

Marks of Discipleship

Daily Prayer ■ Weekly Worship ■ Bible Reading
Giving Time, Talents & Resources ■ Spiritual
Friendships ■ Service In & Beyond
the Church

August 2, 2020

Day 1: Luke 15:11-13

Then Jesus said, 'There was a man who had two sons. The younger of them said to his father, "Father, give me the share of the property that will belong to me." So he divided his property between them. A few days later the younger son gathered all he had and travelled to a distant country, and there he squandered his property in dissolute living.'

This parable gives us insight into the love of God. The story begins very reasonably as the younger son wants to make his own way in life and not work for his brother, who will receive the land. How the boy spent his money is unknown but it may have been some or all of the following: gambling, drinking or being entertained. The story implies that whatever he did, it was foolish and wasteful.

Question: How did the father give the son his share? Did he sell some land, take a loan, or how would he actually do this?

Challenge: Do you have a will or estate plan? How would you divide up your assets if you had to do it now?

Scripture: Luke 15:1-10

Day 2: Luke 15:14-19

When he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed the pigs. He would gladly have filled himself with the pods that the pigs were eating; and no one gave him anything. But when he came to himself he said, "How many of my father's hired hands have bread enough and to spare, but here I am dying of hunger! I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands.'

The famine comes at the wrong time. Just when the boy runs out of money so does everybody else. He cannot even get alms. The boy is forced to go against his religious training and take a job feeding pigs. This shows how desperate he was, he went against his basic religious principles in order to just survive. Violating ones basic religious principles can cause either an awakening or a deep depression. In the boy's case it caused an awakening. "He came to himself" means that he made a move toward health. His move was to get out of the mud and manure and go back to his father's house. His attitude, as he begins to go back, has changed a lot from when he left. Asking for forgiveness is a strong move, not a weak one. The younger son demonstrates strength by going back to his home and dealing with problems.

Question: Have you ever felt like the younger son?

Challenge: Do some research on the Jewish prohibition against eating pork.

Scripture: Deuteronomy 14:3-13

Day 3: Luke 15:20-21

So he set off and went to his father. But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him. "Then the son said to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son."

Gods love goes way beyond our ability to love. Before the words of "forgive me" are out of the boy's mouth his father runs to hug and kiss him. Words will not convey how the father feels at the return of his son; only a kiss will suffice.

Question: Have you felt someone else loving you without using words? What happened?

Challenge: Have you shown someone you love them without words? What happened?

Scripture: Isaiah 60:1-7, 19-22

Day 4: Luke 15:22-24

But the father said to his slaves, "Quickly, bring out a robe—the best one—and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!" And they began to celebrate.

The father does not respond to the boys words of "I am sorry" with "I told you so" or some other disapproving look. The father does not ask for "a pound of flesh" before he accepts the boy. The father gave back to his son all the indicators to the world that this boy is the son. The robe, ring, sandals and the dinner all point to the boy as being a son.

Question: Do you freely forgive or do you find yourself wanting the other to "pay" for the wrong done to you?

Challenge: What are the indicators (in your family) that you belong to your family. Now think about the indicator that you are in God's family.

Scripture: Isaiah 54:5-15

Day 5: Luke 15:25-28

'Now his elder son was in the field; and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. He called one of the slaves and asked what was going on. He replied, "Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has got him back safe and sound." Then he became angry and refused to go in. His father came out and began to plead with him.'

The elder son has more of the usual response to someone asking for forgiveness. We want to extract some punishment from the person before we accept them back and then when they are accepted back we make them feel less than, because of what they did. If we were held accountable for a bad decision we have made in life then who could stand blameless before the world? Forgiveness is one of the most difficult actions humans can perform. Some have held onto their anger over a hurt for 10, 15, 20 years and sometimes even after the other has died. The inability to forgive causes one to punish oneself. Without forgiveness every time we are reminded of the hurt it feels as raw as when it first happened. Unless we can forgive no amount of amends by the other will suffice.

Question: Have you ever felt like the older son?

Challenge: Take inventory of yourself and see if there are any past hurts you have not forgiven.

Scripture: Genesis 25:19-34

Day 6: Luke 15:29-32

But he answered his father, "Listen! For all these years I have been working like a slave for you, and I have never disobeyed your command; yet you have never given me even a young goat so that I might celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours came back, who has devoured your property with prostitutes; you killed the fatted calf for him!" Then the father said to him, "Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found."

The father reminds the elder son that he will receive all the father has. When we want to hold a grudge God reminds us that we have been forgiven and set free to love. The price that was paid for us ought to make us think twice before we withhold forgiveness. Your brother was lost and now is found. My love is great enough for all. I will not run out of love and because I love your brother who has come back, it does not diminish my love for you or diminish what you will someday receive.

Question: How did the older son know the younger was with prostitutes? It does not say in the story how he used his money.

Challenge: Think about the father's reasoning. Does it make sense and why? Or why not?**Scripture:** Romans 10:5-13, Luke 15:1-10

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August 9, 2020

Day 1: Mark 8:1-3

During those days another large crowd gathered. Since they had nothing to eat, Jesus called his disciples to him and said, "I have compassion for these people; they have already been with me three days and have nothing to eat. If I send them home hungry, they will collapse on the way, because some of them have come a long distance."

This is not the account of the feeding of the 5,000. The number here is 4,000. This miracle comes at the end of a journey that Jesus took from Capernaum on the Sea of Galilee, northwest to Tyre, then east over to the Decapolis. The Decapolis was a region east of the Sea of Galilee. Decapolis is the name for the ten cities and was Gentile territory. Here Jesus stops on the northeastern shore to spend time with folks who have come to hear him preach and teach.

Question: What is the longest time you have gone without eating? Why?

Challenge: Try the discipline of fasting. Go without food for a portion of the day, say from morning until evening on a day of the week. Eat just enough in the morning to give you some energy.

Scripture: Psalm 107:1-9

Day 2: Mark 8:4

His disciples answered, "But where in this remote place can anyone get enough bread to feed them?"

The crowd had come with baskets of food but in the three days it was all eaten. Jesus is amazed at how the Gentiles stayed with him during the three days. These non-Jews were eager to hear about the one God's goodness and offer of salvation. In early Christian times there were a number of Christian communities on the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee. The fact that it was a remote place meant that people traveled a distance to hear Jesus. It reminds me of many homebound folks that long to be able to go to church. These homebound individuals know the power and strength that comes from worshiping and listening to the Gospel. Many who are able to get around take coming to church for granted.

Question: Can you think of another time when God asked the Disciples to do something not possible?

Challenge: Keep a journal this week of the meals you eat. Indicate if the meal was satisfying and why it was.

Scripture: Isaiah 55:1-11

Day 3: Mark 8:5

"How many loaves do you have?" Jesus asked. "Seven," they replied.

The number seven stood for the seven heathen peoples that once inhabited the land (Deuteronomy 7:1). As the seven tribes talked about in Deuteronomy have disappeared, Jesus is saying that the gates of heaven are open to all peoples. The coming of Jesus will not eliminate tribes but integrate them into one family. The church is that integration. We are one in Christ.

Question: Who do you think had the loaves of bread?

Challenge: Think over your diet and see what you eat the most of.

Scripture: Micah 6:3-13

Day 4: Mark 8:6

He told the crowd to sit down on the ground. When he had taken the seven loaves and given thanks, he broke them and gave them to his disciples to set before the people, and they did so.

To give honest thanks for something you did not make is an exercise in humility. The bread was made by someone who knew how to put together different elements into something that gives nourishment. Each time I eat I am reminded that the food which allows me to live is made by someone else. Even if I am the one to put together various ingredients to make something nourishing, still I eat in humility because life is given to me. The custom of shoving something in our mouths without pausing to give thanks is regrettable.

Question: Why did Jesus wait three days to offer food for the crowd?

Challenge: What do you have to offer Jesus that He can multiply?

Scripture: Mark 14:20-30

Day 5: Mark 8:7

They had a few small fish as well; he gave thanks for them also and told the disciples to distribute them.

The fish reminds us that much of our food comes from God. No matter how talented someone may be, they cannot make a fish. It is God who made the fish and provided it for us. Much of our food comes from some other living thing giving up its life so we can live. God set us in the midst of creation and allowed us to use it to live. We have a responsibility to be stewards of creation.

Question: How much fish would it take to feed 4,000 people, giving everybody 6 oz. of fish?

Challenge: Look up the types of fish that are found in the Sea of Galilee.

Scripture: I Kings 17:1-16

Day 6: Mark 8:8-9

The people ate and were satisfied. Afterward the disciples picked up seven basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over. About four thousand men were present.

The word used for basket here is different than the one used in the feeding of the 5,000. This word refers to a small basket with two handles that a person could carry. In the feeding of the 5,000 the term for basket refers to a very large basket. As I said earlier, the seven refers to the Gentile nations that inhabited the area at one time. With this feeding it showed that the Messiah had come because the Gentiles were preached to and they are now welcome into the kingdom of God.

Question: What is the best meal you have ever had?

Challenge: Look over your journal and see what makes a meal satisfying.

Scripture: II Kings 4:1-7

of Discipleship

August 16, 2020

Day 1: Luke 11:1

He was praying in a certain place, and after he had finished, one of his disciples said to him, ‘Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples.’

The prayer Jesus taught His disciples seems to be more of a prayer outline. I have wondered if Jesus wanted us to use the phrases as a guide to praying. When we pray we want to know that our prayer is received. It is hard to know if it is heard when there is not a quick response. Our mind tells us that God is not obligated to respond in our time frame but still we want to know that our prayer is heard. Jesus is giving an outline with assurance that if we pray this way we can be assured that we have prayed correctly and that God will respond.

Question: Why do we need a form if God knows what we need before we ask?

Challenge: Each day this week stop at each phrase of the Lord’s Prayer (you can use Luke 11:1-4 or Matthew 6:9-13) and spend a few minutes thinking about the phrase and what it means.

Scripture: Matthew 6:1-17

Day 2: Luke 11:2a

He said to them, ‘When you pray, say: Father, hallowed be your name,

Luke’s form of the prayer helps us to pay attention to the simplicity of the prayer and the directness of its petitions. The term “Abba” is the familiar form of father. It is the form Jesus used to refer to God. It denotes a connection between Jesus and God that is very close, like a son to a father.

Jesus invites his disciples to use the same term, thereby acknowledging that they have an intimate connection to God through Jesus.

Question: What makes something or someone holy?

Challenge: Come up with five differences between an earthly father and our heavenly one.

Scripture: Psalm 103:8-18

Day 3: Luke 11:2b

your kingdom come.

The name of God is holy and is both a statement of fact and a desire that it will be holy over all the earth. God’s kingdom will be extended to the whole earth and some day all will acknowledge that God is ruler. In the second Temple Judaism they earnestly waited for the “Day of the Lord” (Isaiah 13:6, Joel 2:1).

Question: How do you understand the idea that the kingdom has come but not completely?

Challenge: How can you be a part of kingdom building?

Scripture: 1 Thessalonians 4:15-5:7, 2 Thessalonians 2:1-7

Day 4: Luke 11:3

Give us each day our daily bread.

The daily bread recalls the bread in the Wilderness. The Israelites were hungry and called on the Lord to provide food. God answers their request and teaches them about how dependable and merciful He can be. God provides them bread each day and a double portion on the day before Sabbath. All the manna spoiled after a day so the people had to depend on God each day for their food. This part of the prayer is not only a request for food but a request that we recall each day how dependent we are upon God. God is the creator of the world and of all that is in it.

Question: What two other things did God provide while the Israelites were in the wilderness?

Challenge: Do a little research as to what Manna was.

Scripture: Exodus 17:1-8, Exodus 16:8-18

Day 5: Luke 11:4a

And forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us.

This is not a conditional phrase even though it looks like it. The ability to forgive and to be forgiven is part of the same gift. We are not to forgive so that we can receive forgiveness but we forgive because we have received forgiveness. God’s mercy flows in the same channel whether we are the forgiven or the forgiver. As much as we need bread, so too do we need forgiveness. We are prone to sin and if we cannot forgive each other then we cannot be in relationship. The closer we are to someone the more the possibility exists for us to need forgiveness.

Question: What part does forgetting have to do with forgiving?

Challenge: Make a list of persons you have offended and decide what you want to do about it. Now make a list of persons who have offended you and see what you want to do about it.

Scripture: Colossians 3:1-14

Day 6: Luke 11:4b

And do not bring us to the time of trial.

The time of trial or testing is anything that calls our faith into question. The petition is a request to avoid the pain that life can sometimes cause. Our faith and our belief that we are dependent upon God is not a risk when life is going well but when life is not going well. As much as we try to deny it we still believe that if we are good we should be rewarded. We believe we ought to be rewarded by God or society. The petition is a heartfelt plea for evil not to come our way. But as Jesus prayed in the garden, “not my will but yours,” so too that is our prayer. Deliverer us from evil but not my will but yours.

Question: Which word seems best to you: Trial, Testing, or Temptation?

Challenge: Can you think of a time when you felt your faith tested? Did your faith grow because of that testing and why?

Scripture: Luke 22:41-51

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August 23, 2020

Day 1: James 2:1

My brothers and sisters, do you with your acts of favoritism really believe in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ?

A good question! . I heard a story of a college student who spent all night camped outside the college office that assigned rooms so she could be first in line to reserve a room. After a long night in the cold she was first and filled out the proper form but when the assignment came in, it was a different room. She went to complain and found out the person in charge had crossed off her name and put another name in its place. Her complaint grew louder until the “mistake” was corrected. Favoritism - using your position of power to give a favor to a friend or for a bribe.

Question: Why would favoritism show ones non-belief in Jesus as Lord?

Challenge: Look for acts of favoritism this week.

Scripture: Deuteronomy 15:1-18

Day 2: James 2:2

For if a person with gold rings and in fine clothes comes into your assembly and if a poor person in dirty clothes also comes in,

This verse is not referring to proper dress in worship. In fact it is not directed toward the rich or poor person. It is obvious that a rich person can afford a variety of clothing items and the time to clean their clothes. If one is poor then perhaps one set of clothes is all you have and there may not be time to wash completely. This verse is about our attitude toward a person that looks good and one that does not. James is asking how our belief in Jesus as Lord affects our reaction to the rich or poor.

Question: What would correspond to gold rings and fine clothes today?

Challenge: In our community what is rich and what is poor?

Scripture: Leviticus 19 – *this is a sample of Israel's social legislation.*

Day 3: James 2:3

and if you take notice of the one wearing the fine clothes and say, 'Have a seat here, please', while to the one who is poor you say, 'Stand there', or, 'Sit at my feet',

In the Roman world, in the first century, at dinners or other formal functions there were seats that were considered the most important. These seats were reserved for those who were considered the most important. Importance was measured by your official status (governor or general or a rich person). If you were an important person it was just assumed that you would sit at the best place. But if we call Jesus Lord then who is the most important person? At the table of the Lord importance comes from need.

Question: Why do you think 'stand here' or 'sit at my feet' would be a putdown?

Challenge: Think of a time within the last 70 years when the shape of the table occupied a lot of time before important negotiations began?

Scripture: Micah 6:7-7:1

Day 4: James 2:4

have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts?

James now tells us of the danger in making distinctions. If we show preference based on wealth then we will begin down a path that will lead to us being like judges. We will begin to judge, not love. Judging others for some reason is hard to control. When individuals gain some power they soon find themselves tempted to use that power for their own gain. James is saying that making distinctions leads to sin, as we are tempted to use our power to judge for evil purposes.

Question: What attitude do we need to cultivate to avoid being judges with evil thoughts?

Challenge: In a Christian assembly where do you see the danger of “distinctions?”

Scripture: Matthew 7:1-5, John 12:44-50

Day 5: James 2:5

Listen, my beloved brothers and sisters. Has not God chosen the poor in the world to be rich in faith and to be heirs of the kingdom that he has promised to those who love him?

James now offers a commentary on Jesus' words in the Sermon on the Mount (Blessed are the poor in spirit ... Matthew 5:3). A person with diabetes will be more careful with what they eat. Because they are careful they could outlive a person who does not have health problems and eats foolishly. A farmer with 160 acres may be more careful with his land and follow good land conservation where as one with 10,000 acres may not be as careful because he does not have to be. A person who is poor in spirit may have a easier time following God's commands because they want to be sure that they are in harmony with God and God's laws. James tells us not to judge the worth of a person based on what a person has but as one for whom Christ died.

Question: What are the potential problems a wealthy person may have?

Challenge: Think of three practices you can do that will help you become rich in faith.

Scripture: Matthew 5:1-12

Day 6: James 2:6-7

But you have dishonored the poor. Is it not the rich who oppress you? Is it not they who drag you into court? Is it not they who blaspheme the excellent name that was invoked over you?

Blasphemy in the Old Testament meant to revile, curse, slander, reproach or despise someone. What is forbidden is something that disrespects God and is usually done in speech (Exodus 22:27, Leviticus 24:10-23). The name invoked is Jesus so James is saying the wealthy disrespect that name by their actions of dishonoring and abusing the poor. They do this because they can do it. The society at large encouraged a person to gain ever increasing amounts of wealth and power. There was no societal encouragement to care for and love one another. James is stating that which society holds as a value the church does not. We are not to gain at the expense of others. But what is worse in this church is that the ones who are oppressing are being given places of honor. The church James is writing to is conforming to the world, not transformed by Christ.

Question: Why do you think James is saying the rich dragged them to court? What do the rich have to gain by suing a poor person?

Challenge: A big one - If the church was in charge of the country how would it deal with the mortgage crisis?

Scripture: James 4:13-5:20

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August 30, 2020

Day 1: Matthew 6:24

'No one can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.'

In I Timothy 6:10 it says that the "love of money is the root of all evil." Though I Timothy is correct, this is not what Jesus is speaking of in the Sermon on the Mount. He is speaking of wealth and how wealth can control a person. If one has wealth then one can worry about protecting it and growing it. Investment managers talk about wealth as if it is a living thing that needs to grow. I heard someone say once that if they came into a huge sum of money they would reverse tithe. They would give away 90% and live on 10%. If one can have that attitude toward wealth then one will not be controlled by money, but instead, control it.

Question: What amount do you consider real wealth?

Challenge: What is 90% of your assets and can you live on it?

Scripture: Deuteronomy 8:12-20

Day 2: Matthew 6:25

'Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing?'

There are two things to know about this verse. One, worry means do not be anxious and two, life encompasses more than just eating and clothing and housing. We need to work to supply the basics in life but if we are anxious then we will not work but become immobilized. Life must have meaning and purpose in order to be worthwhile.

Question: Have you ever wondered where your next meal will come from? Have you ever been really hungry?

Challenge: Do a little analysis of your week. How often you were anxious about something?

Scripture: Acts 4:27-37

Day 3: Matthew 6:26-27

Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value. And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life?'

God is the creator of all ; the animals, plants, the earth, seas and humans. God has given to each what they need to live. We as humans have been given what we need to live just as the birds have been given what they need. Humans have the capacity to worry but that capacity will not be of help to us in the business of living.

Question: Do Jesus' comments about not worrying make sense?

Challenge: Look up Maslow's hierarchy of needs.

Scripture: Luke 12:14-21

Day 4: Matthew 6:28-30

And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith?'

In addition to God giving each portion of creation what they need to live, they are given their own beauty. Beauty is a part of creation just as air or water or land. God clothes us in beauty so that we are attractive. Beauty is not how the skin hangs on the bones but how the spirit glows within.

Question: What are the clothes that God gives us?

Challenge: Write down what you consider to be basic human needs.

Scripture: I Kings 10

Day 5: Matthew 6:31-32

Therefore do not worry, saying, "What will we eat?" or "What will we drink?" or "What will we wear?" For it is the Gentiles who strive for all these things; and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things.'

Jesus is not calling us to be lazy or foolish. We cannot sit back and wait for the fruit to fall into our laps. We need to work because God has given us what we need to live but we need to use what God has given us. We are created to work for a living. Work (growing crops and making homes) is one way we find meaning in life. We are created to produce, not just consume. God told us to be fruitful and multiply. This means more than having babies, it means working to improve creation. We need to work, but being anxious will not help us; in fact it will drain our energy so that we cannot work.

Question: Who are the Gentiles?

Challenge: If you did not worry about food, drink, clothes and shelter, what would you worry about?

Scripture: Luke 12:25-29

Day 6: Matthew 6:33

But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.'

God is saying that when we seek to live in harmony with the rest of creation and respect life we will receive what we need for living. The way we can keep ourselves balanced between our material needs and spiritual needs is to make our goal in life to manifest the Kingdom of God in our living. To manifest something means make known, make it visible and clearly seen. We make our values visible by the actions we take that are consistent with those values.

Question: What is the Kingdom of God?

Challenge: Can you come up with a balance between human needs and service to God?

Scripture: Matthew 6:1-23