

biblestudy: march 2019

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

March 3, 2019 Text: Luke 14:7-14 “Called to Humility and Hospitality”

Isn't it funny how sometimes a single word jumps out of a text? That's what happened to me as I read the study text for this week. Jesus tells a story to make a point that calls his followers to be humble (Luke 14:7-11). He also speaks to the host at a dinner and advises that person to be generous by including the “misfits” with invitations to the dinner (Luke 14:12-14). But that is not what rattled my cage in this reading. What did?

It's the word “noticed.” Jesus noticed (Luke 14:7). How many others at this dinner entirely missed what Jesus saw? How many gathered as they usually did and never spotted anything wrong with how things were done? Jesus noticed that the guests were power-grabbing the good seats. He noticed.

This text reminds us to be alert to those times when something is amiss. Is it a friend who seems bent out of shape by some personal problem? Did I notice? Is it some simple prejudice against one of God's children? Did I notice? Is society structured in such a way that “the haves” keep on having and “the have nots” cannot find a better tomorrow? Did I notice?

As I write this on a hot, muggy day in late July, I am aware that this lesson will be the study for United Methodists on the first Sunday following the called General Conference, February 23-26, 2019.

March 10, 2019 Text: Mark 1:16-20, Luke 14:25-33 “A Costly Call”

Lent began last Wednesday and after reading this week's study text I am ready to ponder: “Can't I get a better offer?”

Jesus starts calling his disciples (Simon, Andrew, James, John—Mark 1:16-20). So far. So good. There is that little problem of James and John strolling off and leaving their father, Zebedee, to handle the menial work of the family business (Mark 1:20), but it feels good to see these new followers so enthusiastic. (Or did they simply want to get away from the net-mending business?)

The plot thickens. Now, instead of just a handful of cohorts, Jesus is having a large crowd traveling with him (Luke 14:25). It is time to spell out what it means to be a disciple. To tell you the truth, I don't think it is the kind of message most churches will put on their outdoor bulletin boards. How about hating family (v. 26)? How about taking up a cross (v. 27)? How about blindly following Jesus (v. 27)? What about giving up all your possessions (v. 33)?

Now, do you see why I am looking for a better offer?

Following Jesus is not a casual thing. Note that Jesus gives two examples of looking ahead in order to make the right decision: a builder of a tower makes plans (vs. 28-30) and a king checks on troop strength before going into battle (vs. 31-32). Jesus is not looking just for num-

March 17, 2019 Text: Luke 15:11-24 “Calling the Lost”

Henri Nouwen has made an intensive study of Rembrandt's painting “The Return of the Prodigal Son.” In a book by that same name, Nouwen points out that many church folks are not like the prodigal son who made all kinds of foolish decisions and bad moral choices (Luke 15:12-24). Instead, we church folk are more likely to be the elder son, the one who stayed on track, did the right things, didn't get into trouble, and could quote the Apostles' Creed from memory while standing on one foot (Luke 15:25-32).

Both sons are lost, but they are lost in different ways.

Jesus tells about the father who loves both of the boys: Luke 15:23, Luke 15:28-31. Nouwen challenges the reader to be like the father: having love for those who have slipped from righteousness and sought to return and for those who have perhaps depended too much on righteous behavior to try to earn love.

Obviously, I do not know what will happen at that conference; I do not know what decisions will be made; I do not know what The United Methodist Church will look like in the days ahead.

Even though all that is true, I do know that Jesus' example *to notice* will still be applicable. The followers of Jesus are called upon to look at things with the eyes of Jesus (after all, the Church is the body of Christ). When we look with the values of Jesus...when we look with the love of Jesus...when we look with the hopes of Jesus, then we shall notice what the world may not see. Dare we say it? The Church is a people who notice.

What Someone Else Has Said:

In *The Mind of Jesus* (Harper and Row), William Barclay has said: “Jesus came with the message of a God whose love not even sin could destroy, and whose heart's desire was that (all) should accept the offer of forgiveness which (God) was making to them, and in being forgiven, should learn to mend their ways....But Jesus came to tell of a seeking God, a God who did not wait for the sinner to come back., but who went out to seek and to search for him, and to appeal to him to come back.”

Prayer:

As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: “God of abounding love, grant us eyes to see as You see and grace to love as You love...”

bers to add to the roll. He wants folks to know what they are getting into. Make your decision to be a disciple, but realize what it means to be a disciple!

I keep looking for the loop hole. For example, although Jesus says we have to give up all our possessions, he allowed the disciples to have a treasurer for their common funds (John 13:29). I keep looking for the loop hole. For example, although Jesus says that we have to hate our family, from the cross he arranged for John to care for Jesus' mother (John 1'9:26-27). I keep looking for the loop hole.

Bottom line: to follow Jesus faithfully is to go wherever He says to go. That may not look the same for *all* of us, but it is the same for *each* of us.

What Someone Else Has Said:

Writing about his military career, Phil Stern (*Snapdragon*, Osprey) said: “I knew I was going into a fighting outfit, so I sold everything I owned and spent as much money as I could. I didn't want to have anything to go back to. If I had something to go back to, I might be too careful and try to value my life above everything else.”

Prayer:

As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: “Lord, did You say to follow You...?”

Some writers like to call this parable “The Waiting Father.” That makes sense. The story would not have a happy ending—a Jesus ending—if the father had not had prevenient love. That's the way it is with God's love: that waits until we come home (younger son)...or until we are ready to celebrate (elder son).

I wonder why we don't call this story “The Prodigal Father.” He's the one who gave away large chunks of his money to a son who did not know how to spend it. He is the one who gave the big party with the best fatted calf. He is the one who had unbounded love for someone who had gone astray. He is the one who still wanted his jealous son to know that he is included. I asked Amazon Echo the meaning of the word “prodigal.” She replied: “As an adjective, ‘prodigal’ can mean recklessly wasteful.” Praise the Lord! God is recklessly wasteful with God's love for us!

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What Someone Else Has Said:

Writing in *The Return of the Prodigal Son: A Story of Homecoming* (Doubleday Image Books), Henri J. M. Nouwen has confessed: “And still, I knew that I would never be able to live the great commandment to love without allowing myself to be loved without conditions or prerequisites. The journey from teaching about love to allowing myself to be loved proved much longer than I realized.”

March 24, 2019 Text: Luke 19:1-10 “Calling to Salvation”

Okay. Quick! Before you read this week’s text, jot down everything you know about Zacchaeus. Now, let’s glance at that list: . He was short. He climbed up a tree. He had Jesus come for supper. He gave away globs of money. The end. Now, let’s look at the story and make note of what all we learn about Jesus.

Luke 19:1 – Jesus was just passing through Jericho with no intent on stopping. What a word of comfort to know that our Lord will stop whatever He is doing if we need a special moment with Him!

Luke 19:3 – Jesus was attracting a crowd. One of the joys of life within the Church is an awareness that we are part of a large family and they are not all like us! Jesus has attracted people of every land, of every hue. It’s a crowd!

Luke 19:5 – Jesus knew Zacchaeus by name. Remember, Zacchaeus did not know much about our Jesus, but our Lord knew him well enough to call him by name. There is a joy (and some nervousness) in realizing that Jesus knows us by name!

Luke 19:7—Jesus went to have supper with a man most folks did not like. The next time I encounter someone for whom I don’t care much, I need to ask myself if Jesus would have supper with this person. That’s an embarrassing question.

March 31, 2019 Text: Matthew 4:12-22 “Called to Discipleship”

Persons seeking to become clergy in The United Methodist Church are often asked to tell their “call story.” Sometimes, the account is dramatic, but more often than not it is telling about a nagging feeling that just would not go away. (When I teach in the Course of Study School, many of the second-career pastors speak of how they said “No” for years, but finally accepted the truth that it was God who kept tapping them on the shoulder.)

In Matthew’s version of the beginning of Jesus’ ministry, it is interesting that both Jesus (Matthew 4:12-13) and those whom He called (Matthew 4:18-22) had to leave where they were and go somewhere else. If nothing changes about my life (locale, values, practices, relationships), then one must wonder if I have understood what it means to follow Jesus.

The first disciples were brothers [Simon Peter and his brother Andrew—(Matthew 4:18) and then James and his brother John (Matthew 4:21)]. I wonder if those brothers got along with each other or if they were embattled in all sorts of sibling rivalries. (“I have to do all the work when we are out there fishing; I think my brother just comes along to enjoy the ride.”) Following Jesus may well put us in close community with folks we otherwise might not choose as companions. (If you think there are no tensions within the Church family, I have some ocean front property in Montana that I’d like to sell you.)

Prayer:

As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: “O Love that wilt not let me go, I rest my weary soul in thee; I give thee back the life I owe, that in thine ocean depths its flow may richer, fuller be...” (George Matheson, Hymn 480, *United Methodist Hymnal*)

Luke 19:8—Jesus hears Zacchaeus put his money where his mouth was. What does Jesus hear when I meet him? What do I do differently because Jesus and I encountered each other? What have I given away?

Luke 19:9 – Jesus pronounces that Zacchaeus is saved. The Master says that is why He has come—to seek and to save. Do I rejoice or do I panic when I realize that Jesus is seeking me? It is good news when we are rescued.

Zacchaeus was too short to see Jesus, but he did what he could. And Jesus met him. I do not bring a perfect self to Jesus. But He meets me. That’s good news!

What Someone Else Has Said:

Kenneth C. Kinghorn (*The Gospel of Grace*, Abingdon) wrote: “God cultivates our hearts long before we have any inclination to turn to him. The Holy Spirit creates within us a desire for God, and this gracious activity takes place well ahead of our consciousness of his working in our lives.”

Prayer:

As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: “Lord God, You know me...”

The context for this beginning to Jesus’ ministry is the arrest of John the Baptizer (Matthew 4:12). Our Lord might well have thought about what happened to John and have begun to anticipate that His own journey might move to the same fate. Knowing that does not keep Jesus from His work; in fact, being aware of the dangers of faithfulness seems to motivate Jesus to move to Galilee and get started. Awareness of potential risks is more likely to make me back off from that to which I am called. For our Lord, however, those threats made it important that He wait no longer, but to call His disciples and get started.

Following Jesus is going to make life different. No wonder that the Master’s first proclamation is “Repent” (Matthew 4:17). That word means “stop what you are doing and go in a new direction.” Oops. Who, me, Lord?

What Someone Else Has Said:

In *The Next Christians* (Doubleday), Gabe Lyons wrote: “Jesus’s ministry also demonstrates the importance of intentional community. He called disciples to follow him together—a group of people connected on a mission...”

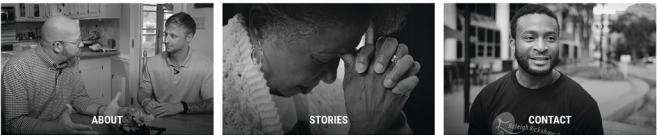
Prayer:

As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: “You have called me, O Lord, to follow You; that means You will be with me...”



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