

the healing and thanksgiving of a Samaritan Luke 17: 1-19

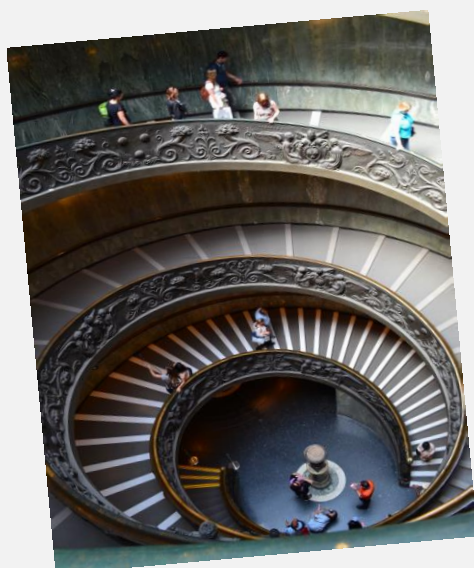
thought for the week

Jesus lays out the disciples responsibility for each other - they must walk together as they face the hard times that will inevitably come their way - they will encounter enough pressure from outside their tight knit community without having to deal with internal conflict and stress. How many times have we experienced Christian communities that have imploded as a result of personal and political pain? How many times have we seen the Church and indeed the Gospel brought into disrepute because of the way we have treated each other or because we have allowed internal struggles and arguments to spill out into the wider community? Is the Church its own greatest enemy? The answer to this problem is not to avoid conflict, but to face it with justice and forgiveness. This is the very business of Church. It is the meat of the “New Commandment”, that we love one another as Christ loves us, with challenge and forgiveness. Not allowing ‘Sin’ to do its destructive work, but dealing with the sinner with reconciling compassion and forgiveness in order to restore relationships. (See: Colossians 3:16).

Discipleship is not a solitary exercise, we need each other and we need to practice giving and receiving forgiveness and reconciliation. Not just because it builds better communities but because it is itself the “message of Christ” which we need to recognise and nurture within us.

Thomas Merton wrote, *“In himself, on the cross, Christ destroyed the hostility that was created by all these [religious, ethnic and national] divisions. There again is what community means for us, destroying division by the cross. In other words, we must be bigger than divisions. There will still remain ethnic differences, but they no longer make any difference in Christ. I think that where the real trouble comes is that we have a tendency to think that this is all very simple and natural. All you have to do is follow your natural good tendencies and it is all taken care of. It isn’t. It isn’t automatic, it has to be done by God. It is a work of God.”*

image for the week



verse for the week

But the Master said, “You don’t need more faith. There is no ‘more’ or ‘less’ in faith. If you have a bare kernel of faith, say the size of a poppy seed, you could say to this sycamore tree, ‘Go jump in the lake,’ and it would do it.”

Luke 17 verse 6

prayer for the week

Psalm 51

reflection for each day



day one

‘Better to wear a millstone necklace and take a swim in the deep blue sea than give even one of these dear little ones a hard time!’

Hard times are to be expected, they are not welcome, or even God’s plan but they are the result of challenging the corrupt values and violent attitudes we see in our society. Jesus said, “Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”



day two

‘Be alert. If you see your friend going wrong, correct him. If he responds, forgive him.’

If we are able to forgive the wounds others inflict on us, we gain a deeper understanding of how much we are forgiven and the real depth of God’s love for us.



day five

‘Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!’

Recognising our own need for mercy can be hard and painful. Who do I need to ask for mercy from?



day three

But the Master said, ‘You don’t need more faith. There is no ‘more’ or ‘less’ in faith.’

As we realise that the little faith we have is actually enough, then the question changes to, “God, what is it that you call me to do in faith?”



day six

‘Go, show yourselves to the priests.’ They went, and while still on their way, became clean.

The lepers needed to be inspected by the Priests so they could be restored to society, so they go home to their families and the Temple. Jesus gifted them whole life restoration.



day four

When you’ve done everything expected of you, be matter-of-fact and say, ‘The work is done. What we were told to do, we did.’

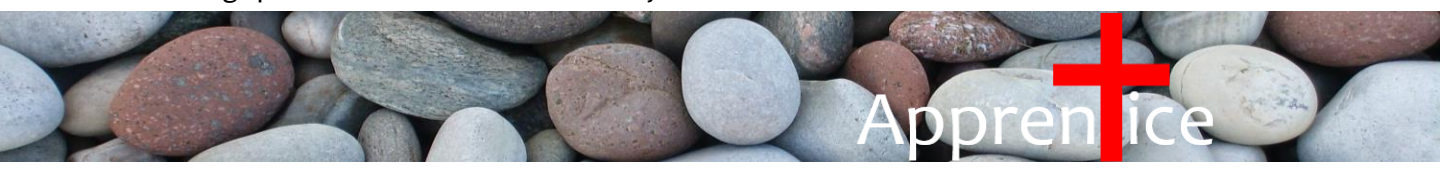
Discipleship is the business of faith. It is not something we can postpone or avoid, or something special we do when we feel ready.



day seven

One of them, when he realised that he was healed,... kneeled at Jesus’ feet, so grateful.

May this response be echoed in our lives today. May we overflow with gratitude as God draws us into relationship with Him and with each other in community as we are forgiven and healed.



for the group

as you gather...

As you reflect together on this week:

- What conflict have you experienced and how has it changed your relationships.
- How might you build the language and grace to challenge each other in a way which rebuilds relationships?
- How can we prevent the natural doubts and insecurities we all have from stopping us following God's call on our lives?
- What healing have you experienced and how can you express gratitude to God.

prayer for the group

Lord, help us to grow together.

Help us to be honest and gracious in our dealings with each other
and in our discipleship.

Thank you for the healing you have given us
through past conflicts and disagreements.

Help us to know your forgiveness more
and to share your love and mercy with all people.

Amen.



continue the conversation
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Apprentice

The coming of the Kingdom

Luke 17:20-37

thought for the week

Kingdom is an uncomfortable word, not least because of its gender associations. It is more common these days for the word to be replaced with 'sovereignty', meaning supreme power or authority. One meaning of the word kingdom though is, 'the domain over which the spiritual sovereignty of God or Christ extends, whether in heaven or on earth' may be helpful. This understanding makes it encompassing rather than simply internal or personal. Brian McLaren writes, *'The Kingdom of God.. is a revolutionary, counter-cultural movement-proclaiming a ceaseless rebellion against the tyrannical trinity of money, sex, and power.'* The coming of the Kingdom then is not simply about the change in individual believers, but about the shift that happens when those who call God sovereign make by surrendering their whole lives, their relationships, their endeavours, their politics to God's purpose.

"If we only had eyes to see and ears to hear and wits to understand, we would know that the Kingdom of God in the sense of holiness, goodness, beauty is as close as breathing and is crying out to born both within ourselves and within the world. We glimpse it at those moments when we find ourselves being better than we are and wiser than we know. We catch sight of it when at some moment of crisis a strength seems to come to us that is greater than our own strength. The Kingdom of God is where we belong. It is home, and whether we realize it or not, I think we are all of us homesick for it." Frederick Buechner

verse for the week

'Whoever tries to keep their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life will preserve it.'
Luke 17 verse 33

image for the week




prayer for the week

God, I want to build your kingdom and not my own.
 Father, I confess that I let fear control me and determine how I spend my time, money, and energy. I am afraid of trouble. I am afraid of hardship. I am afraid of persecution.
 All of this causes me to be self-protective and to build my own kingdom.
 Jesus, help me to have the peace you have promised.
 Help me to no longer be afraid, knowing you have overcome the world.
 Enable me to step out in faith, not fear.

Rachel Baxter

reflection for each day



day one

The coming of the kingdom of God is not something that can be observed

Don't look for external signs for the coming of the Kingdom. How is my heart being changed right now and how is that changing the way you live?



day two

'The kingdom of God is in your midst'

Recognise and acknowledge God in the 'here and now', not just the past and the future. What could that mean for you in your daily life?



day five

'On that day no one who is on the housetop, with possessions inside, should go down to get them'


What would you have a hard time letting go of?



day three

'People will tell you, "There he is!" or "Here he is!" Do not go running off after them.'

Too often we chase after people we think have got the 'answer', the charismatic speaker, the powerful leader, the wise teacher, etc. What would it mean to trust in God alone?



day six

'Whoever tries to keep their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life will preserve it.'

This is a difficult verse. Many have given their lives for God! Can you understand that willingness?



day four

'People were eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building.'

How can you make new space in the busyness of life for God?



day seven

"Where there is a dead body, there the vultures will gather."

Jesus quotes the book of Job. The dead body gives life to many and this gathering would be obvious for miles around. Jesus seems to be saying that where there is real spiritual life that is obvious and brings new life, there is the Kingdom. Where do you see life springing forth?

for the group

as you gather...

As you reflect on this week:

- What made you feel most uncomfortable in this passage?
- What might living the Kingdom into being mean for you and as a group?
- What would be the hardest things to surrender to God?
- How would you identify real spiritual life?
- What change would the Kingdom of God make in your community/society?

prayer for the group

*Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial
and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours
now and for ever.
Amen.*



continue the conversation
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Apprentice

Prayer and the Kingdom

Luke 18:1-30

thought for the week

Archbishop Desmond Tutu was asked whether he found it hard to find time to pray with such a busy schedule. He replied, "I am far too busy to pray for anything less than two hours a day." Sometimes we fall into the trap of thinking prayer is an activity we need to do to sustain our discipleship. Communication is not something we do to make sure a relationship works, it is the relationship itself. Prayer in all its forms is the essence of our relationship with God, it is the breathing in and out that gives life to all aspects of our discipleship. There is much we can learn from the religious communities about the meaning and necessity of a rhythm of prayer and from the spiritual practices they have developed over centuries. In these communities it is the rhythm of prayer which defines them and underpins everything else, community, mission, hospitality, etc. What if instead of praying when we need to, we simply pray?

'Try to keep your soul always in peace and quiet, always ready for whatever our lord may wish to work in you. it is certainly a higher virtue of the soul, and a greater grace, to be able to enjoy the Lord in different times and different places than in only one.' Ignatius of Loyola

verse for the week

'Jesus replied, 'What is impossible with man is possible with God.'

Luke 18 verse 27

image for the week




prayer for the week

*Under a leaf, in a snowflake
In a blade of grass, in a raindrop
All parts of nature
In your parents' loving embrace
In the phone call from your grandparents
All family relationships
In working and sharing with others
In helping the unfortunate
All volunteering jobs
Where are you able to find God?
Lord, help me to find you in all ways and
walks of life. **Amen.***

Jared Kiley.

St. Xavier High School, Cincinnati, Ohio

reflection for each day



day one

'And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off?'

For whom do we cry out for justice?



day two

'I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?'

If crying out for justice to God doesn't demonstrate faith in itself, what does faith look like?



day three

'Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector.'

Is there such a thing as right prayer or wrong prayer?



day four

'For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.'

Humbling oneself seems a very counter-cultural thing to do in a culture where fame has become an objective in itself. What might it mean in a real, practical sense to humble yourself?



day five

'Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.'

Think carefully about what it means to receive the kingdom of God like a child. Are we willing to be so vulnerable?



day six

'You still lack one thing. Sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.'

Why do you think Jesus, uses the word 'lacking', what was the man lacking? What might we lack?



day seven

'no one who has left home or wife or brothers or sisters or parents or children for the sake of the kingdom of God will fail to receive many times as much in this age, and in the age to come eternal life.'

This is a hard verse, one which we regularly pass over. Do you find this a challenge, or a reassurance? Why?

for the group

as you gather...

- As a group spend time in silence praying the Jesus Prayer.
<http://www.orthodoxprayer.org/Jesus%20Prayer.html>

'The Jesus Prayer involves three stages of progress in its practice. You begin praying the Jesus Prayer by repeating the words of the prayer out loud or at least moving the lips. This is called verbal prayer. After some time saying of the Jesus Prayer becomes silent or mental and it is repeated only in the mind. This is mental prayer. Finally, the Jesus Prayer becomes a continuous prayer in the heart, the inner core of our being. We begin with vocal prayer and do not force the move to mental prayer. This will happen naturally when you are ready.'

This will not be easy but try to spend 15 minutes praying the Jesus Prayer.

- Share your own experiences of prayer/spiritual practices.

prayer for the group

"Lord Jesus Christ Son of God, have mercy on me a sinner."



continue the conversation
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Apprentice

The Journey to Jerusalem

Luke 18:31-19:27

thought for the week

Do we trust Jesus' judgement, the disciples often struggled to? These three stories that take place on the road to Jerusalem have a common theme of risk. Perhaps they are there to shed some light on the 'hidden meaning' of Jesus' prediction. In the two stories and the parable, a risk is taken for the sake of a greater good. In the first, Jesus brushes away those who try to silence the blind man. Perhaps they think that the man is not worthy of Jesus' time, perhaps they see him as a distraction to Jesus' purpose that day? In the second story, Jesus takes time to eat and talk with a man who was hated. The Tax collector was seen to be an agent of the occupying powers, a man made rich on the oppression of the people, yet Jesus makes time for him. In the first story, the man is healed and becomes a witness to Jesus' divinity. In the second, Zacchaeus commits to give half of his wealth and four times what he has gained through cheating the system. In the parable, the servant who risks most is given most and the one who hid away what he was given is punished. Perhaps in these stories we get a glimpse of what the disciples could not see, that Jesus death was a great risk, it was a giving up not only of life, but of rightful power and authority. Jesus knew it would not be an end, but a beginning of something greater.

verse for the week

Jesus took the Twelve aside and told them, 'We are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written by the prophets about the Son of Man will be fulfilled.'

Luke 18 verse 31

image for the week



prayer for the week

Shall I abandon, O King of mysteries, the soft comforts of home? Shall I turn my back on my native land, and turn my face towards the sea?

Shall I put myself wholly at your mercy, without silver, without a horse, without fame, without honour? Shall I throw myself wholly upon You, without sword and shield, without food and drink, without a bed to lie on? Shall I say farewell to my beautiful land, placing myself under Your yoke?

Shall I pour out my heart to You, confessing my manifold sins and begging forgiveness, tears streaming down my cheeks? Shall I leave the prints of my knees on the sandy beach, a record of my final prayer in my native land?

Shall I then suffer every kind of wound that the sea can inflict? Shall I take my tiny boat across the wide sparkling ocean? O King of the Glorious Heaven, shall I go of my own choice upon the sea?

O Christ, will You help me on the wild waves?

The Prayer of St Brendon the Navigator

reflection for each day



day one

The disciples did not understand any of this. Its meaning was hidden from them, and they did not know what he was talking about.

The disciples really didn't get it, yet they continued walking with Jesus toward Jerusalem. Are we hindered by an unwillingness to trust God's purpose without understanding it?



day two

Those who led the way rebuked him and told him to be quiet, but he shouted all the more, 'Son of David, have mercy on me!'

Who have we denied access to Jesus? Who in your life have you brushed away because you are too focused on your own path, or because they are too uncomfortable for you?



day five

But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, 'Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount.'

Does the Gospel provoke you to go beyond what sounds practical or reasonable? Think seriously about what might this mean for you?



day three

'Son of David, have mercy on me!'

Spend time in silence praying the Jesus Prayer - "Lord Jesus Christ Son of God, have mercy on me a sinner."



day six

'Put this money to work,' he said, 'until I come back.'

What have you been entrusted with? How might you take risks with what you have been given?



day four

All the people saw this and began to mutter, 'He has gone to be the guest of a sinner.'

We often talk about hospitality and mission, but more often than not we assume we are the hosts. What would it mean to be a guest? Who might you go and eat/spend time with, who perhaps others would turn their noses up at?



day seven

He replied, 'I tell you that to everyone who has, more will be given, but as for the one who has nothing, even what they have will be taken away.'

Jesus' words sound very harsh, even unfair. What do you think they mean? What does it mean for your gifts and talents?

for the group

as you gather...

- The gifts and talents you have all been given. How are you putting them into action?
- We live in a risk averse culture, we don't want to lose the things we have. What does taking great risks feel like to you?
- How can you support each other in recognising gifts and surrendering them to God's purpose?
- What do you understand our part in the coming of the Kingdom of God?
- What could that look like locally?

prayer for the group

*Holy One
Who has given us the breath of life
Today we remember to
Breathe deeply
To rest
To take in
To pause
Before we act...
And then to take in another deep breath poised on the edge
And risk jumping in
Risk taking action
Risk speaking up
Risk using the gifts we have been given
So that at the end of our life we can say with absolute clarity that
No part of our existence was wasted in fear of failure
Or fear of success.
Hold us, prepare us the way to begin to offer the gift of our
Awakened presence
Full of love and light today.
These and the prayers of our hearts we lift up now
In the silence... Amen.*

Tamara Lebak



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Apprentice