

# biblestudy: june 2018

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*Based on the scripture lessons of Cokesbury's Adult Bible Study Series*

## June 3, 2018 Text: Matthew 12: 1-14 “Justice and Sabbath Laws”

These study verses this week have a surprise ending. Jesus does something to help a man by healing the man’s withered hand. Hooray! Bells and whistles! Let’s give God a round of applause!

At least, that is what one might expect. That’s not what happened. Some of the folks who had witnessed the healing left the room and began trying to figure out how to destroy Jesus (Matthew 12:14).

Philip William Otterbein (one of the founders of the Evangelical United Brethren Church that merged with The Methodist Church in 1968 to form The United Methodist Church) often pointed out that the New Testament used two different words that get translated “destroy.” One of the words mean “destroy” in the sense of rendering powerless; the other word means “destroy” in the sense of obliteration, so the object no longer exists. Otterbein notes that we are destroyed by death in the sense that we are made powerless, but we are not destroyed in the sense of being obliterated, because we are promised a resurrection body in Christ Jesus.

Which of these words for “destroy” is used in Matthew 12:14? Did the Pharisees simply want to take away Jesus’ authority, his influence, his power, to make him useless? That’s one way to destroy. Or did the Pharisees want to wipe out Jesus completely, to eliminate him, to abolish him?

## June 10, 2018 Text: Matthew 13: 24-30 “Parables of God’s Just Kingdom”

127. That is how many times the word “kingdom” shows up in the four gospels. This understanding of the reign of God is clearly at the heart of the gospel message. We pray that “Thy kingdom come...on earth as it is in heaven” (Luke 11:1). And Jesus said, “The kingdom is already among you” (Luke 17:21). The kingdom is both “already” and “not yet.”

It’s no wonder that Jesus turned to stories to teach about the kingdom. He even said “God’s kingdom isn’t coming with signs that are easily noticed” (Luke 17:1). So, he told parables that gave a glimpse of the kingdom. In this week’s background study, there is a glimpse that looks like a farmer with a good crop of weeds (Matthew 13:24-30) and there is a glimpse that looks like a tiny mustard seed (Matthew 13:31-32) and there is a glimpse that looks like a woman cooking a few loaves of bread (Matthew 13:33). No one image will capture all the nuances of God’s work in the kingdom!

Weeds and grain together? Sometimes people of the kingdom share time and space with the evil of the devil. Mustard seed? Sometimes the work that manifests the kingdom does not have big-world splash, but is a small act of kindness or quiet forgiveness or simple courage. Loaf of bread? Sometimes the results of a little touch of the kingdom

## June 17, 2018 Text: Matthew 15:1-9 “Jesus Teaches About Justice”

If Jesus called you a nasty name, wouldn’t you want to make sure you knew what the word meant? So, I’m sure when Jesus referred to some folks as “hypocrites” (Matthew 16:7) some of that the crowd pulled out their cell phones, connected to their browsers, and googled *hupōkritēs* (or, at least, the Aramaic equivalent).

No doubt, some of them, having checked on the precise meaning of the word, thought, “That doesn’t apply to me.” The word “hypocrite” means “actor,” like someone who plays a part in a drama, but who is really not like the character being portrayed.

Can you be a hypocrite if you really believe what you are saying? Can you be a hypocrite if it’s not just an act, but is really an expression of your true feeling and thought? In other words, can you be a hypocrite if you are sincere?

The Pharisees in this account are more than just “sincerely wrong.” They are making like their way of doing things is God’s way of doing things. We have allowed a lot of evil to erupt in the world by pretending that how we want things is how God wants things. As Anne La-

Matthew 12:14 uses the word for “destroy” that means obliterating him (*apōllumi*). The goal of the Pharisees was not to take away Jesus’ power; the goal was to eliminate him.

Why? Jesus was a threat to the way many Pharisees understood how God wanted life to be lived. Jesus gave examples from Hebrew life and from how his disciples lived to make the point that mercy trumps regulation (Matthew 12:3, 5). If Jesus is indeed “Lord of the Sabbath” (Matthew 12:8), then our judgments about how to observe the law are spelled out in how Jesus lived and loved. This is not a way of saying “anything goes.” It is a way of saying that Jesus determines what is the thing to do.

### What Someone Else Has Said:

Ted Jennings in *The Portion of the Poor*, ed., Doug Meeks, Kingswood) said: “Holiness that is genuinely scriptural and even evangelical has nothing to do with the childish game of inventing arcane moralistic rules but is instead the imitation of the divine love under the concrete forms of social, political, economic, and religious history.”

### Prayer:

As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: “Lord, You first loved...now I love...”

life go far beyond what is visible and sometimes it is slow in developing.

Don’t you wish God had put me in charge of designing the kingdom? I’d deal out a bit more show, considerably more recognition, and major chunks of fanfare. Oops! God has put me (and you) in charge of living out the values of the kingdom and those values look more like love than they do power; they look more like peace than they do revenge; they look more like patience than they do instantaneousness.

127. That is how many times the word “kingdom” shows up in the four gospels. This understanding of the reign of God is clearly at the heart of the gospel message. That’s how this commentary started and we’ve only gotten a glimpse. Maybe that’s the way it is with the kingdom.

### What Someone Else Has Said:

Wolfhart Pannenberg (*Theology and the Kingdom of God*, Westminster) says “We are not called to choose between concern for the Kingdom and concern for society. Rather, in concern for society we are concerned for its end and destiny, namely, for the Kingdom of God.”

**Prayer:** As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: “God of the kingdom, make me a child of Your kingdom...”

mott said, “You can safely assume you’ve created God in your own image when it turns out that God hates all the same people you do.”

Jesus quotes Isaiah 29:13. The ancient prophet had written of a people who used all the right words, but whose lives did not reflect what they said. Have you seen the TV ad in which a man is making like he is admiring his neighbor’s new car? He says things like, “Impressive!” but then his “real” unspoken voice says, “Gaudy.” His “out loud” voice says, “Great feature,” while he unspoken voice says, “Show off!”

Our Lord is admonishing the Pharisees (and us) to make sure our actions match the words we use. Is our way of doing things simply a matter of what makes sense to us humans or is our way of doing things a reflection of the will of God? Some days it hurts to know the answer to that question!

### What Someone Else Has Said:

*In Living Our Beliefs* (Discipleship Resources), Bishop Ken Carder writes: “Our tradition includes stories of the church’s misunderstanding of God and distortions of the church’s mission. We must learn

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from the failures and avoid repeating them. The tradition, therefore, must be interpreted holistically and in the light of scripture.”

June 24 2018 Text: Luke 16:19-31 “Reaping God’s Justice”

There are about forty-seven dozen different ways of grappling with this text. Let’s zero in on one that sets the stage for the rest of the account.

The bottom line of the “givens” for this story is that our place of influence and prestige in this life has no bearing on our afterlife. Compare Luke 16:22 and Luke 16:23. We might reverse an old saying and note that “the poor get richer and the rich get poorer.”

Most of us would have to identify ourselves as being seen in the description of the rich man (Luke 16:19). We might drive a beat-up 2000 Ford with 275,000 miles on it, but most of the world walks. We might limit ourselves to dessert to twice a week, but many simply wonder when they will next eat anything. We might attend a small, rural church with an average worship attendance of 14, but millions of Christians worship under the threat of torture. In other words, compared to many of God’s people, we have it pretty good.

Having said that, we see the painful truth that having these privileges does not mean that we also have the slam dunk assurance of a seat at God’s right hand. That assurance comes not from our place of privilege, but from faithfulness to the revealed Word of God (Luke 16:31).

That was one of the big “show down” issues in John Wesley’s day. He was under attack because he proclaimed an equality of God’s love,

Prayer:

As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer be: “Help me, Lord, recognize myself in the stories You tell, in the encounters You have had...”

not defined by place, power, or prestige, but by the fullness of God’s grace. Those who had places of influence did not like hearing that and protested when Wesley said God loved their housekeepers as much as God loved them.

That is not to say that God does not love those with positions of worldly success; the worldly success, however, is not a sign of any kind of preferential love from God. The early Methodist societies had many, many poor people, but there were also a few of wealth. In other words, neither poverty nor wealth is a guarantee of God’s presence or lack thereof.

But these verses do not let us off so easily. The temptations, the assumptions, the possibilities of our places of privilege put us at spiritual risk. Maybe we should listen to Moses and the Prophets and Jesus. Finally, it is about grace, isn’t it?

What Someone Else Has Said:

Scott Hendrix (*Martin Luther: Visionary Reformer*, Yale) wrote “(Luther) presented the Ten Commandments as both prohibitions of sinful behavior and encouragements of the opposite: the correct way to honor God and treat others.”

Prayer:

As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: “Help me listen to Your Word, Lord...”



UPCOMING EVENTS:

**North Carolina Conference Annual Conference 2018 June 14 -16**  
Greenville Convention Center, Greenville NC,

**HOMe (Heaven on Earth) July 15 -21**  
Scouters and clergy from across the U.S. will gather at HOMe (Heaven on Earth) at Philmont Scout Ranch, July 15-21, to share ideas and information on scouting as a ministry in the UMC.  
Learn more at: <http://www.gcumm.org/news/go-home-in-july/#.WcFC4JKrGgo.facebook>

**North Carolina Conference UMW Mission u 2018 July 26 – 28**  
Methodist University, Fayetteville NC. More info can be found at: <http://nccumw.org/>