

# biblestudy: august 2020

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

## August 2, 2020 Text: Luke 19:1-10 “Jesus Visits Zacchaeus”

Haven’t you heard the phrase “Be careful what you wish for”? Zacchaeus climbed a tree so he could get a better view of this Jesus who seemed to be drawing such a big crowd. He got a better view all right! Jesus invited him down out of the tree and said He was coming to visit. Zacchaeus got to see Jesus up close and personal! (Luke 19:4)

Sometimes, we want to check out Jesus, but prefer not to get too close. If we get too close, someone might mistake us for a fundamentalist religious zealot. If we get too close, we might have to re-order our priorities. If we get too close, He may even ask us to get closer, such as “I must stay in your home today” (Luke 19:5).

I remember being at a Vacation Bible School program when the children were acting out the story of Zacchaeus. One of the little boys--about four years old--had been put up on a branch of a small tree. The little girl who was playing the role of Jesus walked over to the tree and called out, “Zacchaeus, come down from that tree. I want to go to your house for supper.” The boy did not move, so she yelled it even louder, “Come down right now so I can go to your house for supper!” No movement. The little girl put her hands on her hips and shouted, “You’re supposed to come down!” The boy said, with a touch of fright in his voice, “I can’t get down by myself.” And one of the adults helped him down from the tree. “Zacchaeus” and “Jesus” walked off together. The good

news is that if we can’t get down by ourselves, there is the hospitality and caring of the people of God to give us a hand. Few of us got to know Jesus on our own. Someone or someones helped us out of the tree. A teacher. A parent. A pastor. A neighbor. A sibling. A friend. Who helped you out of the tree so Jesus could stay in your home, in your life?

Thanks be to God that you wanted a better view of our Lord. Thanks be to God for those who helped you come down to accept Jesus into your home and life.

Sometimes we are in the tree. Sometimes we are helping others from the tree. But in both conditions, we are moving that there might be a better view of Jesus.

### What Someone Else Has Said:

S T Kimbrough, Jr. has written (*May She Have a Word with You?*, Cascade Books): “Wesley says that those of the household of faith, the church, divide their time between secular and sacred activity, and both arenas of activity are sanctified by sacrifice and prayer.”

### Prayer:

As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: “Lord, I want to see You better...”

## August 9, 2020 Text: Text: John 4:7-30, 39-42 “Jesus in a Samaritan Village”

There are so many handles for picking up this story! What about Jesus’ witness to gender equality (John 4:27)? What about the many times this woman has been dumped by men (John 4:18)? What about the urgency with which this woman ran to tell the good news (John 4:28)? What about the way many are led to belief by the witness of just one (John 4:39)? What about the change effected in those who believe (John 4:42)? All of this and we do not even know the woman’s name!

On my desk is a trivia calendar. Today’s question was “What is the driest place on Earth?” My mind rumbled around various deserts: Sahara, Mojave. Gobi. Wrong. Wrong. Wrong. The driest place is the McMurdo Dry Valleys in (Are you ready for this?) Antarctica.

That sort of surprise happens ever so often in our spiritual journey: our Lord shows up when we do not expect it or when we do not recognize Him or when we thought He would look like something else. Who expected a desert in Antarctica? Who expected Jesus to be witnessed to by a Samaritan woman? [After all, the text says, “Jews and Samaritans did not associate with each other” (John 4:9).

I ask myself: How do I relate to persons who are “different” from me? (John 4:9) I ask myself: How often do I confess the broken places in our life? (John 4:17-18) How often do I speak to another about the Jesus in

my life? (John 4:39) How often have I asked Jesus to be even more present in my life? (John 4:40)]

And here is another thought that emerges from this account: Am I willing to listen and honor what is said by someone on whom society (and perhaps me) looks down? Review John 4:39. This was not a culture that paid much attention to what women had to say. Yet, these Samaritans—no doubt, both men and women—learned and grew in faith because they were willing to respect what was said by this five-time divorcee who was shackled up with yet another man (John 4:18). What message from God might I be missing because I do not expect any wisdom or insight or revelation to come from a particular person or a shackled group?

Like I say, there are many handles for picking up this story.

### What Someone Else Has Said:

In *Fellowship of Love* (Kingswood), Alice Knotts wrote: “The women at the heart of this story refused to wall off citizenship and social responsibility from what it meant to follow God and Jesus.”

### Prayer:

As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: “Who, me, Lord?...”

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August 16, 2020 Text: Luke 10:25-37 “The Good Samaritan”

This week’s study text is a familiar story, but I wonder if its familiarity also includes an unintentional put down of “another people.” Jesus celebrates the good deed done by the Samaritan (Luke 10:30-35). Jesus invites the legal expert (and us) himself to show that kind of mercy and kindness (Luke 10:37). Jesus tells how the Samaritan has been a loving neighbor (Luke 10:27, 29). But Jesus does not call the Samaritan “good.” That is an adjective our tradition has added to describe the man.

What’s wrong with that? Think about it. What is the implied smear if we were to describe an African American as “a good Black”? What is the implied put down if we spoke of someone as “a good lesbian”? What is the implied insult if we said “He is a good immigrant”?

The implication would be that most African Americans, most lesbians, and most immigrants are not good, and here is one who stands out because she or he, by way of contrast, is good! Maybe I am chasing a rabbit here, but I do think our prejudice reveals itself sometimes in subtle ways.

It is interesting how many verbs it takes to depict what all the Samaritan did to help the injured man: came (v. 33) , saw (v. 33), was moved (v. 33), went (v. 34), bandaged (v. 34), tending (v. 34), placed (v. 34), took (v. 34), took care (v. 34) , took (v. 35), gave (v. 35), said (v. 35),

August 23, 2020 Text: Matthew 15:21-28 “Jesus Heals a Gentile Woman’s Daughter”

Most of the time when we read this week’s study text, we begin pondering what Jesus said about giving the children’s bread and throwing it to the dogs (Matthew 15:24). Is our Lord calling the Canaanite woman a dog? Is Jesus saying that all Gentiles are no more than dogs?

Remember that Matthew is writing primarily to a Jewish audience. He needs to tell the story in such a way that his readers—faithful Jews—will hear and not ignore his teaching. Matthew points out that the Savior is going to start with “the lost house of Israel” (Matthew 15:24). But even at this early stage of His ministry, Jesus is wondering how best to let His Jewish followers know that He also came for the Gentiles, the rest of the world.

In a sense, he “hooks” His Jewish disciples by pointing out that He is here to save Israel (Matthew 15:24). Surely the most stringent of the Hebrew children would say “Yes! Yes!” when He hints that His mission is for them and not the Gentiles. How now to let these loyal Jews know that His saving power is also extended to Gentiles?

Then comes this exchange about dogs not eating food intended for the family. (This is not to call the Gentiles a demeaning term like “dogs.” It is simply using an example from everyday life at the family tables of

August 30, 2020 Text: Mark 5:1-20 “Jesus Faces a Demon-Possessed Man”

One of the many interesting things in this unusual story is that Jesus told this man not to follow him as a disciple (Mark 5:18-19). Wouldn’t you think that Jesus would want as many in his troupe as possible? No! All who accept a saving relationship with our Lord are not called (or sent) on the same mission. I am reminded of Ephesians 4:11: “The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors, and some teachers...”

Some are called to leave everything and follow (Matthew 4:19) and some are called to go back home (Mark 5:18-19). This should reassure us that we are still faithful even if our ministry does not look like the ministry of others.

Jesus told the healed man to tell others how he had been shown mercy (Mark 5:19—Common English Bible, New Revised Standard Version). Other translation don’t call it “mercy,” but use the word “compassion” (King James Version) or “pity” (Broadus, NT of Our Lord and Savior) or “kind” (J. B. Phillips). In New Testament language, the word is *ēlēēō*. Only three times is this word used in the New Testament; ordinarily, the word translated “compassion” is *splagehnizōmai*. What is the difference between these two Greek words? One is the action of divinity; the other is the action of humankind. In this account, Mark wants to make sure that we understand that what Jesus has done is the work of the divine.

take care (v. 35), return (v. 35), repay you (v. 35).

It is interesting to note how many things and people were employed in being a neighbor to the injured man: bandage (v. 34), oil (v. 34), wine (v. 34), (donkey (v. 34), inn (v. 34), wages (v. 35), innkeeper (v. 35).

Fortunately for us today, Jesus simply says “Go and do likewise” (Luke 10:37). This means you and I are off the hook unless we happen to be walking between Jerusalem and Jericho; otherwise, how could we do “likewise”? You know that’s not right! Our Lord lets us know that all of us will walk/ride/see/hear/think/touch places where there is desperate need for a neighbor. Then, we go and do.

What Someone Else Has Said:

Donald Hall (*String Too Short to be Saved*, Godine Publishers) tells about a worker who was promised by a church deacon four dollars for some work: “But the deacon said, when the carriage was delivered, that four dollars was too much, and that three dollars was what the job was worth. (The worker) refused to take anything, and never sat in his pew again, for if deacons cheated, churches were corrupt.”

Prayer:

As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: “Help me hear Jesus, O Lord...”

both Jews and Gentiles.) Now, Jesus “reels in” those who think He is for them and them alone.

The woman answers about how in her home (and in the home of the Jewish families), the dogs got to eat things that fell from the table. (Have you ever fed your family pet a piece of meat from the table?)

Boom! Jesus says, “You are right! There is enough food for all!” And He as much as announces, “I am for this Canaanite, this Gentile woman, as much I am for my Jewish disciples.” And the woman’s daughter is healed.

That’s good news to us 21st century Gentiles!

What Someone Else Has Said:

Charlie Mackesy has written a children’s story, *The Boy, the Mole, the Fox, and the Horse* (Harper One from Harper Collins): “‘What do you want to be when you grow up?’ ‘Kind,’ said the boy. ‘What do you think success is?’ asked the boy. ‘To love,’ said the mole.”

Prayer:

As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: “Lord God, Your love extends far beyond my imagination and I give You thanks...”

Do you see how Jesus and geography challenge us? Look at Mark 5:1. Jesus and His disciples go to the “other side of the sea” (NRSV). His early ministry was in familiar Jewish territory, but as Suzanne Watts Henderson points out, “Jesus deliberately expands the scope of his ministry.” To go to a new place does not mean one abandons the old, but, also, to be alive in the old place does not mean that one cannot go into a new territory. Jesus did both. A good question for a local church is: “Where did we go this year that we had not been to before?”

And all those pigs (Mark 5:13) were shipped to eastern North Carolina for vinegar based pork barbecue.....or something like that.

What Someone Else Has Said:

In *The Humanity of God* (John Knox Press), Karl Barth has written: “On the basis of the eternal will of God, we have to think of every human being, even the oddest, most villainous, or miserable, as one to whom Jesus Christ is Brother and God is Father, and we have to deal with (that person) on this assumption.”

Prayer:

As you prepare this lesson, let our prayer begin: “Lord Jesus, I come now with my own brokenness and ask to be healed...”