of greatness, suggesting that those who wish to be disciples of Jesus, must follow him in self sacrifice in the service of others.

1. While speaking with Moses and Elijah on the Mount of Transfiguration, Luke records that the three of them "spake of his decease which he should accomplish at Jerusalem." One can imagine that the three of them might have discussed any number of important items.
 - ? In your mind, what is the significance of the fact that Luke only records their discussing Jesus' impending death?
 - ? What might be the significance of Luke's highlighting this part of their discussion in light of Peter's recent confession/and rebuke of Jesus?
2. Luke records that during this discussion "Peter and they that were with him were heavy with sleep" waking up afterwards only to see "his glory, and the two men that stood with him." Later, we will learn that the disciples slept through Jesus' agonizing prayers at Gethsemane.
 - ? Is there something more than mere "reportage of the facts" going on here? If so, what is the text telling us?
 - ? How would you feel if we suggested that the text is telling us that the disciples simply could not understand or accept such possibilities as Jesus' suffering, rejection, death, etc., but were only willing to see his "glory"—as if "glory" is not found in his suffering and death?

- ? Speaking of the “glory” found on the Mount of Transfiguration, what, do you imagine, did the disciples see and feel as they witnessed the “glory” of Jesus’ transfiguration?
- 3. As soon as Jesus has an opportunity to be alone with all the apostles after these events, he delivered his second warning concerning his looming rejection and death, saying, “the Son of man shall be delivered into the hands of men.”
 - ? Why, do you think, did Jesus follow up his glorious transfiguration with this sobering warning?
 - ? How did the disciples respond?
 - ? How is this sobering follow up to a glorious moment similar to Jesus’ sobering warning immediately after Peter’s initial confession, “Thou art the Christ...”?

Luke 9.⁵¹⁻⁵⁶

⁵¹And it came to pass, when the time was come that he should be received up, he stedfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem, ⁵²and sent messengers before his face: and they went, and entered into a village of the Samaritans, to make ready for him. ⁵³And they did not receive him, because his face was as though he would go to Jerusalem. ⁵⁴And when his disciples James and John saw this, they said, “Lord, wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them, even as Elias did?”

⁵⁵But he turned, and rebuked them, and said, “Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of. ⁵⁶For the Son of man is not come to destroy men’s lives, but to save them.”

And they went to another village.

Questionary

Today’s reading continues our look at Jesus’ sense of what greatness—human and divine—means and how power is to be exercised. Before we share any thoughts or ask any specific questions, take a moment to consider how today’s reading contributes to the insights into greatness and the use of power that you have already made.

Today’s readings is another in our series of readings focused on “True Greatness and the Godly Use of Power” (Matthew 16.¹³⁻²¹; Matthew 16.²²⁻²³; Matthew 16.²⁴⁻²⁶; Luke 9.^{28-36, 44-45}; Mark 9.³³⁻³⁵ & Matthew 18.²⁻⁴; Luke 9.⁵¹⁻⁵⁶; Mark 10.³⁵⁻⁴⁵; Matthew 21.¹⁻⁵; Revelation 5.¹⁻⁷)

1. James and John were highly offended at Jesus’ poor treatment at the hands of the Samaritans. These same disciples would, of course, see Jesus treated even more poorly by all the power centers of Jewish and Roman society.
 - ? How might their experience in Samaria and Jesus’ rejection there have prepared them to later respond appropriately not only to Jesus’ rejection and murder, but also to the persecution and hatred that they themselves would experience as they began their witnessing ministry?
2. The Samaritans rejected Jesus “because his face was as though he would go to Jerusalem.” Of course, this stemmed from their rejection of the Jerusalem priesthood and temple—largely because of its rejection of them. However, there may be a subtler, somewhat ironic message here. Though for different reasons, Peter (standing, really, as a representation of all Jesus’ disciples) and the Samaritans were offended by and rejected Jesus’ determination to go to Jerusalem.
 - ? Is it possible that Luke is involved in a bit of irony in his reporting of these two episodes—Peter’s and the Samaritans’ “rejection” of Jesus’ intentions?
 - ? How would you feel about the possibility of the Gospel writer saying, among other things, that the disciples were not so different from the Samaritans?
 - ? Do you see the further irony in the fact that James and John considered destroying the Samaritans for being guilty of a rejection of Jesus that was not so unlike their own?
 - ? How often are we repulsed by others’ sins because of our own?
 - ? How often do we use other peoples’ sins to cover our own, and make ourselves feel better about ourselves?
3. Consider Jesus’ two responses—the first to Peter, the second to James and John (again, we should think of them as being representative of all the disciples)—to his disciples’ misunderstanding of him; of his own self-understanding concerning the nature of greatness and the appropriate use of power in relation to others.

“Thou art an offence unto me: for thou a savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men.”

And

“Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of. For the Son of man is not come to destroy men’s lives, but to save them.”

- ? In what ways do these two responses represent essentially the same observation and critique of the disciples character and value system?
- ? “What manner of spirit” *are* the disciples of?
- ? In what ways are they simply thinking of and reacting to the world around them just like everyone else?
- ? How do you feel knowing that Jesus concluded and accepted the fact that in order to avoid “being a destroyer” He would have to “be destroyed”?
- ? How do you feel about, and what do you learn from the Gospels’ focus on the misunderstanding of “Peter, James, and John,” who we often think of as chief among the disciples?
- ? We have said that Peter, James, and John can be thought of as representative of all the disciples. How can they be view as representative of *all* disciples throughout time?
- ? How can they be viewed as representative of *us and our society*?
- ? What can you do to not only correct your own misunderstanding about greatness and how power is exercised toward others, but to correct and transform the misunderstanding and misuse of power in society?

Luke 10.³⁸⁻⁴²

³⁸Now it came to pass, as they went, that he entered into a certain village: and a certain woman named Martha received him into her house. ³⁹And she had a sister called Mary, which also sat at Jesus' feet, and heard his word. ⁴⁰But Martha was cumbered about much serving, and came to him, and said, "Lord, dost thou not care that my sister hath left me to serve alone? Bid her therefore that she help me."

⁴¹And Jesus answered and said unto her, "Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things: ⁴²but one thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her."

Q

uestionary

This is the 10th reading for Lent 2024. During Lent, one is asked to live a simpler life as one considers one's general life priorities. Today's reading allows us to examine our life priorities.

1. As the KJV has it, "Martha was cumbered about much serving."
 - ? What do you understand by Martha's being "cumbered"?
 - To be cumbered means to be "weighed down," or "hindered." The NIV translates "distracted."
 - ? How do these potential alternate translations impact your understanding of Martha's blindness?
2. Jesus corrects Martha by pointing out that she is "careful and troubled about many things."
 - ? What was the tone, do you feel, of Jesus' rebuke?
 - ? What does it mean to be "careful and troubled"?
 - ? About what worldly cares and concerns are you "careful and troubled," that only serve to "weigh you down," "hinder you," or "distract you" from things are far more importance and eternal consequence?
3. Jesus tells Martha that "one thing is needful and that needful thing is the "good part."
 - ? What is that "one needful and good thing"?
 - ? How practical and realistic does Jesus seem to you?
 - ? What is that "one needful and good thing" on which you could focus during Lent that could serve to assist you as you seek to permanently jettison distractions that hinder you from enjoying the more needful and eternal things of the Spirit?

Matthew 6.¹⁰ & Luke 11.²— Jesus & the kingdom or rule of God (questionary 10)

¹⁰Thy kingdom come.

Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.

²Thy kingdom come.

Thy will be done, as in heaven, so in earth.

Jesus speaks of kingdom of God⁴ some forty times in the Gospel of Matthew. Jesus' announcement of the kingdom were Jesus' first words as recorded in the Gospel of Mark. In the idea of God's kingdom, Jesus found a primary and motivational principle and value. It was a central feature of his ministry. In this series of questionnaires entitled, "Jesus and the Kingdom of God," we examine Jesus' sayings about the kingdom of God and what he hoped and intended to happen as a consequence of his focus and teachings on God's kingdom. This questionnaire is the eighth in this series.

In introducing Jesus' ministry, Mark characterizes Jesus as "preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God." We might translate, "preaching the positive proclamation about God's kingdom." Matthew not only introduces the beginning of Jesus' ministry as one focused on "the kingdom of heaven," but says that "*from that time* Jesus began to preach... the kingdom of heaven," suggesting that the kingdom of God remained a central feature of Jesus' teachings and intentions throughout his ministry.

In our first 5 questionnaires, we attempted to show that 1) the kingdom of God should be thought of as that group or society that adopts God's rule over it, i.e. accepts and lives by the principles and values by which He, Himself, lives and governs, and by which individuals and societies endure; 2) in proclaiming the kingdom of God, Jesus hoped and intended to change this world and the principles and values by which it governed and by which it lived. The kingdom of God on earth was in preparation for a kingdom of God in heaven, but he intended that life on earth be improved and that the kingdom of God become an experience of human history on earth; 3) Jesus expected a personal response to his message of the kingdom, that response being repentance/ a change in one's perspective and world view, and belief in Jesus' message of the imminent coming of the kingdom of God; and 4) that God sent Jesus for the express purpose of proclaiming the good news about the kingdom and that the healing of the sick was an integral part of the kingdom of God since it demonstrated God's taking control of things previously out of control.

In our sixth, seventh, and eighth questionnaires we examined the first Beatitude found in Jesus' Sermon on the Mount with its statement concerning the kingdom of God. Here, we found that 1) Matthew's "poor in spirit" and Luke's simple "poor" both reflected the same class of people: those who were temporally poor, indeed destitute and beggarly; 2) that Jesus statement could be seen as both invitation and comfort to the poor; 3) that Jesus invitation was for the poor to enter the comfort of his kingdom in the here and now as well as in some distant, future, post-mortal time and place; and 4) that even more than invitation and comfort, Jesus' statement reveals that the kingdom of God belongs naturally to the poor because of their own suffering and the nature of the Kingdom of God itself.

In our ninth questionnaire, focused on Jesus' eighth Beatitude, we found that those who are persecuted are part of the kingdom of God. Indeed, we suggested that it might very be, in fact, their desire for the kingdom of God that makes them targets of persecution.

In this questionnaire, we remain in Jesus' Sermon on the Mount and consider the kingdom of God in light

⁴ Where the other Gospel writers speak of the "kingdom of God," Matthew speaks of the "kingdom of heaven." It is generally thought that Matthew speaks of the "kingdom of *heaven*" rather than the "kingdom of *God*" out of a disinclination to refer to God directly out of respect for God, much as Jews avoid speaking the name of Yahweh, replacing it with LORD. Therefore Matthew's "kingdom of heaven" should be understood as being precisely the same as the "the kingdom of God" spoken of elsewhere.

of his instruction on prayer, often called The Lord's Prayer. Traditionally, the prayer is seen as having seven pleas. In this questionnaire, we consider the second and third.

1. After the first plea of the Lord's Prayer that God's "name" be "hallowed," or His "power" be held as "preeminent" (the most basic idea of holiness is the fact of uniqueness, of being set apart, of being unusual, and, in the case of God, of being unmatched, unparalleled, preeminent), Jesus suggests that his disciples pray for the coming of God's kingdom.
 - ? What is one asking for when they make this plea that God's kingdom might come?
 - ? Is a discussion of and desire for the coming of God's kingdom are significant part of your prayers? Why do you answer as you do?
 - ? How is the desire to see God's kingdom come and the plea that it be so manifest in your prayers?
2. The next plea is "Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven."
 - ? To what degree is the will of God done in heaven?
 - ? How does the idea of God's will being done on earth relate to the plea that "Thy kingdom come"?
3. We have suggested that Jesus' intention was not only to prepare his followers for entrance into the kingdom of God in the next life, but to provide principles and laws by which humans could establish a kingdom in the mortal life of humans. When we read the plea, "May thy kingdom come," we hear, "May thy kingdom come here and now."
 - ? Do you feel that the two pleas found in this reading confirm in any way our previous assertions? Why do you answer as you do?
 - ? How do these two requests from the Lord's Prayer suggest that Jesus did indeed hope to establish God's kingdom in the mortal life of humans?
 - ? How is the doing of the will of God on earth indicative of the kingdom of God?

(edition: December 18, 2024)

Luke 15.¹⁻⁷— lent

¹Then drew near unto him all the publicans and sinners for to hear him. ²And the Pharisees and scribes murmured, saying, “This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them.”

³And he spake this parable unto them, saying, ⁴What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it? ⁵And when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing. ⁶And when he cometh home, he calleth together his friends and neighbours, saying unto them, Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost. ⁷I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance.

Questionary

Today's reading is our 29th for Lent 2024.

1. Luke records, as do Matthew and Mark, many instances of Jesus sitting down to eat with people.
 - ? With whom do you sit down and share a meal?
 - ? Are there people and classes of people with whom you would be unwilling to share a meal? Why? What does your reticence say about you? And about them?
 - ? What does Jesus' sitting down and sharing a meal signify to the attendant diners?
 - ? What was it about Jesus' sitting down and sharing a meal with sinners and publicans that the religious leaders found so objectionable?
 - ? How does the introductory information of verses 1 and 2 shape your understanding of the parable?

2. Jesus speaks of one lost sheep among a hundred.
 - ? In the matter of salvation, how many sheep out of one hundred actually become lost at one time or another?

Later, Jesus speaks of “ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance.”

- ? Who are the “just persons” “which need no repentance”?
 - ? Given that everyone is in need of repentance, why does Jesus speak of “persons” who, in fact, do not exist?
 - ? How do you feel about Jesus showing a degree of sensitivity to the Pharisees and scribes, who think of themselves as “just persons,” while at the same time trying to correct their false ideas and hardened feelings toward “sinners”?
 - ? In limiting himself to just one lost sheep, what is Jesus telling you about lost sheep and his feelings for them?
3. Upon finding the lost sheep, the shepherd “layeth it on his shoulders” and, presumably, carried in back home.
 - ? What does it signify—about the shepherd and about the sheep—that the shepherd carried the sheep home?
 - ? Why not lead the walking sheep back?
 - ? How do you feel about Jesus' apparent sense that sin so weakens and confuses the sinner that they can do very little to aid in their recovery, leaving Jesus to bear the hardest work of rescue?
 4. Upon returning home with the rescued sheep, the shepherd “calleth together his friends and neighbours, saying unto them, ‘Rejoice with me.’”
 - ? What is the significance of this part of the parable?
 - ? How does it address and encourage change in the religious leaders' who challenged Jesus and possessed such distaste for the sinners and publicans with whom Jesus sits down to eat?
 - ? What can you do to be responsive to sinners and their need for rescue in such a way as to be true to Jesus' parable?

Luke 17.³⁻⁶—lent

³“Take heed to yourselves: if thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him. ⁴And if he trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, “I repent;” thou shalt forgive him.”

⁵And the apostles said unto the Lord, “Increase our faith.”

⁶And the Lord said, “If ye had faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye might say unto this sycamine tree, ‘Be thou plucked up by the root, and be thou planted in the sea;’ and it should obey you.

Today’s is the 17th reading for Lent 2024.

1. Jesus counsels, “If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him.”
 - ? What does it mean to you to “rebuke”?

The Greek word can also be translated “reprove,” and even “blame.”

 - ? Does this alter your understanding of how to handle a “trespass against” you? If so, how?
 - ? How does Jesus’ designation of the trespasser as “thy brother” influence your understanding of how Jesus expects us to approach the trespasser?
 - ? Who is not our “brother”?
2. Jesus speaks of those who “trespass against thee seven times in a day.”
 - ? How should we feel about someone who is so habitually transgressive?
 - ? How well does this relate to what some might think of as our own myriad trespasses a day against God?
3. Jesus requires that even though one might trespass habitually against us, we are to forgive just as habitually if they “repent.”
 - ? How do you feel about this requirement?
 - ? Do you wonder at the sincerity of the repentance when “trespasses” flow one after another? How do you square this with the common understanding that repentance involves forsaking?
 - ? How does this relate to ourselves and our myriad trespasses a day against God—sometimes the same trespass over and over again?
 - ? Do you believe that Jesus was true to this admonition? Do you believe God is true to it? What does this say about your own trespasses against God and his response to them?
 - ? What does all of this suggest about the nature of forgiveness itself?
4. Luke records the apostles’ response to Jesus’ instruction about forgiveness.
 - ? What was that response?
 - ? What do you hear in the apostles’ “Increase our Faith”?
 - ? Would you agree with the apostles’ sense that what Jesus is asking is very difficult and requires his help?
 - ? To what degree are you true to Jesus’ admonition?
 - ? What can you do to experience an increase of faith needed for obedience to this directive?
5. Jesus says that with the tiniest amount of faith, we could do something as huge as move a mountain.
 - ? What is your response to Jesus’ assertion?
 - ? Does it sometimes feel that it is the opposite: that it requires a mountain of faith to do the simplest things? How do you abandon such feelings and think, feel, and live more in line with Jesus’ observation?
 - ? How does this instruction concerning faith relate to Jesus’ instruction concerning our need to forgive others?
 - ? How might this instruction concerning faith relate to our confidence in God’s readiness to forgive... over and over again?

6. Matthew records that Peter once asked Jesus, “How oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Till seven times?” Jesus’ reply was “I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven” Matt. 18.²¹⁻²²).

? How does this passage relate to and enhance your understanding of today’s reading?

Luke 18.⁹⁻¹⁴

⁹And he spake this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: “¹⁰Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican. ¹¹Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, ‘God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. ¹²I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess.’

¹³And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, ‘God be merciful to me a sinner.’

¹⁴I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.”

Q

uestionary

Today's is our 4th reading for Lent 2024.

1. Jesus offers a parable to those who “trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others.”
 - ? Self-righteousness seems to go hand in hand with despising others. What is it about feelings of righteousness that make individuals so inclined to look down on others?
 - ? How often do you observe religious people who are really secure in themselves being dismissive of others?
 - ? How is looking down on other people actually a sign of insecurity and, thus, a sign that the religious individual is uncertain of their standing with God and so becomes “righteous” in an exaggerated manner?
 2. Jesus shares the prayer of the Pharisee and the publican.
 - ? What about the Pharisee's prayer is true? What is false?
 - ? How do you feel about the Pharisee's prayer if we assume that he really had avoided extortion, injustice, and adultery and did fast and tithe regularly and faithfully?
 - ? What about the publican's prayer is true? What is false?
 - ? How do you feel about his prayer if we assume that he really was “a sinner” as he, himself confesses, perhaps even guilty of some of the same sins that the Pharisees claims he is free of?
 - ? How do you feel about the individual who accurately proclaims himself a “sinner” being thought “right” with God while the observer of outward, often exaggerated “righteousness” is not thought right with God?
- ? What do you learn from today's reading that you can apply to your Lent experience as it relates to the confession of sin in hopes of personal forgiveness and reconciliation with God?
 - ? What do you learn from today's reading that you can apply to your Lent experience as it relates to your relationship with others?
 - ? What do you learn about Jesus when you consider this parable and the audience with which he shared it?

Luke 18.²²⁻²⁷— just scripture

²²Now when Jesus heard these things, he said unto him, “Yet lackest thou one thing: sell all that thou hast, and distribute unto the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, follow me.’

²³And when he heard this, he was very sorrowful: for he was very rich.

²⁴And when Jesus saw that he was very sorrowful, he said, “How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God! ²⁵For it is easier for a camel to go through a needle’s eye, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.”

²⁶And they that heard it said, “Who then can be saved?”

²⁷And he said, “The things which are impossible with men are possible with God.”

Questionary

Today’s reading represents the Savior’s response to the nobleman who wished to know what he needed to do to enter heaven as well as the Savior’s reaction to the man’s failure to comply with the requirements.

- ? How hard is it to thread a needle with a rope (this imagery seems more likely than the camel and the eye)?
- ? Camel or rope, both are impossible. How do you feel about the Savior’s assertion?
- ? Like the disciples, you may be somewhat surprised, even disturbed by Jesus’s assertion. Why be surprised to learn that riches change one’s behavior, inhibit one’s willingness and ability to follow God’s values, and make it unlikely that one will enter the kingdom of heaven?
- ? What false doctrines will conflict and oppose Jesus’ assertion?
- ? Why are such conflicting doctrines so attractive and so damning?

Luke 18.³¹⁻³⁴

³¹Then he took unto him the twelve, and said unto them, “Behold, we go up to Jerusalem, and all things that are written by the prophets concerning the Son of man shall be accomplished. ³²For he shall be delivered unto the Gentiles, and shall be mocked, and spitefully entreated, and spitted on: ³³and they shall scourge him, and put him to death: and the third day he shall rise again.”

³⁴And they understood none of these things: and this saying was hid from them, neither knew they the things which were spoken.

Q

uestionary

- ? Sunday will mark the commemoration of the final week of our Lord’s earthly ministry and his ‘Triumphal Entry’ into Jerusalem. Today’s reading represents a warning that Jesus issued to his disciples not long before this momentous final week.
- ? What, do you think, was it about Jesus’ warning that they found impossible to understand?
- ? Why, do you think, the disciples found Jesus’ warning so impossible to understand?
- ? What is it about Jesus’ suffering, death, and resurrection that makes it almost incomprehensible to all of us?
- ? What can you do during this Easter Season to grow in your appreciation and understanding of what Jesus has done for you and what he means to you?

Luke 19.^{30, 35-38}

³⁰“Go ye into the village over against you; in the which at your entering ye shall find a colt tied, whereon yet never man sat: loose him, and bring him hither”....

³⁵And they brought him to Jesus: and they cast their garments upon the colt, and they set Jesus thereon. ³⁶And as he went, they spread their clothes in the way. ³⁷And when he was come nigh, even now at the descent of the mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works that they had seen; ³⁸saying, “Blessed be the King that cometh in the name of the Lord: peace in heaven, and glory in the highest.”

Questionary

Today is Palm Sunday when we commemorate Jesus’ entrance into Jerusalem to begin his final week on earth.

- ? In your mind, what is the significance of this entrance?
- ? What, do you suppose, did the multitude have in mind when it exclaimed, “Peace in heaven”?

Luke 21.¹⁻⁴

¹And he looked up, and saw the rich men casting their gifts into the treasury. ²And he saw also a certain poor widow casting in thither two mites. ³And he said, "Of a truth I say unto you, that this poor widow hath cast in more than they all: ⁴For all these have of their abundance cast in unto the offerings of God: but she of her penury hath cast in all the living that she had."

Questionary

Today's reading continues our review of events and teachings that took place during the final week of Jesus' earthly mission.

1. According to the traditional chronologies, Jesus' observation of and observations about the widow's contribution to the temple treasury occurred within a day or two of his cleansing of the temple. If need be, take a moment to review his cleansing of the temple (Mark 11.¹⁵⁻¹⁹).
 - ? Do you think the near proximity of the two narratives is significant? If so, what do you learn from the proximity of the two stories?
 - ? Contrast the temple administration's attitude toward money and that of the widow. What do you learn from the contrast?
2. In cleansing the temple Jesus had been critical of the presence of money and the economic flurry associated with the temple.
 - ? How does Jesus' attitude toward the presence of money in the temple in today's reading compare with that when he cleansed the temple?
 - ? What accounts for the difference?
3. In observing the small amount that the widow contributed, and comparing it to that of the rich, Jesus declared that "this poor widow hath cast in more than they all."
 - ? How does knowing that God is less interested in the amount we give than in how and why we give impact your own willingness and practice of contributing to his work?
 - ? In what aspects of life other than economic, do the Father and Son show appreciation for the intent over the actual capacity of one's efforts to love and serve him?
 - ? How does a knowledge of the appreciation of Father and Son for those who give their all, though it may be meager, impact how you feel about your own sincere efforts that may be lacking?
 - ? Do any other passages of scripture come to mind that teach this same mercy and appreciation on the part of God for the meager efforts of the sincere?
4. In today's reading, Jesus unexpectedly holds up a poor person and their contribution rather than the rich with their greater contribution. Throughout his work, Luke has Jesus frequently holding up as examples individuals who one would not expect to be held up as an example, especially when held up against another apparently more "worthy" individual. Look, for example, at Luke 18.¹⁰⁻¹⁴.
 - ? There are many more examples of this phenomenon in Luke. Take a moment to just scan through the Gospel of Luke and identify other examples.
 - ? What do you learn from these examples?
 - ? What do such examples suggest about the nature of Jesus, and by extension, his Father.
 - ? What do they suggest about our own judgments and prejudices?

Luke 21.³²⁻³⁶

³²Verily I say unto you.... ³³Heaven and earth shall pass away: but my words shall not pass away.

³⁴“And take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares. ³⁵For as a snare shall it come on all them that dwell on the face of the whole earth. ³⁶Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man.”

Q

uestionary

1. Jesus warns about three things that can distract us from him and his kingdom.
 - ? What are those three things?
 - ? Why do individuals resort to excessive drinking and partying?
 - ? What role does “escapism” play in such excess?
 - ? What remedies are available to those who suffer with the need to “escape” the challenges of life?
 - ? How do the “anxieties related to life” contribute to the resort to “escapism”?
2. It might seem odd to lump together “drunken debauchery” and “anxieties related to this life.”
 - ? How do they relate to each other?
 - ? What are the “anxieties related to this life” than might distract us from God and his kingdom?
 - ? How do they act as distractions from what is most important?
 - ? How do you feel about “worrying about the things of this world” and “drunkenness” being lumped together as equally and similarly dangerous distractions from God and his kingdom?
3. Each of these dangers have an element of “self-indulgent excess” to them.
 - ? What other forms of “self-indulgent excess” might distract us from God and his purposes?
 - ? What forms of self-indulgence are part of your life?
 - ? How can you rid yourself of them so as to not be distracted from the more important and eternal things of God?

Luke 22.¹⁴⁻²⁰

¹⁴And when the hour was come, he sat down, and the twelve apostles with him. ¹⁵And he said unto them, “With desire I have desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer: ¹⁶For I say unto you, I will not any more eat thereof, until it be fulfilled in the kingdom of God.”

¹⁷And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and said, “Take this, and divide it among yourselves: ¹⁸for I say unto you, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine, until the kingdom of God shall come.”

¹⁹And he took bread, and gave thanks, and brake it, and gave unto them, saying, “This is my body which is given for you: this do in remembrance of me.”

²⁰Likewise also the cup after supper, saying, “This cup is the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you.

Q

uestionary

This is our 43rd reading for Lent/Easter 2024. According to the traditional chronology of Jesus’ final week, no events were recorded for Wednesday. The Passover Meal in the upper room is traditionally assigned to Thursday.

1. Jesus confesses, “with desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer.”
 - ? What do you hear in Jesus’ “with desire I have desired...”
 - ? Why, do you think, had Jesus been looking forward to conducting this Passover with his disciples?
 - ? What, in your mind, is the significance of Passover?
 - ? How can Passover, a commemoration of rescue and release from bondage, be applied to your own sacramental experience?
 - ? How would you feel and what would you think about the possibility that Jesus desires with desire to participate with you in your partaking of the sacrament?
 - ? What can you do to make the sacrament experience more meaningful, effective, and communicative?
 - ? What can you do so that the partaking of the sacrament truly becomes a time of rescue and release from any bondage that might be part of our life?
2. Jesus says that the bread “is my body” and that the cup is “the new testament in my blood.”
 - ? When you partake of the sacramental bread, how often do you think of his body, broken through crucifixion?
 - ? When you drink the water, how often do you think of Jesus’ blood, shed in the garden and on the cross?
 - ? Are you supposed to think of such things? Why do you answer as you do?
 - ? What is the impact of having such images in your mind as you partake of sacramental emblems?
 - ? What can you do to make sure that the sacramental experience is more often a time spent “in remembrance of him?”

Luke 22.³⁹⁻⁴⁴— atonement

³⁹And [Jesus] came out, and went, as he was wont, to the mount of Olives; and his disciples also followed him. ⁴⁰And when he was at the place, he said unto them, “Pray that ye enter not into temptation.”

⁴¹And he was withdrawn from them about a stone’s cast, and kneeled down, and prayed, ⁴²Saying, “Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done.”

⁴³And there appeared an angel unto him from heaven, strengthening him. ⁴⁴And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly: and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground.

Questionary

This reading is one in a series of readings on Atonement that we entitle, “Sacrifice: What Jesus Suffered for Us.” *

1. Luke says that Jesus, “being in an agony... prayed more earnestly.”
? What comes to your mind when you think of “agony”?
2. Luke does not say that Jesus is “in agony,” but “in an agony.”
? Is there a difference, and if so, what is the difference?
3. The word agony comes from the Greek word *agonia*. It means ‘a contest,’ ‘a battle,’ ‘a conflict.’
? Why do you think Luke chose this word?
? In what type of “battle” or “conflict” was Jesus engaged?
? With whom was he “battling”?
4. In seeking relief from his terrible ordeal, Jesus asked, “remove this cup from me.”
? Have you ever wondered why, in this terrible moment, Jesus resorted to a metaphor—the metaphor of a cup—rather than just saying outright what he meant, “stop the pain”?
? Why, do you think, did he resort to this this particular imagery of a cup?
? What is the significance of the “cup”?

Consider the following passages.

Mosiah 3.²⁵⁻²⁷

Isaiah 51.^{17& 22}

Ezekiel 23.³²⁻³⁴

Revelation 17.⁴⁻⁶

DC 43.²⁶

Psalm 11.⁶

Jeremiah 25.^{15-17, 27}

Revelation 14.¹⁰⁻¹¹

Alma 40.²⁶;

DC 101.¹¹

Psalm 75.⁸

Jeremiah 51.⁷⁻⁹

Revelation 16.¹⁹

D&C 29.¹⁷

- ? After reading these passages, what do you think was “in” Jesus’ cup?

The following words and phrases are associated with this cup:

“Torment... as a lake of fire and brimstone”

“Be moved and mad”

“Awful view of... guilt and abominations”

“Be drunken, and spue, and fall”

“Shrink from the presence of the Lord”

“Astonishment and desolation

“State of misery and endless torment”

“Wrath of God”

“Snares, fire and brimstone”

“Indignation”

“Horrible tempest”
“Fierceness of his wrath”
“Dregs”
“Cast out”
“Fury”
“Unclean”
“Cup of trembling”

- ? What does all of this language suggest to you about the nature of Jesus’ suffering?
5. Close your eyes and imagine that you are present in the garden of Gethsemane and witness Jesus’ “agony.”
- ? What does Jesus look like?
- ? What does the garden feel like?
- ? What, do you think, would you want to say to him if you had been there?
- ? Take so time in your upcoming prayers to say these things?
- * The following ten titles are part of our atonement series:
- “Fall: Our Need of Atonement”
“Grace: The Savior’s Generous and Earnest Invitation”
“At-one-ment: The Savior’s unity and connectedness with us”
“Sacrifice: What Jesus Suffered for Us”
“Glorification: The Savior’s Resurrection, Ascension, and Enthronement”
“Justification: How We Repent and Change”
“Renewal: The Hope, Joy, Peace, and Power of Atonement”
“Sanctification: Imitating and living a life of Atonement”
“Thanksgiving: In Praise of Atonement”
“Song of the Righteous: A Song unto Me”

Luke 22.³⁹⁻⁴⁶—lent

³⁹And he came out, and went, as he was wont, to the mount of Olives; and his disciples also followed him. ⁴⁰And when he was at the place, he said unto them, “Pray that ye enter not into temptation.”

⁴¹And he was withdrawn from them about a stone’s cast, and kneeled down, and prayed, ⁴²saying, “Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done.”

⁴³And there appeared an angel unto him from heaven, strengthening him. ⁴⁴And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly: and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground. ⁴⁵And when he rose up from prayer, and was come to his disciples, he found them sleeping for sorrow, ⁴⁶and said unto them, “Why sleep ye? Rise and pray, lest ye enter into temptation.”

Today’s is the 12th reading for Lent 2024.

Many of our Lent readings focus on ourselves—our need to repent, our need to prioritize and simplify our lives, our need to serve others, and our need to prepare to meet our God. However, in all these things Jesus both set the example and empowers us to follow his example. So, during Lent it is vital that we review Jesus’ life and ministry. In doing so this year, we will review events from the final days and hours of the Savior’s life as Luke records them. In addition to being a reading for Lent, today’s reading is also one in a series of readings on Atonement that we entitle, “Sacrifice: What Jesus Suffered for Us.”

1. Luke says that Jesus, “being in an agony... prayed more earnestly.”
? What comes to your mind when you think of “agony”?
2. Luke does not say that Jesus was “in agony,” but “in *an* agony.”
? Is there a difference, or is this just a quirk of grammar? If there is a difference, what is the difference? Why do you answer as you do?

The word agony comes from the Greek word *agonia*. It means ‘a contest,’ ‘a battle,’ ‘a conflict.’

- ? Why do you think Luke chose this word?
? In what type of “battle” or “conflict” was Jesus engaged?
? With whom was he “battling”?
3. In seeking relief from his terrible ordeal, Jesus asked, “remove this cup from me.”
? Have you ever wondered why, in this terrible moment, Jesus resorted to a metaphor—the metaphor of a cup—rather than just saying outright what he meant, “stop the pain,” “let this end,” or some such request?
? Why, do you think, did he resort to this particular imagery of a cup?
? What is the significance of the “cup”?

Consider the following passages.

Mosiah 3. ²⁵⁻²⁷	Psalm 11. ⁶	Psalm 75. ⁸
Isaiah 51. ^{17& 22}	Jeremiah 25. ^{15-17, 27}	Jeremiah 51. ⁷⁻⁹
Ezekiel 23. ³²⁻³⁴	Revelation 14. ¹⁰⁻¹¹	Revelation 16. ¹⁹
Revelation 17. ⁴⁻⁶	Alma 40. ²⁶ ;	D&C 29. ¹⁷
DC 43. ²⁶	DC 101. ¹¹	

- ? After reading these passages, what do you think was in Jesus’ “cup”? What did it represent?

In the preceding passages, the following words and phrases are associated with a cup:

“Torment... as a lake of fire and brimstone”
“Be moved and mad”
“Awful view of... guilt and abominations”
“Be drunken, and spue, and fall”
“Shrink from the presence of the Lord”
“Astonishment and desolation”

“State of misery and endless torment”
“Wrath of God”
“Snares, fire and brimstone”
“Indignation”
“Horrible tempest”
“Fierceness of his wrath”
“Dregs”
“Cast out”
“Fury”
“Unclean”
“Cup of trembling”

- ? How do each of these relate to Jesus’ experiences in Gethsemane and at Golgotha?
 - ? What does all of this language suggest to you about the nature of Jesus’ suffering?
4. Jacob admonished his people to “view his [Jesus’] death” (See Jac. 1.⁸). We can do the same in relation to Jesus’ suffering in Gethsemane. Close your eyes and imagine that you are present in the garden of Gethsemane and witness Jesus’ “agony.”
- ? What does Jesus look like?
 - ? What does the garden feel like?
 - ? What, do you think, would you want to say to him if you had been there?
 - ? Take so time in your upcoming prayers to say these things?

Luke 22.⁴⁷⁻⁵³—Lent

⁴⁷And while he yet spake, behold a multitude, and he that was called Judas, one of the twelve, went before them, and drew near unto Jesus to kiss him. ⁴⁸But Jesus said unto him, “Judas, betrayest thou the Son of man with a kiss?”

⁴⁹When they which were about him saw what would follow, they said unto him, “Lord, shall we smite with the sword?”

⁵⁰And one of them smote the servant of the high priest, and cut off his right ear. ⁵¹And Jesus answered and said, “Suffer ye thus far.” And he touched his ear, and healed him.

⁵²Then Jesus said unto the chief priests, and captains of the temple, and the elders, which were come to him, “Be ye come out, as against a thief, with swords and staves? ⁵³When I was daily with you in the temple, ye stretched forth no hands against me: but this is your hour, and the power of darkness.”

Questionary

Today’s is the 13th reading for Lent 2024.

Many of our Lent readings focus on ourselves—our need to repent, our need to prioritize and simplify our lives, our need to serve others, and our need to prepare to meet our God. However, in all these things things Jesus both set the example and empowers us to follow his example. So, during Lent it is vital that we review Jesus’ life and ministry. In doing so this year, we will review events from the final days and hours of the Savior’s life as Luke records them.

1. Jesus’ disciples propose and then act upon the use of violent resistance to protect Jesus. This is not the first time they have considered violence in response to threats made against Jesus.

? Can you identify another instance of this violent tendency?

Upon witnessing the Samaritans’ disdain for Jesus earlier in his ministry, the disciples responded, “Lord, wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them, even as Elias did?” (Luke 9.⁵⁴)

? How did Jesus respond to this proposal of the use of violence?

? How does Jesus respond to the proposal of the use of violence in today’s passage?

? What does Jesus’ response as translated in the KJV mean: “Suffer ye thus far”?

? How do you feel about and how does it change the way you feel about Jesus’ response if we utilize the NIV’s translation of Jesus response: “No more of this!”

? How well do the two different translations reflect Matthew’s report of Jesus’ response to violence at the time of his betrayal?

“Put up again thy sword into his place: for all they that take the sword shall perish the sword” (Matthew 26.⁵²).

? What do you learn from Jesus’ response to violence at the time of his betrayal and his response to violence at the time of his rejection among the Samaritans?

“But he turned, and rebuked them, and said, Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of. For the son of man is not come to destroy men’s lives, but to destroy them” (Luke 9.⁵⁵⁻⁵⁶).

? Of what “manner of spirit” are the disciples?

? How have the disciples partaken of the “spirit” of this world?

2. Jesus asks his assailants why they had not acted more openly in arresting him.

? Why, do you think, did they not arrest him more openly?

Jesus follows this question up with a definitive statement: “This is your hour, and the power of darkness.”

- ? What, do you think, does Jesus mean and what is its importance within the greater narrative of the Gospels and the gospel?

Even though the religious leaders attempted to keep a lid on their violence against Jesus, the text exposes their violence to the full light of the sun.

- ? What do you learn from this exposure?
3. Jesus makes it clear that the violence done against him in arrest and, really, throughout his ordeal is a result of human will—“this is your hour”—and dark impulses—“the power of darkness.”
 - ? Why is it important to understand that it was the world with all its dark impulses that was responsible for the suffering and death that Jesus endured?
 - ? What is Jesus trying to teach us about all the suffering caused by dark and violent impulses?
 - ? What is Jesus trying to teach us about our world?
 - ? How do we take this message and use it to resist the world and its dark impulses for violence, especially violence against individuals and groups that the world sees as vulnerable to attack?
 - ? Would the story of Jesus, the world’s response to it, and your own response to it be different if Jesus had violently resisted arrest, lost, and still been executed? Why do you answer as you do?

Luke 22.⁵⁴⁻⁶²— lent

⁵⁴Then took they him, and led him, and brought him into the high priest's house. And Peter followed afar off. ⁵⁵And when they had kindled a fire in the midst of the hall, and were set down together, Peter sat down among them. ⁵⁶But a certain maid beheld him as he sat by the fire, and earnestly looked upon him, and said, "This man was also with him."

⁵⁷And he denied him, saying, "Woman, I know him not."

⁵⁸And after a little while another saw him, and said, "Thou art also of them."

And Peter said, "Man, I am not."

⁵⁹And about the space of one hour after another confidently affirmed, saying, "Of a truth this fellow also was with him: for he is a Galilæan."

⁶⁰And Peter said, "Man, I know not what thou sayest."

And immediately, while he yet spake, the cock crew. ⁶¹And the Lord turned, and looked upon Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said unto him, "Before the cock crew, thou shalt deny me thrice." ⁶²And Peter went out, and wept bitterly.

Questionary

Today's reading is our 18th reading for Lent 2024. In this reading, we return to Luke's account of Jesus' final days and hours. In our first reading from Luke (22.³⁹⁻⁴⁶), the Evangelist reports on Jesus's suffering in Gethsemane. In the second (22.⁴⁷⁻⁵³) he reports on Jesus' "arrest" and how he resisted the use of violence to stymie his arrest. In today's reading, we find ourselves in the palace of the High Priest, Caiaphas.

1. Today, we are going to ask you to use your imagination. We are going to ask that you attempt to see with an eye of faith what you read on the page. We begin with the following.
 - ? Luke says that Peter followed Jesus "afar off." Follow Peter in this half-mile journey. How much space does he put between himself and the party leading Jesus to Caiaphas' palace? How does Peter look? How does he move? How worried does he look? With what "suspicion" does he pass others on the way?
 - ? What do you see and feel as you imagine this journey?
2. Peter denied knowing or following Jesus three times.
 - ? How were these denials delivered? Was he sheepish? Apologetic? Was he quiet or loud in his denials? Angry? Did he feign offense at the suggestion of being a follower? Did he feign contempt for Jesus?
 - ? What do you see and feel as you imagine these denials?

Matthew records that with the third accusation that Peter knew and followed Jesus, Peter "began to curse and to swear..." (26.⁷⁴).

- ? How does this shape the picture you have been making in your mind of Peter and his denials of Jesus?
3. From first denial to third, an hour and a half to three hours passed.
 - ? What do you think and feel about Peter's denials when you consider the time he had to think and consider his responses to those who identified him as a disciple?
 4. We will now invite you to use your inspired imagination one more time. Luke records that after Peter had denied Jesus for the third time, "the Lord turned, and looked upon Peter."
 - ? What do you see when you imagine Jesus looking at Peter? Do you see sorrow on Jesus' face? Anger? Disappointment? Self-justification—"see, I told you that you would deny me"? Compassion? Sorrow? Why do you answer as you do?

Luke 22.⁶³⁻⁷¹— lent

⁶³And the men that held Jesus mocked him, and smote him. ⁶⁴And when they had blindfolded him, they struck him on the face, and asked him, saying, “Prophesy, who is it that smote thee?” ⁶⁵And many other things blasphemously spake they against him.

⁶⁶And as soon as it was day, the elders of the people and the chief priests and the scribes came together, and led him into their council, saying, ⁶⁷“Art thou the Christ? Tell us.”

And he said unto them, “If I tell you, ye will not believe: ⁶⁸and if I also ask you, ye will not answer me, nor let me go. ⁶⁹Hereafter shall the Son of man sit on the right hand of the power of God.”

⁷⁰Then said they all, “Art thou then the Son of God?”

And he said unto them, “Ye say that I am.”

⁷¹And they said, “What need we any further witness? For we ourselves have heard of his own mouth.”

Questionary

Today’s reading is our 20th reading for Lent 2024. It also represents our fourth reading from Luke’s passion narrative.

In the first of the three passion narratives, we viewed Jesus in “an agony” as he drank from the bitter and hellish cup (22.³⁹⁻⁴⁶). In the second, we watched Jesus’ arrest, as he rejected all violent resistance (22.⁴⁷⁻⁵³). In the third passion narrative, we witnessed Peter deny Jesus three times over the course of several hours—a final testament to not only his but all the disciples’ blindness and inability to discern or be true to Jesus’ true nature (22.⁵⁴⁻⁶²).

In today’s reading, Jesus is brought to the first of a series of kangaroo courts.

1. During the first “trial,” Jesus is asked three questions
 - ? What are those three questions?
 - ? What is the nature of the questions?
 - ? How do the questions reflect the questioners’ disinterest in learning the truth?
 - ? How do the questions reflect an interest in mocking, entrapping, and convicting Jesus?
 - ? What message does Jesus send in his unwillingness to directly answer any of the dishonest questions posed to him?
 - ? What do you think and feel when you consider the judicial injustice done to Jesus as a kind of symbol for and condemnation of all judicial injustice perpetrated throughout human history?
2. Consider the questions that you ask as you seek to understand the world around you—the manner in which you seek “the truth.”
 - ? What are the evidences of a sincere and open quest for truth?
 - ? How open and sincere is your quest for “truth”?
 - ? How do you avoid the harming influences of “confirmation bias”—asking questions and “investigating” “evidence” in the spirit of confirming what you already believe and, particularly “feel”?
 - ? How open and sincere is the quest for “truth” in your society?
 - ? What does today’s reading and Jesus’ experience with individuals driven by “confirmation bias” teach you about the dangers of investigating and exploring and studying for the purpose of justifying one’s own preconceived ideas and feelings?

Luke 23.¹⁻⁷— lent

¹And the whole multitude of them arose, and led him unto Pilate. ²And they began to accuse him, saying, “We found this fellow perverting the nation, and forbidding to give tribute to Cæsar, saying that he himself is Christ a King.”

³And Pilate asked him, saying, “Art thou the King of the Jews?”

And he answered him and said, “Thou sayest it.”

⁴Then said Pilate to the chief priests and to the people, “I find no fault in this man.”

⁵And they were the more fierce, saying, “He stirreth up the people, teaching throughout all Jewry, beginning from Galilee to this place.”

⁶When Pilate heard of Galilee, he asked whether the man were a Galilæan. ⁷And as soon as he knew that he belonged unto Herod’s jurisdiction, he sent him to Herod, who himself also was at Jerusalem at that time.

Q

uestionary

Today’s reading is our 22nd reading for Lent 2024, and the next in our continuing series of passion narratives from Luke’s Gospel.

1. In presenting Jesus to Pilate and offering their first accusations against him (vs. 2), Jewish leaders brought three charges.
 - ? What are those three charges?
 - ? What is the nature of those charges?
 - ? Why do you think that their first charges against Jesus were political in nature?
 - ? How do you feel about the political nature of the charges?
 - ? How much of a threat to Rome were Jesus’ teachings and actions?
 - ? How much of a threat are Jesus’ teachings and actions to any unjust empire, country, or nation?
2. When, after hearing their initial accusations and conducting a brief interrogation of Jesus, Pilate announced that he found Jesus innocent of the charges, the Jewish Leaders offered a variation of the first three charges in verse 5.
 - ? What is the latest charge?
 - ? What is the nature of this charge?
 - ? How do you feel about this later charge and the people who brought it?
 - ? What do you learn from the Jewish leaders’ behavior about the habits and conduct of individuals and groups in conflict?
3. Learning that Jesus was from Galilee, Pilate sent Jesus’ case “back down to a lower court,” that of Herod’s
 - ? Why, do you think, did he do this?
 - ? How do you feel about Pilate as a leader when you observe him try to shirk a difficult responsibility by passing the buck to another, inferior, less politically secure individual?
 - ? What lessons about leadership do you glean from Pilate’s actions?

Luke 23.⁸⁻¹²—lent

⁸And when Herod saw Jesus, he was exceedingly glad: for he was desirous to see him of a long season, because he had heard many things of him; and he hoped to have seen some miracle done by him.

⁹Then he questioned with him in many words; but he answered him nothing. ¹⁰And the chief priests and scribes stood and vehemently accused him. ¹¹And Herod with his men of war set him at nought, and mocked him, and arrayed him in a gorgeous robe, and sent him again to Pilate.

¹²And the same day Pilate and Herod were made friends together: for before they were at enmity between themselves.

Q

uestionary

Today's reading is our 25th reading for Lent 2024, and represents a return to Luke's passion narrative.

1. During Herod's interrogation of Jesus, Jesus refused to say a word.
 - ? Why, do you suppose, was Jesus unwilling to engage with Herod when he had responded to both the Jewish leaders and Pilate?
 - ? How do you feel about Jesus' refusal to talk with Herod?
2. Jewish leaders hated Herod and the Romans. Herod hated the Jewish leaders and the Romans. The Romans disrespected Herod and Jews. Yet, all three groups could agree on the need for Jesus to die. Luke tells us that although they had been enemies before Jesus, Herod and Pilate became friendly after his trials and death.
 - ? What, do you think, accounts for their sudden friendship?
 - ? How do you feel about the two men coming to agreement through their unity against Jesus?

This phenomenon is known as scapegoating, in which parties feeling antipathy toward one another develop a sense of unity, however short-lived, through attacking individuals or groups that they consider somehow threatening and undesirable.

- ? To what modern day examples, perhaps even from your own experiences, can you point in which people found concord and a feeling of unity through joining in hating, persecuting, and otherwise abusing some individual or group?
- ? What makes this phenomenon so despicable?
- ? How stable is a unity between two individuals or groups based on mutual hatred of a third?

Given that this phenomenon played such a key role in Jesus' death, when we seek and acquire concord with others through attacking another, we are guilty of joining Herod, Pilate, and Jewish leaders in killing Jesus—"when you do it unto the least of these... ye have done it unto me."

- ? How do you feel about this observation?
- ? What makes scapegoating so contrary to the character of God?
- ? How does God seek unity with others?

Luke 23.¹³⁻²⁵— lent

¹³And Pilate, when he had called together the chief priests and the rulers and the people, ¹⁴said unto them, “Ye have brought this man unto me, as one that perverteth the people: and, behold, I, having examined him before you, have found no fault in this man touching those things whereof ye accuse him: ¹⁵no, nor yet Herod: for I sent you to him; and, lo, nothing worthy of death is done unto him. ¹⁶I will therefore chastise him, and release him.” ¹⁷(For of necessity he must release one unto them at the feast.)

¹⁸And they cried out all at once, saying, “Away with this man, and release unto us Barabbas:”

¹⁹(Who for a certain sedition made in the city, and for murder, was cast into prison.)

²⁰Pilate therefore, willing to release Jesus, spake again to them. ²¹But they cried, saying, “Crucify him, crucify him.”

²²And he said unto them the third time, “Why, what evil hath he done? I have found no cause of death in him: I will therefore chastise him, and let him go.”

²³And they were instant with loud voices, requiring that he might be crucified. And the voices of them and of the chief priests prevailed. ²⁴And Pilate gave sentence that it should be as they required.

²⁵And he released unto them him that for sedition and murder was cast into prison, whom they had desired; but he delivered Jesus to their will.

Questionary

Today, we return to Luke’s passion narrative for our 28th Lent 2024 reading.

1. Today’s reading contains a very well know narrative.
 - ? If you were asked to identify one or two things that you think Luke most wants to stress with this passage, what would they be?
2. Pilate reminds the Jewish religious leaders that they have accused Jesus of “perverting the people.”
 - ? What do they mean by the charge that Jesus “perverteth the people”?
 - ? What is the nature of his alleged perversion?
 - ? How does Luke 23.² help in establishing the nature of the Jewish accusation against Jesus as a perverter of the people?
 - ? What was the charge for which Barabbas was arrested and jailed?
 - ? Why was it important to Luke that his readers know that when Rome applied its own rules of evidence for political insurrection, it could find no reason to convict Jesus?
 - ? What is the significance of the guilty, Barabbas, going free while Jesus, the innocent, was sentenced to death?
3. Pilate resisted, and that repeatedly, the Jewish charge of sedition that they made against Jesus.
 - ? How do you feel about Pilate?
 - ? How would you characterize his eventual succumbing to the Jewish leader’s demands?
4. Luke reports that Pilate “delivered Jesus to their [Jews] will.”
 - ? How do you feel when you consider Pilate, an official of the world’s most powerful empire, handing Jesus, whom he knows to be innocent, over to the cruel desires of an unruly and illegal mob?

Luke 23.²⁶⁻³¹— lent

²⁶And as they led him away, they laid hold upon one Simon, a Cyrenian, coming out of the country, and on him they laid the cross, that he might bear it after Jesus.

²⁷And there followed him a great company of people, and of women, which also bewailed and lamented him. ²⁸But Jesus turning unto them said,

“Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me,
but weep for yourselves, and for your children.

²⁹For, behold, the days are coming, in the which they shall say,
‘Blessed are the barren,
and the wombs that never bare,
and the paps which never gave suck.’

³⁰Then shall they begin to say to the mountains,
‘Fall on us;’
and to the hills, ‘Cover us.’

³¹For if they do these things in a green tree,
what shall be done in the dry?”

Q

uestionary

In today’s reading, our 31st for Lent 2024, we return to Luke’s passion narrative.

1. As Jesus was walking the Via Dolorosa, or the “Way of Suffering” between the Roman fort of Antonia and Golgotha, Jesus addressed women who were accompanying him and lamenting his treatment.
 - ? As you consider his response to their weeping, what do you imagine the mood and tone of his words to be—stern and threatening, sorrowful and compassionate, something else? Why do you answer as you do?
 - ? How would you summarize his words?
2. Jesus warns that in the tragic days that are soon to arrive two laments will be heard.
 - ? What is the nature of these two laments?
 - ? What does it suggest about the coming days that people would think it a good thing to have not had children?
3. Jesus’ final words to the lamenting women are: “For if they do these things in a green tree, what shall be done in the dry?”
 - ? What, do you think, did Jesus mean by this?

While it is a bit obscure and several meanings are possible, this much seems clear: Jesus is warning them that they will see worse things done to them than what they are seeing done to him.

- ? How do you feel about the fact that after a ministry of service and love, this dire warning would effectively be Jesus’ final prophetic utterance—the words he spoke from the cross are all short, breathless utterances little more than a whisper that express his suffering rather than his attempt to instruct.
- ? How appropriate does it feel to you that such a magnificent ministry as his should end with such gloomy words?

Luke 23.³²⁻³⁸— lent

³²And there were also two other, malefactors, led with him to be put to death. ³³And when they were come to the place, which is called Calvary, there they crucified him, and the malefactors, one on the right hand, and the other on the left. ³⁴Then said Jesus,

“Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.”

And they parted his raiment, and cast lots. ³⁵And the people stood beholding. And the rulers also with them derided him, saying, “He saved others; let him save himself, if he be Christ, the chosen of God.”

³⁶And the soldiers also mocked him, coming to him, and offering him vinegar, ³⁷And saying, “If thou be the king of the Jews, save thyself.”

³⁸And a superscription also was written over him in letters of Greek, and Latin, and Hebrew, THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS.

Q

uestionary

For our 33rd reading during Lent 2024, we return to Luke’s passion narrative. Today’s reading is the first of three covering Jesus’ crucifixion as recorded by Luke.

1. In the four Gospels, Jesus is reported to have spoken seven times from the cross. Luke records three. Today’s reading contains Jesus’ first utterance as recorded by Luke: “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.”
 - ? How do you feel about Jesus when you witness the generous way in which he forgives and pleads for forgiveness for the very people who kill him?
 - ? There is a “cosmic” aspect to forgiveness and then there is a “psychological” aspect. How do you feel about Jesus’s hope that those who kill him will both be forgiven by God and experience no psychological wounds from the contribution they made to his death that will negatively impact the rest of their mortal lives?
2. Jesus was crucified with criminals on either side of him.
 - ? What is the significance of Jesus’ companions in death being criminals?
3. To begin his ministry, the Devil invited/challenged/tempted Jesus to use his power to serve himself. Now, while on the cross, Jesus is again tempted to use his power to deliver himself from discomfort and death.
 - ? How difficult, do you think, was it for Jesus to resist these calls to serve his own needs?
 - ? What made it possible for him to resist the temptation to serve himself and his needs?
 - ? What can you do to follow Jesus’ example even in the minutest way?

Luke 23.³⁹⁻⁴³— lent

³⁹And one of the malefactors which were hanged railed on him, saying, “If thou be Christ, save thyself and us.”

⁴⁰But the other answering rebuked him, saying, “Dost not thou fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation? ⁴¹And we indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds: but this man hath done nothing amiss.” ⁴²And he said unto Jesus, “Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom.”

⁴³And Jesus said unto him, “Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with me in paradise.”

Questionary

Today’s reading is our 35th for Lent 2024, represents a return to Luke’s passion narrative, and is our second of three readings on Luke’s account of Jesus’ crucifixion.

1. One of the criminals executed with Jesus challenged him with, “If thou be Christ, save thyself and us.”

? What do you think of when you read this?

? On what other occasion/s has Jesus been tempted to use his power for his own comfort, self-justification, and deliverance?

Satan presented this temptation to Jesus at the beginning of his ministry.

? What, does it suggest about this temptation that it was present at the beginning and the end of Jesus’ ministry?

? How much of a “real and continual temptation” do you suppose it was for Jesus to use his power for his own benefit?

? How do you feel about his repeated refusal to use his power for his own benefit?

? What can we learn in our own life and in our own temptations from Jesus’ stubborn refusal to yield to this most natural temptation to use power to preserve oneself?

2. Traditionally, Christians have identified seven utterances made by Jesus from the cross. Luke records three of them. Today’s reading contains the second recorded by Luke: “To day shalt thou be with me in paradise.”

? What do you take from this statement?

? What was Jesus conveying to the criminal?

? As you contemplate your answers to the preceding questions, do your responses focus on Jesus as a “theologian” or on Jesus as a “caring human being”?

? How does Jesus’ statement bring comfort to the suffering man?

? How do you feel when you witness Jesus’ attempt to comfort a sufferer when he himself is experiencing intense suffering?

? What do you think and how do you feel when you contemplate the fact the Jesus’ first two utterances as recorded by Luke are focused on other people’s needs?

? How can you take Jesus’ example and apply it in your life?

3. If you find time during the Easter season, read John 13-17. Rather than looking at these chapters through the lens of Jesus as “theology instructor,” look for all the ways and instances in which Jesus seeks to comfort his disciples in the face of his eminent departure.

? How do you feel about Jesus when you consider these chapters from this perspective—as manifesting Jesus’ desire to comfort his disciples?

? How has Jesus comforted you?

Luke 23.⁴⁴⁻⁴⁹— lent

⁴⁴And it was about the sixth hour, and there was a darkness over all the earth until the ninth hour.

⁴⁵And the sun was darkened, and the veil of the temple was rent in the midst.

⁴⁶And when Jesus had cried with a loud voice, he said, “Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit:” and having said thus, he gave up the ghost.

⁴⁷Now when the centurion saw what was done, he glorified God, saying, “Certainly this was a righteous man.”

⁴⁸And all the people that came together to that sight, beholding the things which were done, smote their breasts, and returned. ⁴⁹And all his acquaintance, and the women that followed him from Galilee, stood afar off, beholding these things.

Q

uestionary

As we approach Palm Sunday and the beginning of Holy Week, in today’s reading, our 37th for the Lent and Easter 2024 Season, we will examine the last of our three readings from Luke’s account of Jesus’ crucifixion. We will, of course, return to this event as recorded in a different Gospel on Good Friday.

1. Luke mentions that darkness descended over Jerusalem and that “the veil of the temple was rent.”
 - ? In addition to the “historical fact” of these two events, what symbolism might they hold?
 - ? According to the following passage, what symbolic meaning did Book of Mormon writers find in the darkness?

“And all these things must surely come, saith the prophet Zenos. And the rocks of the earth must rend; and because of the groanings of the earth, many of the kings of the isles of the sea shall be wrought upon by the Spirit of God, to exclaim: The God of nature suffers’ (1 Ne. 19.¹²).
 - ? Imagine the veil torn. Imagine that thereby individuals who had previously been denied such a sight were allowed a view of the Holiest Place—or the place of the presence of God. Now, what symbolic meaning might be behind Luke’s record that at Jesus’ death, the veil was ripped open?
2. Luke records three of Jesus’ traditional seven utterances made from the cross. Today’s reading contains Luke’s third recorded utterance: “Father, into thy hands, I commend my spirit.”
 - ? What do you feel when you read these words?
 - ? When you close your eyes and try to imagine the moment, what is the mood and tone of Jesus’ utterance?
 - ? What is the mood and tone of the final two verses in today’s reading?
3. Luke records that at Jesus’ death one of the Roman soldiers present at the scene exclaimed, “Certainly this was a righteous man.”
 - ? Again, try to think beyond the “historical/ literally meaning of this notice. What, do you think, is the broader significance of this exclamation for Luke and his message?

Luke 24.¹⁻¹² – lent

¹Now upon the first day of the week, very early in the morning, they came unto the sepulchre, bringing the spices which they had prepared, and certain others with them. ²And they found the stone rolled away from the sepulchre. ³And they entered in, and found not the body of the Lord Jesus. ⁴*As they were much perplexed thereabout, behold, two men stood by them in shining garments: ⁵and as they were afraid, and bowed down their faces to the earth, they said unto them,

“Why seek ye the living among the dead? ⁶He is not here, but is risen: remember how he spake unto you when he was yet in Galilee, ⁷saying, ‘The Son of man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again.’”

⁸And they remembered his words, ⁹and returned from the sepulchre, and told all these things unto the eleven, and to all the rest. ¹⁰It was Mary Magdalene, and Joanna, and Mary the mother of James, and other women that were with them, which told these things unto the apostles. ¹¹And their words seemed to them as idle tales, and they believed them not.

¹²Then arose Peter, and ran unto the sepulchre; and stooping down, he beheld the linen clothes laid by themselves, and departed, wondering in himself at that which was come to pass.

Q

uestionary

Happy Easter! Today’s is our 47th and final reading for Lent/Easter 2024. It is the day of our Lord’s rising from the tomb!

1. As the women went to the tomb with materials necessary to cleaning Jesus’ body, they were met with a series of surprises. They

“found the stone rolled away from the sepulchre”

“found *not* the body of the Lord Jesus”

- ? What do you think you would have thought and felt upon seeing the stone rolled away and the sepulchre standing wide open?
- ? What do you think you would have thought and felt had you entered the tomb in which you knew full well Jesus had been buried only to find that his body was not there?

2. The women had another surprise in order as an angel informed them,

“Why seek ye the living among the dead? ⁶He is not here, but is risen: remember how he spake unto you when he was yet in Galilee, ⁷saying, ‘The Son of man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again.’”

- ? What do you think you would have thought and felt upon hearing this news?

3. We know what Jesus’ resurrection means for us and the possibilities it holds out to us for a glorious future. But, consider the following passage.

“Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection: knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin. For he that is dead is freed from sin.

Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him: knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him. For in that he died, he died unto sin once: but in that he liveth, he liveth unto God. Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ

our Lord” (Rom 6.⁴⁻¹¹).

- ? What do you learn about the significance of Jesus’ resurrection for our daily life in the here and now?
- ? What does Jesus’ resurrection from death signify about the renewal of our spiritual lives today?
- ? As we have so often done, we will ask again that you close your eyes, imagine the tomb, imagine entering the tomb, and imagine hearing the angelic message of Jesus’ resurrection.

Luke 24.¹⁻¹²— Atonement

¹Now upon the first day of the week, very early in the morning, they came unto the sepulchre, bringing the spices which they had prepared, and certain others with them. ²And they found the stone rolled away from the sepulchre. ³And they entered in, and found not the body of the Lord Jesus. ⁴*As they were much perplexed thereabout, behold, two men stood by them in shining garments: ⁵and as they were afraid, and bowed down their faces to the earth, they said unto them,

“Why seek ye the living among the dead? ⁶He is not here, but is risen: remember how he spake unto you when he was yet in Galilee, ⁷saying, ‘The Son of man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again.’”

⁸And they remembered his words, ⁹and returned from the sepulchre, and told all these things unto the eleven, and to all the rest. ¹⁰It was Mary Magdalene, and Joanna, and Mary the mother of James, and other women that were with them, which told these things unto the apostles. ¹¹And their words seemed to them as idle tales, and they believed them not.

¹²Then arose Peter, and ran unto the sepulchre; and stooping down, he beheld the linen clothes laid by themselves, and departed, wondering in himself at that which was come to pass.

Q

In addition to being one in a series of readings on Atonement that we entitle, “Glorification: The Savior’s resurrection, ascension, and enthronement,”* today’s reading was also the 45th reading for Lent/Easter 2021.

1. As the women went to the tomb with materials necessary to cleaning Jesus’ body, they were met with a series of surprises. They

“found the stone rolled away from the sepulchre”

“found not the body of the Lord Jesus”

- ? What do you think you would have thought and felt upon seeing the stone rolled away and the sepulchre standing wide open?
- ? What do you think you would have thought and felt had you entered the tomb in which you knew full well Jesus had been buried only to find that his body was not there?

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“Why seek ye the living among the dead? ⁶He is not here, but is risen: remember how he spake unto you when he was yet in Galilee, ⁵saying, ‘The Son of man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again.’”

- ? What do you think you would have thought and felt upon hearing this news?

3. We know what Jesus’ resurrection means for us and the possibilities it holds out to us for a glorious future. But, consider the following passage.

“Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection: knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin. For he that is dead is freed from sin.

Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him: knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him. For in that he died, he died unto sin once: but in that he liveth, he liveth unto God. Likewise

reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Rom 6.⁴⁻¹¹).

- ? What do you learn about the significance of Jesus’ resurrection for our daily life in the here and now?
- ? What does Jesus’ resurrection from death signify about the renewal of our spiritual lives today?
- ? As we have so often done, we will ask again that you close your eyes, imagine the tomb, imagine entering the tomb, and imagine hearing the angelic message of Jesus’ resurrection.
- * The following ten titles are part of our atonement series:
 - “Fall: Our Need of Atonement”
 - “Grace: The Savior’s Generous and Earnest Invitation”
 - “At-one-ment: The Savior’s unity and connectedness with us”
 - “Sacrifice: What Jesus Suffered for Us”
 - “Glorification: The Savior’s Resurrection, Ascension, and Enthronement”
 - “Justification: How We Repent and Change”
 - “Renewal: The Hope, Joy, Peace, and Power of Atonement”
 - “Sanctification: Imitating and living a life of Atonement”
 - “Thanksgiving: In Praise of Atonement”
 - “The Song of the Righteous: A Song unto Me”

Luke 24.¹³⁻²⁴

¹³And, behold, two of them went that same day to a village called Emmaus, which was from Jerusalem about threescore furlongs. ¹⁴And they talked together of all these things which had happened. ¹⁵*While they communed together and reasoned, Jesus himself drew near, and went with them. ¹⁶But their eyes were holden that they should not know him. ¹⁷And he said unto them, “What manner of communications are these that ye have one to another, as ye walk, and are sad?”

¹⁸And the one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answering said unto him, “Art thou only a stranger in Jerusalem, and hast not known the things which are come to pass therein these days?”

¹⁹And he said unto them, “What things?”

And they said unto him, “Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, which was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people: ²⁰and how the chief priests and our rulers delivered him to be condemned to death, and have crucified him. ²¹But we trusted that it had been he which should have redeemed Israel: and beside all this, to day is the third day since these things were done. ²²Yea, and certain women also of our company made us astonished, which were early at the sepulchre; ²³and when they found not his body, they came, saying, that they had also seen a vision of angels, which said that he was alive. ²⁴And certain of them which were with us went to the sepulchre, and found it even so as the women had said: but him they saw not.”

Questionary

Today is our 46th reading for Lent/ Easter. For the eight days from easter to the following Sunday—often known in western Christianity as the “Octave of Easter,” and in eastern Christianity as “Bright Week”—we turn to Luke’s post-passion narrative found in Luke 24.

1. Upon Jesus’ appearance to the two disciples, Luke informs us that “their eyes were holden that they should not know him.”
 - ? Who or what, do you suppose, did the “holding” of their eyes so that they did not recognize him?
 - ? Why, do you suppose, did they not recognize him?
 - ? What role does this notice play in addition to any “literal” reading?
 - ? How does the blindness of these two disciples relate to and continue the narrative of the disciples’ lack of discernment when it comes to Jesus and his character?
2. Luke reports that Jesus asked the two disciples engaged in serious conversation, “What manner of communications are these that ye have one to another, as ye walk, and are sad?”
 - ? What comes to your mind when you learn that they were “sad”?
 - ? Why were they sad?
 - ? What does their sadness tell you about them?
3. In answer to Jesus’ questions concerning their conversation, the two disciples reply, “the chief priests and our rulers delivered [Jesus] to be condemned to death, and have crucified him. But we trusted that it had been he which should have redeemed Israel.”
 - ? What is the force and message of their “but” when they answered, “but we trusted that it had been he which should have redeemed Israel”?
 - ? What does this tell you about their post-crucifixion feelings about Jesus?
 - ? How do you feel about their loss of faith in Jesus?
 - ? What do you learn from their exchange with Jesus about your own moments of doubt and uncertainty?
4. The two disciples also tell Jesus about the women’s report that Jesus was alive.
 - ? What is your impression concerning their response to the women’s report?
 - ? What are some of the reasons, do you suppose, for their skepticism?

- ? How much of their skepticism stemmed from their gender? How much simply from the extraordinary nature of their message?
- ? If you are male, how do you respond to the testimony of women? If you are female, how do you respond to the testimony of other women compared to that of men?
- ? What role should gender play in accepting the authority of the witness of truth?

Luke 24.²⁵⁻²⁷

²⁵Then he said unto them, “O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken: ²⁶ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory?” ²⁷And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself.

Q

uestionary

Today is our 47th reading for Lent/Easter. For the eight days from easter to the following Sunday—often known in western Christianity as the “Octave of Easter,” and in eastern Christianity as “Bright Week”—we turn to Luke’s post-passion narrative found in Luke 24.

1. Luke informs us that “beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself.”
 - ? What Old Testament scriptures come to you mind that Jesus might have used as referring to himself?
 - ? What do each of these teach you about Jesus and his character?
 - ? We often imagine Jesus referencing only those passages that have traditionally been considered prophecies about the future. But might there be other passages that have not traditionally been considered prophecy of the future that Jesus might have referenced as pertaining to himself? Why do you answer as you do?
 - ? What are some of the other scriptures that Jesus could have legitimately referenced as pertaining to himself even though they were not prophecies about the future?

Consider, for example, the following passage.

“And the Lord said,
‘I have surely seen the affliction of my people which are in Egypt,
and have heard their cry by reason of their taskmasters;
for I know their sorrows;
And I am come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians,
and to bring them up out of that land unto a good land and a large,
unto a land flowing with milk and honey;
unto the place of the Canaanites, and the Hittites, and the Amorites, and the Perizzites, and
the Hivites, and the Jebusites.
Now therefore, behold, the cry of the children of Israel is come unto me:
and I have also seen the oppression wherewith the Egyptians oppress them.
Come now therefore, and I will send thee unto Pharaoh,
that thou mayest bring forth my people the children of Israel out of Egypt’” (Ex. 3.⁷⁻¹⁰).

- ? Would it have been legitimate for Jesus to reference this passage with his disciples as referring to himself? Why do you answer as you?
 - ? What would his disciples have learned about Jesus, and what do you learn about Jesus from this passage?
 - ? How is what Yahweh did in delivering the Israelites from their bondage the same as what Jesus did throughout his life and in his suffering and death?
2. Jesus asked the two disciples, “ought not Christ to have suffered these things”? It seems apparent to Jesus that the Jews should have been looking for a Messiah who suffered pain.
 - ? What Old Testament teachings come to mind that indicate that God is one who accepts and experiences pain, and thus should have prepared the Jews for a suffering Messiah—remember, Messiah is Jehovah, thus God?
 - ? If we take seriously Jesus’ contention that he came to reveal his Father and the Father’s

character, what does Jesus' acceptance and experience of pain reveal to you about Heavenly Father?

Luke 24.²⁸⁻³²

²⁸And they drew nigh unto the village, whither they went: and he made as though he would have gone further. ²⁹But they constrained him, saying, “Abide with us: for it is toward evening, and the day is far spent. And he went in to tarry with them.”

^{30*}As he sat at meat with them, he took bread, and blessed it, and brake, and gave to them. ³¹And their eyes were opened, and they knew him; and he vanished out of their sight. ³²And they said one to another, “Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the scriptures?”

Questionary

Today is our 48th reading for Lent/ Easter. For the eight days from easter to the following Sunday—often known in western Christianity as the “Octave of Easter,” and in eastern Christianity as “Bright Week”—we turn to Luke’s post-passion narrative found in Luke 24.

1. After spending the briefest amount of time with Jesus, unaware of his identity, the disciples “constrained him,” requesting that he “abide with us.”
 - ? What other examples can you point to in which individuals or groups were so attracted to Jesus’ personality that they wished him to stay or asked that they be allowed to stay with him?
 - ? What does this suggest about Jesus’ personality and personable nature?
 - ? What experiences have you had with Jesus that have had a similar affect upon you?
2. It was only when Jesus “took bread, and blessed it, and brake, and gave to them” that the disciples realized who Jesus was.
 - ? What symbolic significance might be found in this notice?
 - ? How does and how has Jesus revealed himself to you though the sacrament?
3. After Jesus had taught them and departed, the disciples confess, “Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the scriptures?”
 - ? Think back on your scripture study experiences. Recall the very first time that you felt the Spirit touch and teach you as you read. Where were you reading? What did you learn or feel? What was the outcome or benefit of the insight?
 - ? Thinking back on your scripture study experiences, when was the last time you felt the Spirit touch and teach you as you read? Where were you reading? What did you learn or feel? What was the outcome or benefit of the insight?
 - ? What can you do to improve your study of scripture so that you have more frequent and more meaningful revelation?
 - ? What do the disciples mean by “our hearts burned within us?”
 - ? What other means does God use to confirm truth and draw us to it?
 - ? In what ways has God confirmed truths to you?
 - ? How do you avoid deception, especially self-deception, being drawn to ideas and principles that appeal to you, your biases, and your preferences based on character?

Luke 24.³³⁻⁴³

³³And they rose up the same hour, and returned to Jerusalem, and found the eleven gathered together, and them that were with them, ³⁴saying, “The Lord is risen indeed, and hath appeared to Simon.”

³⁵And they told what things were done in the way, and how he was known of them in breaking of bread.

³⁶And as they thus spake, Jesus himself stood in the midst of them, and saith unto them, “Peace be unto you.”

³⁷But they were terrified and affrighted, and supposed that they had seen a spirit. ³⁸And he said unto them, “Why are ye troubled? and why do thoughts arise in your hearts? ³⁹Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself: handle me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have.”

⁴⁰And when he had thus spoken, he shewed them his hands and his feet. ⁴¹And while they yet believed not for joy, and wondered, he said unto them, “Have ye here any meat?”

⁴²And they gave him a piece of a broiled fish, and of an honeycomb. ⁴³And he took it, and did eat before them.

Questionary

Today is our 49th reading for Lent/ Easter. For the eight days from easter to the following Sunday—often known in western Christianity as the “Octave of Easter,” and in eastern Christianity as “Bright Week”—we turn to Luke’s post-passion narrative found in Luke 24.

1. Upon returning from their trip to Emmaus and informing the other disciples that Jesus had appeared to them, they explained that Jesus “was known of them in breaking of bread.”
 - ? What, do you suppose, was it about Jesus’ breaking of bread that helped the disciples recognize him?
 - ? How can you utilize the sacrament in your efforts to grow closer, more familiar with him?
2. During his earthly ministry, Jesus had often been a calming and comforting presence in his disciples’ lives. During their time together on Passover eve, Jesus had said to his disciples, “Let not your heart be troubled” (14.¹), and “Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid” (14.²⁷). He had also said, “Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you” (14.²⁷). Here he is, on his first post-resurrection visit with his disciples, seeking to calm and comfort his disciples.
 - ? What does this tell you about the nature of Jesus?
 - ? How has Jesus acted as a calming and comforting influence in your life?
3. Jesus invited his disciples to “Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself: handle me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have.” Then, “he shewed them his hands and his feet.

We have referenced Jacob’s admonition that we “view his death” and have suggested that this admonition can and should be applied to Jesus’ enter ministry, including all aspects of his passion. Consider the following admonition and invitation given to Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery.

“Look unto me in every thought; doubt not, fear not. Behold the wounds which pierced my side, and also the prints of the nails in my hands and feet...” (DC 6.³⁶⁻³⁷).

- ? How can you apply such invitations to behold and view Jesus?
 - ? Take a moment to use your imagination. “View” and even “touch” the Lord’s resurrected body as the disciples were invited to do. What do you see and feel?
 - ? If you find such exploration through imagination difficult or unfulfilling, what could you do to enhance your “viewing” of Jesus—his life, suffering, death, and presence?
4. Luke records that upon seeing and handling Jesus, the disciples “yet believed not for joy, and

wondered.”

- ? What emotions do experiences when you read of the disciples conflicted response to Jesus’ presences?
- ? Have you had experiences with Jesus which seemed “almost too good to be true”? What convinced you that, though seemingly too good, the good news could be depended upon?

Luke 24.⁴⁴⁻⁴⁹

⁴⁴And he said unto them, “These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me.”

⁴⁵Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures, ⁴⁶and said unto them, “Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: ⁴⁷and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. ⁴⁸And ye are witnesses of these things.

⁴⁹And, behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high.”

Questionary

Today is our 50th reading for Lent/ Easter. For the eight days from easter to the following Sunday—often known in western Christianity as the “Octave of Easter,” and in eastern Christianity as “Bright Week”—we turn to Luke’s post-passion narrative found in Luke 24.

1. It was perhaps Jesus’ first objective to serve as a revelation concerning the character of God, the Father, and the divine character. Jesus told his disciples that “it behoved Christ to suffer.”
 - ? What does his willingness to experience suffering and pain teach you about his Father?
 - ? How does the revelation concerning God’s acceptance of the pain that humans inflict upon him by their sinfulness initiate the offer of repentance and the promise of forgiveness?
 - ? How does the revelation concerning God’s acceptance of the pain that humans inflict upon him by their sinfulness make it more likely that you will seek repentance?
 - ? How does the revelation concerning God’s acceptance of the pain that humans inflict upon him by their sinfulness make it more likely that you will accept the reality of his forgiving disposition and, thus, his offered forgiveness?
2. Before teaching his disciples that “it behoved Christ to suffer,” Jesus reminds them that “all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me.”
 - ? What passages from the Old Testament come to mind when you contemplate Jesus’ mortal suffering?
 - ? What passages from the Old Testament reflect Jesus’, or Yahweh’s commitment to his people even though they caused him pain?
 - ? What does his willingness to experience pain and suffer as both Jesus of Nazareth and Yahweh in order to maintain a relationship with people tell you about him?
 - ? How can you follow his example in remaining so faithful to others?

Luke 24.⁵⁰⁻⁵³

⁵⁰And he led them out as far as to Bethany, and he lifted up his hands, and blessed them. ⁵¹And it came to pass, while he blessed them, he was parted from them, and carried up into heaven. ⁵²And they worshipped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy: ⁵³And were continually in the temple, praising and blessing God. Amen.

Q

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Today is our 51st reading for Lent/ Easter. For the eight days from easter to the following Sunday—often known in western Christianity as the “Octave of Easter,” and in eastern Christianity as “Bright Week”—we turn to Luke’s post-passion narrative found in Luke 24.

1. Luke records that Jesus “was parted from them, and carried up into heaven.”
 - ? What, if any, is the significance of the passive voice: he “was carried up into heaven,” rather than, say, “he went up into heaven”?
 - ? How does Jesus’ ascension into heaven and his enthronement on the right hand of God “conclude” his atonement rather than the resurrection?
 - ? In your mind, what is the significance of Jesus’ being in heaven?
 - ? What do you imagine him doing there?
 - ? What does he do for you in heaven?

Tomorrow, in our final reading for Lent/ Easter 2021, we will review the importance of Jesus’ ascension into heaven, his sitting on the right hand of God, and the role he plays from that intimate place as advocate for us.

- ? What passages come to mind when we speak of his advocacy for us from the right hand of God?