

Monday, March 22, 2010

Written by Judi Eaves

Scripture: Luke 18: 9-14

After reading this parable about the Pharisee and the Tax Collector, I am reminded of how I have behaved like the Pharisee – compared myself to others and took pride in my righteous behavior. The Pharisees were revered religious members of society, whereas the Tax Collectors were looked down upon as thieves and cheaters. When the Pharisee prayed, he reminded God of what a great man he was, how generous he was, and that he was not like others who were extortionists and swindlers. When the Tax Collector prayed, he bowed his head and humbly told God he was a sinner and asked for forgiveness. After praying to God, the Tax Collector, not the Pharisee, “went down to his home justified”.

Sometimes it is difficult not to compare ourselves to others because we know how hard we try to be good people. We worry too much about what everyone thinks, therefore, we remind ourselves of how great we are, and we feel better. God doesn't reward us for being superior to others. He rewards us for being humble, for putting our pride aside, for asking for forgiveness, and being faithful followers of Jesus Christ.

Prayer: Lord, it is so easy to let pride direct my thoughts. Please help me to be humble, to put self-righteousness aside and recognize that I am not better than others. Forgive me for comparing myself to others and guide me to the path of your love and grace. Amen.

Tuesday March 23, 2010

Written by Kim Sherwood

Scripture: Luke 18: 15 – 17

To be honest, I never really thought in depth before about the story of the blessing of the children. I always connected this story to be just another “nice” story of all that Jesus did. I looked at it to be just another one of his stories, such as healing the men with leprosy or giving sight to the blind beggar.

As I read this again, I let myself think a bit more on what Jesus was trying to teach his disciples. Jesus says “Don’t try to stop them. People who are like these children belong to God’s kingdom. You will never get into God’s kingdom unless you enter it like a child”. Does this mean we are to act like a child in order to be welcomed into God’s kingdom? In some ways, yes. Children are innocent. The trustworthiness of a child, who puts all of their trust into an adult to nurture and guide them, who will blindly and faithfully try something new with no fears – this is what we should be willing to do – trust that the kingdom of God is there for us.

Prayer: Dear Lord. As we travel on our faithful journey, please give us the eyes, ears and trusting hearts such as a child, so that we too, may openly and willingly trust you will guide us through all eternity. Amen.

Wednesday, March 24, 2010

Written by Lauren Pelletier

Scripture: Luke 18: 18-30

I remember asking a question about this scripture years ago because I did not understand why Jesus would say that it was easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. Several explanations were given to me but I think that it is less important to understand the wording than to understand the meaning behind the words. Jesus was trying to make a point. We all have material things that we hold dear and would never want to part from, but if Jesus himself asked us to, would we?

I haven’t often been overcome with the temptation to give away all of my belongings and follow a path that spreads the love and word of Jesus, but I have felt the urge once or twice. Both of those times I was on one mission trip or another and it took a lot of prayer and searching for me to realize that just like trying to understand the meaning of Jesus’ words, I was literally thinking of purging my life of material objects. Really what I needed to do was detach myself from them so that I could see clearly what the most important thing in my life is. I’ll give you a hint... it’s not something that can be bought.

Prayer: God, I do not always understand right away and I do not always feel like I can give up the comforts of my life to follow you. Please help me to know in my heart that what is impossible for me is possible with you. Amen.

Monday, March 25, 2010

Written by Barbara Madden

Scripture: Luke 19: 1-10

Jesus initiates a change by talking to an unlikely person who Jesus recognizes as needing help. He reaches out to this person who is hated by the crowd as he is a tax collector, very rich and whom they believe a sinner. Jesus orders him to climb down from the tree he has gone up to see Jesus better and tells Zacchaeus that he will be staying at his home. When Zacchaeus was on the ground before Jesus, he realized immediately the greatness and honesty of this man before him and humbled himself telling Jesus that he will return all of the riches he has acquired four times over.

The lesson is that Jesus reaches out to the most despicable individual who needs help and changes his life. If we feel estranged from God we can feel secure that we are always loved.

Prayer: Holy and loving God, help me to see myself through your eyes so that I can see the ways that need to be changed.

Friday, March 26, 2010

Written by Edie Sletner

Scripture: Luke 21:1-4

Jesus saw the wealthy drop their gifts into the treasury. He then saw a poor widow drop in two copper coins. Jesus said the poor widow put in more than all the wealthy, because the rich contributed out of their abundance, but she gave out of her poverty, putting in all the living she had.

Is that widow not an example to us all?

Prayer: Jesus, remind us every day of the wealth you have given us to share it with others, not only our money, but our care and compassion. Amen.

Saturday, March 27, 2010

Written by Gordon Rankin

Scripture: Luke 19: 45-48

I am sure that most of you have heard me say before that the cleansing of the temple is one of my favorite gospel stories. It fascinates me that how different the Jesus in this story seems to be from our popular image of a peaceful, loving Jesus with children climbing all over his lap. Yet for me, the Jesus presented in this story is absolutely consistent with the Jesus that we read about in the rest of the gospels. Sure Jesus gets angry and forceful. The behavior might be a bit different, but concern is the same. Jesus always is upset when people lose sight of the Kingdom of the God. In this particular case, Jesus becomes righteously indignant that practices have become commonplace that demean and distort the very temple of God.

This leads to an interesting reflection for we who claim to be Christ's followers. What do we become righteously indignant about? In my experience, we usually only become righteously indignant when we feel we ourselves or someone really close to us has been wronged. Sure other things may upset or concern us. But are they things that we are willing to put ourselves on the line for and risk upsetting others? Righteous indignation, the kind the Christ models, is about really stepping out there and taking risks when something wrongs the Kingdom of God.

It seems that it is much easier to follow a loving, peaceful, children-surrounded Jesus. But to follow the Christ who cleanses the temple, that is a challenging calling indeed.

Prayer: O Christ, you have shown us that our focus should first and foremost be one that enhances the Kingdom of God. Keep us from whimpering out. Strengthen us to stand against anything that blinds ourselves or others to the coming of your Kingdom. Amen.

Sunday, March 28, 2010 (Palm Sunday)

Written by Fredd Ward

Scripture: Luke 19: 28-40

Just recently I was encouraging some friends that often times along the journey of faith we are required to embrace absurdity – that which is utterly or obviously senseless. That is certainly the case with the entrance procession described by the gospel writer. Processions were a common ceremony in the first century. Jerusalem had seen military commanders and kings enter the city before; but Jesus' entry was unusual and...absurd.

Imagine a king (of fishermen and disabled and unacceptable persons and social outcasts) riding a borrowed donkey! Ridiculous! Imagine people on both sides of the path leading down from the Mount of Olives throwing their ragged, threadbare clothes on the road; casting their hopes and expectations upon this uncommon king! Preposterous!

The episode does not make good sense. It makes God sense, however! Those first century believers found hope and release from oppression and suffering in the love of God embodied in the person of Jesus. The same experience is available here and now if we would join the march and embrace the absurdity of God's abundant affection.

Prayer: Creator God, I pray to keep an open mind today because what may appear to be nonsense may actually make perfect sense according to your design. Amen