

GROW. PRAY. STUDY

Maple Grove United Methodist Church - Weekly Devotional Guide

March 31, 2019 - With All Your Heart: "Reconciling"

Scripture References: <u>Joshua</u> <u>5:9-12; Psalm 32; 2 Corinthians</u> <u>5:16-21; Luke 15:1-3, 11b-32</u>

Notes from today's sermon:

MONDAY 04.01.19 Luke 12:35-59 (focused on 12:35-40)

Jesus was getting Israel, and the world, and his followers, ready for great events that were still to come. Everything he was doing was about launching a project, the work of God's kingdom. One day that kingdom will come to birth full and fresh, and all that Jesus has been doing will be seen as the necessary groundwork for that new moment. We wish it would hurry up. 'Your kingdom come...' But Jesus says, 'you need to learn to wait. You need to grow up in your trust of God. Learning to wait is part of the deal.' 'Lord,' we say, 'give us strength and patience – but please hurry up anyway!' 'No,' he says again, 'you've got to be like servants prepared to wait through until the small hours. What matters is that when God does what God is going to do, you're ready.' • Lord, give us patience, and the courage to wait and watch and be ready to join you at work when we are called to help build your kingdom on earth as it is in heaven.

TUESDAY 04.02.19 Luke 13 (focused on 13:22-30)

These stern warnings should send us back to our prayers, back to our knees, back to humility and trust. We cannot presume. We dare not. Jesus tells them that there will come a time when the people who thought they were 'automatically' part of God's people will find they're outside, while plenty who never imagined they'd have anything to do with the family of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob will be inside. The shocking warning to the insiders is matched by the surprising grace toward the outsiders. That puts the pressure on those of us who might assume that we are the 'right' ones: to recognize, both in how we pray and what we pray, that everything we have, everything we are, is a gift from God, and that neither we nor anybody else deserve it. Prayer like that will be humble. It will also be a sigh of relief. We don't have anything to prove or earn.

• Thank you, Father, for your generous love. Help me, today and every day, to trust in you, not in myself.

WEDNESDAY 04.03.19 Luke 14 (focused on 14:25-33)

This is another time when you may want to put your hands over your ears, as Jesus says some of the harshest things you've heard from him yet. But Jesus was announcing God's new way of running things. He was telling God's people that everything up to now had been preparation, but he was starting the real thing. And the hardest task for someone doing that is to persuade people to give up the preparatory stages they've become so comfortable with. God's people are being redefined, and the identity markers of family and possessions won't matter any more. Jesus' challenge, then, comes to all of us at the point where we are tempted to settle down and be comfortable with the way things are. Instead, we need to think through, and pray through, what it's going to mean to be a follower, a learner, a disciple.

Ignatius Loyola, the founder of the Jesuit order, used to pray this prayer: Lord, teach me to be generous, teach me to serve as you deserve: to give and not count the cost, to fight and not to heed the wounds, to toil and not to seek for rest, to labor and to ask for no reward, save that of knowing that I do your will.
Talk to God about how that prayer makes you feel and what it makes you think.

40 DAYS OF LENT

Before Jesus ventures out to preach in the synagogues of Judea, he departs to a desolated place. Jesus retreats in order to advance his ministry. These 40 days offer us the opportunity to do likewise. As we seek to discern how and where God is calling us to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ, we are invited to find a place without distraction, where we can notice our thoughts, name our fears and listen for a holy word of guidance that is no doubt very near.

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What am I being challenged to <u>give</u> <u>up or stop doing</u> in order to grow in my relationship with God?

What am I being challenged to <u>start</u> <u>doing or practicing</u> in order to grow in my relationship with God?

Who will I ask to hold me accountable for these 40 days?

Prayer Concerns

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THURSDAY 04.04.19 Luke 15 (focused on 15:4-10)

This is one of the stories in Jesus' set of this-is-why-we're-having-a-party stories. But, like most of Jesus' stories, this one connects with what goes on in people's heads when they respond to him. So many of us secretly assume that there must be something special about his person, or that one, that makes Jesus go looking for them. Others, with low self-esteem, always assume that it's the other people who are the special ones, and that they're somewhere in the back of the flock, unnoticed and unimportant. But the point it that every single sheep is important to the shepherd, and when any one of them gets into difficulties he is especially concerned for them. That is the truth that's so hard to learn, both for those with self-confidence and for those without it. By welcoming Jesus, we are inviting him to do in our moral and spiritual lives what he did for so many people physically.

• Lord, help us to celebrate your welcoming love, and to be transformed by it.

FRIDAY 04.05.19 Luke 16 (focused on 16:1-12)

Jesus' first hearers of this story would have understood that a story about a landowner and his steward, or manager, was almost certainly a story about God and Israel, And, granted what Jesus had been saving about needing to sit loose to the traditional Jewish attachments to family and land, this would make a whole lot of sense. The nation of Israel, as a nation, is going to find that God's purpose is moving ahead in a new direction, as always intended; but if they have been faithless to that overall intention, as Jesus is constantly warning that they have been, then they cannot presume that they will be God's 'steward' for ever and ever. This story also illustrates the murky world you get into when you start playing around with money and property. Do one shady deal and others will follow as a way of hushing things up, and before you know what's happened, you're in over your head and can't get out. That's the point at which, after the parable. Jesus turns to serious warnings. These are things we need to take very, very seriously. But how? Jesus has some questions for every generation, for each of his followers; questions about priorities, about people poorer than you. How are you going to listen to those questions, and answer them truthfully?

• Take a walk (in your imagination) to your bank. Take Jesus with you. Chat to him, on the way, about how much money comes in, how big your overdraft is, which loans you hope to pay off, and all that. Then, when you get to the bank, sit down in a private room with your manager, with Jesus beside you. Get the full bank statements from last year. Talk through them with Jesus. Are there points you're tempted to gloss over, or bits you wish had been deleted in advance?

• Lord Jesus, make me faithful in little things and great things, so that I may be faithful to your gift to me also.

SATURDAY 04.06.19 John 12:1-8

As we approach Passion Sunday, we switch to John's gospel to help us get your hearts and minds ready for the tumultuous, awe-inspiring events that are about to unfold. John describes the intimate scene when Mary of Bethany anoints Jesus' feet with a very expensive perfume, and wipes them with her hair. Judas, watching this scene, is more than a little annoyed. His impatience grows the closer they get to Jerusalem because if God is ever going to act to free his people then Passover would be the obvious time to do it... so why is Jesus allowing this woman to waste perfume so good that it must have cost a year's wages? Doesn't she know there are poor people around here who could live on that money? Doesn't she realize we're all poor anyway and some of us could use a bit of a bonus after all we've been through? And you suddenly realize, as you watch this scene from Judas' point of view, that Mary has seen something that Judas hasn't. And learning to see *that* is what living with Jesus and his story is all about.

• Lord, help me to be humble enough to see what you are seeing, even when all my instincts are telling me the opposite. Help me, particularly, to understand what your death was all about.