

of Discipleship

February 4, 2018

Day 1: John 2.1-3

On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. 2Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. 3When the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said to him, 'They have no wine.'

A wedding in those days consisted of a procession in which the bridegrooms' friends brought the bride to the grooms' house, and then the wedding was held. The festivities could last 7 days. The Mishana said that a wedding of a maiden should be held on a Wednesday. Mary is not asking for Jesus to perform a miracle but informing Him of a desperate situation.

Question: Why would Mary mention that the wine gave out to Jesus?

Challenge: Nobody knows for sure but can you think of 3-4 reasons why the wine was not sufficient for the guests.

Scripture: John 2.1-11

Day 2: John 2.4

And Jesus said to her, 'Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come.'

He is not showing disrespect or irritation with Mary by referring to her as "woman". The word should be translated as one of respect. Jesus' response could be because He was caught off guard because in John's Gospel the term "hour" refers to Jesus' passion (his trial, crucifixion, resurrection and ascension.) This simple comment by Mary causes Jesus to announce His power to His disciples in a dramatic form.

Question: Do you think that Jesus was not happy with his mothers question to him about the wine?

Challenge: Think of someone who has run out of hope how could you help them?

Scripture: John 4:46-5.18

Day 3: John 2.5-7

5His mother said to the servants, 'Do whatever he tells you.' 6Now standing there were six stone water-jars for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. 7Jesus said to them, 'Fill the jars with water.' And they filled them up to the brim.

The dialogue between Jesus & Mary (vs. 4-7) appears to leave out some parts. It seems like more conversation should take place between the two. For Jesus at first refused to act but then he responds to Mary's request to become involved. There is nothing in the text that suggests that Mary is expecting a miracle but she is encouraging Jesus to help in some way. Jesus does decide to use the problem to show the first sign that He is the Son of God.

Question: Why stone jars and not earthen jars? Pottery would be easier to make.

Challenge: Do some calculation to see how many people could have a cup of wine from the water turned into wine. Let's say a 3 oz cup per person. And each person get two cups.

Scripture: John 6.1-21

Day 4: John 2.8"

8He said to them, 'Now draw some out, and take it to the chief steward.' So they took it.

In Amos and Hosea there is a prediction that the earth will yield fruit in such abundance that it can only be a sign of the new age. Jesus uses this first sign to declare the new age and that Jesus is the one to bring the new age.

Question: What do you think the stewards' response was to the water turned to wine?

Challenge: When was the last time you followed an order that you believed came from God?

Scripture: Amos 9.13-14, Hosea 14.7, Jeremiah 31.12, Isaiah 25.6-10

Day 5: John 2.9-10

9When the steward tasted the water that had become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the steward called the bridegroom 10and said to him, 'Everyone serves the good wine first, and then the inferior wine after the guests have become drunk. But you have kept the good wine until now.'

The emphasis is not on replacing the water with wine, nor even on the quality of the wine. The emphasis is not on Mary or her intercession. The primary focus is on Jesus as the one sent by the Father to bring salvation to the world. Jesus replaces the Temple (in Jerusalem) as the place where God and humanity meets. Jesus is the water of life that purifies us in God's sight.

Question: Why would someone serve the poor wine first?

Challenge: Can you think of one other miracle where Jesus multiplied something? Does that event shed light on this one?

Scripture: John 6:1-41

Day 6: John 2.11

11Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.

Jesus' glory is revealed in that this sign (and the ones to follow) show how God, in Jesus, has replaced all the previous Jewish (and pagan) religious institutions, customs, feasts and Temples (places where God meets humanity). The disciples' belief did not come from just this one event but came because this event brought into focus things Jesus (& John the Baptist) had taught them. Their own Jewish tradition of "eating and drinking at wisdom's table" (Prov. 9.5, & Sirach 15.1-3, apocrypha) was in the background as they drank the new wine. It was the tasting of the really good wine that brought their memory of the past events to their time. It was an A-HA moment.

Question: What did they experience that revealed His glory?

Challenge: Think back to a time when something happened that caused you to see the glory of God

Scripture: John 11.1-44

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February 11, 2018

Day 1: Exodus 3:1-3

3Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian; he led his flock beyond the wilderness, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. 2There the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire out of a bush; he looked, and the bush was blazing, yet it was not consumed. 3Then Moses said, 'I must turn aside and look at this great sight, and see why the bush is not burned up.

Moses notices that God is calling. Moses has been prepared (by his life experiences and his willingness) to receive God's summons. The angel never says anything but stands by while God speaks. Moses has spent a number of years learning how to be a husband, father, shepherd and work for someone else. He is now ready after learning all those things to be a leader of people seeking freedom.

Question: Why is God on a mountain?

Challenge: Can you look back and recall when you have had an experience of seeing an image of God

Scripture: 1 Samuel 3:1-21, Isaiah 6

Day 2: Exodus 3:4-6 4

When the Lord saw that he had turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, 'Moses, Moses!' And he said, 'Here I am.' 5Then he said, 'Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.' 6He said further, 'I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.' And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.

God spoke to summon Moses, now God speaks to alert him that he is on holy ground- ground that is totally filled with the presence of God. In this passage the removal of sandals removes any separation between God & Moses. The voice from the burning now identifies who is talking to Moses by stating the history of God's involvement with the people of Abraham. God has been with Moses' family for many generations. Even though there has been a number of years when no one has been receiving God's words, still God has remained faithful to his promise to be with the children of Abraham (Gen 17:6-7).

Question: What made the ground holy?

Challenge: Think of some reasons why a person would be afraid to look directly at the face of God?

Scripture: Joshua 5: 13-15, Ruth 4.2-12, Deuteronomy 25:5-10

Day 3: Exodus 3:7-8

7 Then the Lord said, 'I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings, 8and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey.

The Lord has seen, has heard and has known. The Lord has "come down" is a way of saying that God is now coming to the people and taking a hand in alleviating their suffering. The land of milk & honey is one where both farmers and shepherds can live. Just as in creation God provides the whole world for plants, animals and people to live, so now God is promising them a land where they can grow and live freely.

Question: Why if God has seen the people suffering has God not done something earlier?

Challenge: The words "a land flowing with milk & honey" were hopeful to those in bondage. What words of hope would you offer to persons in bondage to some addiction today?

Scripture: Deuteronomy 26.4-14

Day 4: Exodus 3:9-11

9The cry of the Israelites has now come to me; I have also seen how the Egyptians oppress them. 10So come, I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt.' 11But Moses said to God, 'Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?' 12He said, 'I will be with you; and this shall be the sign for you that it is I who sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall worship God on this mountain.'

Moses receives the bad news that he is the one to act for God to free the people. Moses has five reasons for not sending him to do this task. He, like us, feels unprepared to do a task in God's name. Even though we know that whatever we do in Jesus' name will succeed still we are concerned that maybe we are not up to the task. Just as Moses saved Jethro's daughters from the shepherds so God will save Israel from slavery. Reason 1 "who am I" .God does not answer but simple says I am with you and by implication if God is with you who could be against us.

Question: Moses asks God to reconsider sending him. Did Jesus ever ask God to reconsider what God was asking of Him?

Challenge: When have you felt not up to a task you needed to do?

Scripture: Judges 6:11-24

Day 5: Exodus 3:13-14

13 But Moses said to God, 'If I come to the Israelites and say to them, "The God of your ancestors has sent me to you", and they ask me, "What is his name?" what shall I say to them?' 14God said to Moses, 'I am who I am.' He said further, 'Thus you shall say to the Israelites, "I am has sent me to you."'

Reason 2 "who are you". God says I will be who I will be or I am the one who created life and gave it to all creatures. I am the one who has loved you even when you did not realize nor appreciate it. Reason 3 is the fear that he will be rejected just as he was rejected by the two Hebrews he tried to help after he killed the Egyptian. God gives him the strategy to talk to both the Egyptians and Israelites. First talk to the elders. Then confront the King and lastly use the power God gives you to demonstrate God's determination to free the people.

Question: Why talk to the elders of the tribes first?

Challenge: What is the reason Moses is to give Pharaoh to let the people go and do?

Scripture: Exodus 5:1-9

Day 6: Exodus 4.10-1410

But Moses said to the Lord, 'O my Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor even now that you have spoken to your servant; but I am slow of speech and slow of tongue.' 11Then the Lord said to him, 'Who gives speech to mortals? Who makes them mute or deaf, seeing or blind? Is it not I, the Lord? 12Now go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you are to speak.'

Reason 4 & 5 have to do with public speaking. Moses says he cannot talk well and God says it's not you talking but me talking through you. Moses says his speech is halting and not good and God (now irritated) tells him that his brother Aaron will speak for him. This marks a change in the way God will intervene by giving the power for doing God's work to more than one person. Up to this point God has worked with one person at a time. From now on there'll be a team of people that has the power to do God's work. This extends all the way to the New Testament when Jesus sent them out two by two. In the 21st century when we want to begin a new faith community we send a team of people to begin the work not just one.

Question: Why does Moses say he is slow of tongue? Do you think he gets nervous or does he have a speech problem?

Challenge: What reasons have you given to God for not taking up a task in Jesus' name?

Scripture: Ecclesiastes 4.9-12

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February 18, 2018

Day 1: Matthew 3.11

11 'I baptize you with water for repentance, but one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to carry his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. 12 His winnowing-fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing-floor and will gather his wheat into the granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.'

John's baptism was a call for people to repent. Repentance is a change of mind and behavior. It means "turn around" stop going in the direction you are going because that direction will end in your destruction. John's baptism was a sign of the coming judgment. The one coming with "fire" brings the judgment itself. The judgment would purify the righteous and burn up the unrighteous. Here at the beginning of Jesus' ministry John's call to the people to turn around and look for the kingdom that is in the other direction. Repent for the Kingdom of God is at hand!

Question: Why does John believe he is not worthy to carry "His" sandals?

Challenge: Why do you think we use water in our baptism services?

Scripture: Mark 1:1-11

Day 2: Matthew 3.13

13 Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan, to be baptized by him.

Jesus begins His public ministry by going to see John where he was baptizing at the Jordan River. John will be the one to announce to the world that the savior has come to call all humanity to Him. It is fitting that Jesus begin His ministry where John was baptizing. John had been telling people that the time had come for the people to repent so that they might "see" the messiah. John baptized in the Jordan near the place where the people of Israel crossed the Jordan centuries ago to take possession of the Promised Land. They had to go through the Jordan to reach the Promised Land and John is calling them back to the Jordan so that they can once again go to the Promised Land.

Question: How old do you think Jesus was when he was baptized?

Challenge: In the United Methodist church we baptize in one of three ways: Sprinkling (a small amount of water) pouring (a larger amount poured on the head) immersion (the whole person going under the water). If you were being baptized which one would you want and why?

Scripture: Luke 3:2-23

Day 3: Matthew 3.14

John would have prevented him, saying, 'I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?'

John recognizes that Jesus does not need to repent and does not need to go into the water. John sees before anyone else that Jesus comes from God. John's question allows Jesus to state that He is obedient to God's will.

Question: Do you think that Jesus ever baptized anyone? Why or why not?

Challenge: Think back on a baptism service you have been to and see what the most meaningful part was.

Scripture: John 1:19-37

Day 4: Matthew 3.15

15 But Jesus answered him, 'Let it be so now; for it is proper for us in this way to fulfill all righteousness.' Then he consented.

Righteous here means doing the revealed will of God. Fulfill means to perform. Both John & Jesus are linked in carrying out God's plan of salvation for the world. God's plan includes the baptism of Jesus. The Gospel does not get into what the motive was behind the act or what was on the mind of either participant. The key is that they carry out God's commands and that they are obedient to God's command. In the Gospels, as important as the people involved are (and we do not get much more important than Jesus), all their actions point to their obedience to God's commands. The Creator not the creature is important.

Question: How do you feel about the concept of obedience?

Challenge: How do you see yourself being obedient to God's will?

Scripture: Acts 2:24-32

Day 5: Matthew 3.16

16 And when Jesus had been baptized, just as he came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened to him and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him.

The image of the dove is found at some critical moments in the Bible. At creation the spirit of God went across the chaotic waters (Gen. 1:2). The dove flew out from the ark across the dangerous water (Genesis 8:8) and brought back an olive branch. In both of these events the dove is a sign of a new creation. The appearance of the dove in the midst of chaos is the sign that God is creating order out of chaos. The appearance of the dove in Matthew is the sign that the new kingdom has come. Out of the chaos of the world a new creation is emerging.

Question: Why a dove?

Challenge: When do you think of water as soothing, dangerous, and comforting?

Scripture: Romans 6

Day 6: Matthew 3.17

17 And a voice from heaven said, 'This is my Son, the Beloved with whom I am well pleased.'

The term "Beloved" is used in Isaiah 42:1 (in Isaiah it is translated servant). Matthew has now completed his introduction of Jesus. He has shown his lineage and divine birth in chapters 1 and 2, now he shows the complete picture of Jesus as the Son of God and the suffering servant. Jesus' baptism is a matter of obedience and receiving of the spirit. It is the same with our baptism. Jesus was declared Son of God when he was baptized. Christians are declared to be God's children in the act of baptism.

Question: Why was God pleased with Jesus?

Challenge: Do you feel a sense of calling by your baptism? And called to do what?

Scripture: Isaiah 42:1-10, Psalm 2:7

Marks

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of Discipleship

February 25, 2018

Day 1: Mark 2:1-2

When he returned to Capernaum after some days, it was reported that he was at home. So many gathered around that there was no longer room for them, not even in front of the door; and he was speaking the word to them.

Capernaum is on the Sea of Galilee and is the village where Jesus stayed when he was not traveling. The house probably belonged to Peter's mother-in-law. The Synagogue where Jesus taught, though in ruins, is not far from the house. His fame preceded Him before going to Capernaum. Jesus had been teaching and healing in the region of the Galilee.

Question: How would people at that time know Jesus was in town?

Challenge: Do a little research to see how big the house might have been.

Scripture: Mark 2

Day 2: Mark 2:3-4

Then some people came, bringing to him a paralyzed man, carried by four of them. And when they could not bring him to Jesus because of the crowd, they removed the roof above him; and after having dug through it, they let down the mat on which the paralytic lay.

The crowd is a barrier to the man's healing just as his illness is a barrier to the man's full participation in the life of the community. In Jesus' time having physical access to places was not considered by Jesus as the problem with being paralyzed. His main concern has to do with the lame man not being allowed to be a full member of the community. He would not have been allowed to be in the priesthood and at the Qumran community he would be excluded, period. In our time we have passed laws to lessen the exclusion of persons who are handicapped from buildings and other public services. Jesus knows that there are some barriers that cannot be eliminated but those erected to benefit the few are to be taken down. The issue of accessibility is not just one of a physical nature but also of attitude.

Question: Why were there four men carrying him?

Challenge: How do you feel about visiting folks in the hospital? Does it do any good for the patient? Why or why not?

Scripture: Mark 3

Day 3: Mark 2:5

When Jesus saw their faith; he said to the paralytic, 'Son, your sins are forgiven.'

It is the faith of those helping the paralyzed man that is affirmed by Jesus. We ought not to think that the paralyzed man did not have any faith, but that for some reason he could not use it even for his own healing. When Jesus questioned the disciples for having little faith during the storm at sea he was not saying they had no faith but that they were not using it. Their barrier to faith was the worry about being drowned. The crippled man believed he could not be restored fully to the community. Jesus forgives his sins not because sinning caused the crippling but because Jesus is showing that the real barrier in life is our separation from God. Jesus restores the crippled man to full relationship with the community and God.

Question: Jesus does heal the man but why do you think he said your sins are forgiven first?

Challenge: What should be first - sins forgiven or physical healing?

Scripture: Mark 4

Day 4: Luke 5:12

Once, when he was in one of the cities, there was a man covered with leprosy. When he saw Jesus, he bowed with his face to the ground and begged him, 'Lord, if you choose, you can make me clean.'

Leprosy in Jesus' time covered a number of skin disorders and was considered a social disease because those labeled were considered unclean, impure and were to be separated from others (Leviticus 13). The leper comes to Jesus (who by custom he was not supposed to even approach) and calls Jesus Lord, thereby acknowledging Jesus' standing. The leper wants to be made clean, which means that he wants to be part of his family and community once again.

Question: Did the man want to be healed or pronounced clean?

Challenge: You will find this uncomfortable but when you are alone some time pray with your face on the ground.

Scripture: Luke 5

Day 5: Luke 5:13

Then Jesus stretched out his hand, touched him, and said, 'I do choose. Be made clean.' Immediately the leprosy left him.

Jesus releases the man from his leprosy. His illness has chained him to a life of separation and loneliness. To make him clean was to restore him to life. He may or may not have had what we today would call leprosy but whatever it was forced him to be put out of the town. The man demonstrated great faith and understanding of just who Jesus really was. In Jesus' time only a priest could pronounce a person clean. This man understands that Jesus is the Son of God and Jesus' power and authority is above that of the priests. He believed Jesus so was made clean. Today we need to believe that He is the Redeemer so we can be made clean.

Question: Why do you think the lepers were forced to live outside of the town when others with physical problems were not (the blind, lame, etc.)?

Challenge: Can you think of some illnesses today that we partially treat by keeping people separate from one another?

Scripture: Luke 15

Day 6: Luke 5:-14

And he ordered him to tell no one. 'Go', he said, 'and show yourself to the priest, and, as Moses commanded, make an offering for your cleansing, for a testimony to them.'

Even though Jesus' authority and power exceeded the Priests, still He was more concerned with the man's return to society than His own fame. Even though Jesus can release him from the illness, the rest of the community will not accept the man until the priest pronounces him clean. In this verse Jesus shows He is concerned with the person and not with fame. Jesus gives all of us a lesson in humility. The compassion of Jesus is seen in Him lowering Himself for the sake of another. Those in power today could take a lesson. They are elected to recede into the background while those they serve are cared for.

Question: How would the priest know that the man had leprosy?

Challenge: Think of a time that you receded into the background while someone else stood in the limelight. How did you feel?

Scripture: Luke 14