



The Evangelical Covenant Church of Canada

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LENTEN READER 2018

A COMPILATION OF REFLECTIONS ON SCRIPTURE
FOR THE SEASON OF LENT FROM MEMBERS OF THE
EVANGELICAL COVENANT CHURCH OF CANADA



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Editors: Julia Sandstrom & Hanne Johnson

A Brief Introduction to Lent

My dad is a master toy maker. He has made chickens, grasshoppers, ducks, bulldozers, dump trucks, ferry boats, cars, trains, and more for his grandkids. He is currently adding train cars to our family's collection. My sister and I each get a set of toys for our kids, but each new grandchild's first toy is for them specifically. It's the first in the collection and it's my favourite treasure: the baby rattle.

Due to a long distance move and shoulder surgery, my daughter didn't receive her rattle until this last month at nearly 10 months old. It was worth the wait though, because for the first time I got to watch my dad turn a rattle on his lathe. Purple heart is the best looking wood for toys in my opinion so I requested this for my daughter. As I watched the block of wood begin to turn, my dad applied pressure to the cutting tools and I was instantly nervous. The wood wasn't shaving away like I thought it would, it was splintering and when he stopped the lathe, chunks had come away. Apparently, purple heart is not the easiest wood to turn. He kept at it though and I was mesmerized at how the rough wood started to smooth.

He added pressure carefully, moving the tool across the surface of the soon to be rattle and a form took shape. I was struck at how gnarly it looked at first and how much initially came away. The next phase took the longest. Sanding with increasingly finer and finer sand paper, my dad smoothed the wood from rough to smooth, to smoother, to "I don't think it gets smoother than that." The final phase was my favourite to witness. He burnished the wood by turning the rattle rapidly on the lathe while holding the sawdust in his hand against the rattle. The scraps refined the remaining, finished piece. Lastly he added mineral oil which deepened the colour and made the wood almost shine.

While he turned the rattle, I reflected on how the life of a disciple was similar to that piece of wood. We all start off rough. When we first come to faith, God strips away big chunks of our old life, but over time the refining becomes subtler. It takes ever-finer attunement to living like Jesus. Each time my dad reached for another piece of sand paper I thought, "Seriously! You are going to sand it more. This is taking forever!" Discipleship can be like that. I sometimes say to God, "Seriously! Didn't I already conquer that sin in my life enough? You want to do more work on me in this area—didn't we do enough there already!"

Lent is the sandpaper season of discipleship. Whether you give something up, or take something on during this season, allow God to use it to refine you. I love that the Church year provides us this annual season to put ourselves at the mercy of the Master Craftsman and allow Him to work on us just a bit more. The good news is it is His work, you simply allow Him to apply the tools.



Martin Eisbrenner
Strathmore, AB

Easter Sunday

April 1

Luke 24

He is Risen!
He is Risen Indeed!
Alleluia!

This year we are working our way through the Gospel According to Luke. We begin at the start of Jesus' ministry and follow Him to the cross. There is one devotional for each day of Lent. There are no entries on Sundays as Sundays are not included in the forty days of Lent. Instead there are works of art to help you meditate and pray. Contributions for the Lenten Reader come from all over the Evangelical Covenant Church of Canada and guest contributors from affiliated ministries. We have included artwork from ECCC artists this year and we are grateful for those who submitted pieces. Thank you to all who wrote devotionals and shared what Jesus was teaching you through the text. I am also grateful to Hanne Johnson for her assistance in editing and compiling the reader.

May you be shaped to be more like Jesus this Lenten Season.

Julia Sandstrom
Editor

First Day of Lent
Ash Wednesday

February 14

Luke 3:1-21

On this, the first day of the Lenten season, I call us to repentance. Repentance—that place where God meets the human heart in Jesus. Repentance—that place where the Spirit invites us to join God’s complete work of salvation in our everyday life. Fittingly, our text for reading and prayer today deals with John the Baptist, whose message was a “baptism of *repentance* for the forgiveness of sins” (3:3).

Let us consider two anchoring phrases that guide us toward a beautiful and freeing repentance that is offered to us by God through Lent. The first phrase is actually Isaiah’s phrase: “Prepare the way for the Lord” (3:4). This speaks of the God movement in repentance. God moves first. For us to repent, it requires that God come to us even before we invite Him or know He is on the way. We do not know of our need for life change unless the mercy of God meets us, shows us that need, and the means of change provided through Jesus. The baptizer was God’s messenger; he was speaking on God’s behalf. To hear the call and to receive repentance is to hear the voice of God. So, my fellow repenters in this Lenten season, know that whenever you hear the call toward repentance, you are hearing the tender voice of God.

The anchoring second phrase is the description of John’s audience: that they were “waiting expectantly” (3:15). If the first phrase spoke of God’s movement toward us in repentance, then this phrase speaks of our movement in repentance. When received properly, repentance is something we eagerly accept, not begrudgingly nor with resistance. John’s words were not easy to hear; they called for difficult sacrifices (3:10-14). However, people recognized the voice of God in John’s words even though heeding those words would cost them money, power, prestige and influence. It is the kindness of God that leads us to repentance.

Grant me, merciful Father, the opportunity to hear your voice calling me to repentance.

Come to me, Jesus Christ, so that together we can live a good life.

Enliven me, Holy Spirit, to wait expectantly for your timing.

Amen.

Phil Adkins
Bowen Island, BC

Fortieth Day of Lent
Holy Saturday

March 31

Luke 23:50-56

“The women who had come with Jesus...” (v. 55)

The women.

Four women. A grandmother. A mother. A wife. A friend.

A grandmother. Her name was Grace and she embodied her name. All grace from her. She loved me unconditionally, prayed for me, and told me about Jesus. All grace, good news from beginning to end.

A mother. Her name was Harriet. She was Grace’s daughter. With her it was sacrifice. She was the embodiment of sacrificial love. My father died when I was eleven. But Mom was always there. My needs before her needs. My life before her life.

A wife. Valerie is her name. She embodies strength and hope. Always. Forty-two years. Seven moves. Four sons. Good times and hard times. Joys and sorrow. Always strength. Always hope. Now, as I struggle with cancer and challenges in ministry, I borrow strength, borrow hope from her.

A friend and colleague. Debbie is a woman of courage and character. She teaches me to listen, to hear people’s stories, to welcome the other into my life. Her life is the embodiment of compassion, reconciliation and justice.

The women. Four women who have shown me Jesus. Grace and Harriet and Valerie and Debbie. Praise God from whom all blessings flow.

Richard Lucco
Covenant Offices

Thirty-Ninth Day of Lent
Good Friday

March 30

Luke 23:26-49

I'm not sure He knew He was going to die.

Not like this. Not in the grip of swirling dust and noonday sun. With the cries of His friends and family all around Him. On the efficient timeline of the empire's cross.

The gospel writers certainly thought that Christ was self-aware and knew the time was coming. His face 'being set' toward Jerusalem. His teachings on the need for a seed to fall into the ground and die.

But if He was human at all this is hardly a revelation or insight, right?! Like us, for Jesus it was just a question of when...not if.

On that Good Friday morning it would have become clear though, as judgement was passed and scourging meted out and a cross beam hand-selected for Him to bear. In those moments Jesus encountered death as we all do: unavoidable.

What is so curious for me in this reading of the text is how, in those final scenes of Christ's life, a host of other characters found themselves caught up in the story. And much like Jesus', we might assume that their Friday unfolded differently than they anticipated or desired.

Simon got man-handled by soldiers and told to carry a cross. Women who had found dignity and welcome in Christ's presence saw their hope fading with every step. Two criminals met their end, long-in-coming by feared nonetheless. Soldiers mocked, only to discover that they'd killed a holy man.

And in their stories we should see ourselves. In the moments of our lives where unexpected tragedy struck. When we came to the end of ourselves. When we failed to meet expectations. When we were swept into darkness. And fear.
And death.

Good Friday's coming might not feel like comfort, but what it brings is the affirmation that in all death's unexpected forms and comings...we are not alone. Christ knows that road, and there He holds us.

This is our hope.

Scott Wall
Calgary, AB

Second Day of Lent

February 15

Luke 4:1-13

When Jesus was tempted by Satan in the wilderness, He had just been baptised and filled with the Holy Spirit at the beginning of His ministry. However, being human, He was also famished as He had been in the wilderness for 40 days without eating.

The tempter capitalized on this moment when Christ was physically weak. Remember, had Jesus succumbed to any sin He would no longer have remained the blameless Lamb of God. His mission would have been nullified before it even began.

The temptations thrown at Jesus were not obvious or shocking sins. What could be so wrong, one might ask, with turning stones to bread to feed oneself in the wilderness? When a body is ravaged by hunger it would be easy for the mind crumble—to forget the big picture and all reason.

Nevertheless, Jesus' response to the seductions tells us much about His relationship with His Father. With each of the three temptations, Jesus replied with Scripture. Even when Satan abused a quote from the Psalms to sweeten the temptation, Christ rejected these wiles with another passage from the Old Testament. God's Word was so tightly bound to His heart and mind that, even in a mighty test, Jesus had Scripture at the ready.

At the end of this telling in Luke we read:

Now when the devil had ended every temptation, he departed from Him until an opportune time. (vs. 13, NKJ)

We are not told of a specific instance in which this happens. We do know that Satan entered Judas as the man on his way to deliver Jesus over to those who would have Him crucified. This apex moment of Christ's ministry was excruciating—He prayed that the cup be removed. However, He ultimately knew and carried out the Father's will.

In these cases, Jesus was vulnerable. His body and mind were struggling, as ours often do as well. Yet, through constant communion with His Father, He found the will to do the work He was sent to accomplish.

Kirsten Mitchell
Erickson, BC

Luke 4:14-30

In the movie, *A Few Good Men*, Col. Nathan Jessup (Jack Nicholson) forcefully shouts at the prosecuting attorney, "You can't handle the truth!" How about you? I know for me, the truth stings when it contains evidence convicting me of a personal flaw, a shortcoming, or (can I handle this truth?) sin. Frankly, I don't appreciate someone pointing a finger at me, whether friend or foe. It's easier to simply dismiss or denigrate a truth-teller as a liar and irrelevant to my life. It hurts too much to face it.

The truth hurt in Jesus' day too. In this passage we learn Jesus was already experiencing a fruitful ministry in His home region of Galilee and then returns to His hometown of Nazareth. Initially the response was one of good vibes, "*All who were there spoke well of him and were amazed by the gracious words that fell from his lips*" (v 22 NLT). At this point I want to tell Him: "Wow. Leave it there, Jesus. Step away from the pulpit and enjoy!"

But that isn't Jesus' way or purpose. He knew the listeners in Nazareth harboured a deep scepticism and resentment in their hearts. They wanted Jesus to prove himself, prove His lineage and even prove His loyalty to His home by performing the same miracles right here, right now. Jesus confronted that arrogance by saying, "*But the truth is, no prophet is accepted in his own hometown*" (v 24 NLT). There it is—the truth. But what did Jesus mean?

As Jesus confronted those listeners in the synagogue He confronts us with the truth even when we can't see it and especially when we don't want to hear it. I recognize this pattern of His truth telling in my life, whether it is through a parable that reveals my hard heart, shaped more like a resentful older brother's or in a passage that commands the impossible like loving my enemies.

Jesus also reveals a more complete truth if I keep listening. The truth is that He loves me. The Father in heaven loves me. There is life which is truly life is mine if I turn to Him. May I be immersed in the completeness of THAT truth: a truth that is hard to hear (that I am a sinner), and a truth that is sometimes harder to accept (that I am a forgiven child of God).

Arden Gustafson
Norquay, SK

Luke 22:7-23

Then came the day . . . Our Lenten season nears completion. Wherever we have journeyed, whatever given up or taken on, however the Spirit has worked within us to bring us here, the day of Christ's passion is upon us. The Passover, arching back to God's ancient triumph, is about to be recast in Jesus, our ultimate Passover lamb.

It would be a Passover like no other, forever marking final deliverance, and Jesus wanted this special meal to be just right. Preparations are important, featuring large in Luke's story. Orders given, disciples sent, a place arranged, with hearth and provision, for this one, last meal.

Our Lenten preparations have also been leading to this moment, too. Care has been taken. Arrangements have been made, not on a whim but divinely orchestrated by our Master. Reflect back: How have you been led through Lent to this communion, when Jesus would offer you himself, in the bread, in the wine, as our Passover Lamb?

When the hour came . . . Jesus knew, as no one else, the finality of this Passover meal. Israel commemorated this historical day, but its significance was about to shift irrevocably. "I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer," Jesus announced, declaring that He would neither eat nor drink of it again "until the kingdom of God comes." And in unforgettable words lodged deep in the core of all Christian worship, Jesus realizes His eager desire at this meal, at this hour, with these friends, in the presence of those who love him and one who would betray him. All the preparations to fulfill Jesus' one desire for fellowship before suffering. And why is that? Because this last communion foreshadowed our lasting fellowship, which His suffering was about ensure for us.

The day has come, and the hour, too. Will you sit with Jesus at the table today? He's prepared it all for us. Here, on Holy Thursday before Good Friday, Jesus eagerly desires to meet and eat with us, to look into our eyes and say, "This is my body for you . . . this cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you." Everything that's coming next--the betrayal, the darkness, the horror, the silence--would secure our fellowship with Him forever. But for today, will you join Him at the table? Will you eat, drink, and receive His communion, even as we plunge into the following darkness?

Tom Greentree
Erickson, BC

Luke 22:1-6

What can we possibly learn from this short, dark tale of Judas selling out Jesus? There is the danger that we become distracted trying to sort out why Judas would do this. How could someone so close to Jesus, someone who had seen and heard such incredible things, betray him?

But here the question *Why?* is less important than the question *Who?* We can't pass by Luke's identification of Judas as "one of the Twelve" without reflection. We know very well that Judas was one of the twelve disciples, so we tend to gloss over that phrase, but it's important enough that Luke repeats it later in the chapter. Judas was "one of the Twelve." He was one of Jesus' closest companions. As followers of Jesus, we might have called him one of *us*.

Our tendency is to separate good from evil along lines of power and wealth. Even in this passage we may have already done this—the chief priests and the teachers of the law on the evil side, "the people," who these leaders fear, on the good side. But I don't know where to place Judas. We already know him as one of the villains of this story and we want to lump him in with the evil powers with whom he colludes. Yet in every other respect he appears to be one of "the people" living in subjection to the powers and, again, he is "one of the Twelve."

Alexander Solzhenitsyn famously said, "the line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being." The distinction between the villains and the heroes, the oppressors and the victims, isn't always so clear—it's not something "out there" that we can identify; it's something in each one of us that we must work out.

The real scandal of this story is not that Judas would betray *Jesus*. There were plenty of people who would have happily done so. The scandal is that *Judas* betrayed Jesus. The betrayal came from one who seemed to be so close to Jesus, someone who had seen and heard it all.

It unnerves me to think about it. Betrayal—selling out Jesus—is always within my reach, even as one who tries to follow Him closely. The *Who?* in this passage could very well be me.

Lord, have mercy. How have I betrayed you, Jesus?

Marc Vandersluys
Wetaskiwin, AB

Luke 5:1-11

It chafes my teacher-heart just a bit that Luke chooses to leave out of today's text any details about what Jesus was teaching the crowds from Simon's fishing boat that fine day. I want a window on His words of instruction, His divine directives, His voice of authority. Instead of hearing them directly, I'm given the opportunity to receive them through the experience unfolding on the waters of Lake Gennesaret, through an intimate and powerful encounter between Jesus and Simon.

For isn't that the way of Jesus? To desire encounter and experience with us? To come to us in the grittiness of our everyday lives?

That's certainly how it is for Simon. He has just endured a futile and frustrating night at work, with absolutely no fish to show for his efforts. He's busy cleaning his nets, probably looking forward to getting off that shore. Just when he's dreaming of the breakfast he's going to enjoy before resting his weary body, Jesus calls and Simon responds. Jesus comes to Simon in the middle of his ordinary daily grind and Simon responds with openness to the encounter. He responds with trust. He responds with action.

As Jesus catches Simon by surprise in a net-ripping catch of fish, Simon is awakened. His eyes are opened to Jesus' identity, to His divine power. His eyes are opened to his own unworthiness, his sinfulness. He is awakened to his own fear. Jesus isn't interested in his cringing deprecation. He desires more encounter with him, more experience together, more life lived with Jesus' kingdom purposes in mind.

What do we learn from our observation of this first century day on the lake? We learn that Jesus is not even remotely put off by smelly fishing boats, frustrating or unfruitful past experiences, our unworthiness. We learn that allowing Jesus to come to us as He desires is crucial, that our trust in and acknowledgement of who he is and who we are become clearer as we do life together with Him.

I've heard the expression, "More things are caught than taught." May we be people who are increasingly caught by the Presence and Power of Jesus in our own experience and who from that place of encounter become part of God's bigger story of bringing all people to life in Jesus.

Deb Arndt
Saskatoon, SK

 Luke 21:20-38



Fame
 Julia Sandstrom
 Winnipeg, MB

If you are a student of theology you will know that this passage has a few main interpretations. Some place the fulfilment in the past and conclude it is speaking of the destruction of Jerusalem and the enthronement of Jesus over His kingdom after His resurrection. Others place the fulfillment as partly in the past and partly in the future. Others see this as entirely future.

However you see this passage, we are all to “be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness and the anxieties of life” (v.34).

The anxieties of life take our focus off Jesus and puts it on our problems. Anxiety often starts as a trickling stream but becomes a rushing river that pushes God and His power out of our thinking. Mark 4:19 says, “the worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth and the desires for other things come in and choke the word, making it unfruitful.”

We are commanded to keep our thoughts fixed on Him (Col. 3:2; Is. 26:3). We must do this until the rushing river of anxious thoughts in our mind becomes kingdom. We cannot afford to have a thought in our mind that God does not think about our situation.

May your heart not be “weighed down” (v.34). Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness (Matt 6:33). Remember: “The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 4:5-7).

For reflection: What anxieties of life are overwhelming you today? Take a moment to cast your cares upon God (1 Pt. 5:7). What does God think about your situation? What truth does God want you to hold onto? Allow this truth to fill your mind instead of your anxiety. Take captive every thought to make it obedient to Jesus (2 Cor. 10:5).

Luke 21:1-19

Earlier this year, one January morning in the midst of our annual pilgrimage to Maui, I was thankful to be in contemplation of today's Lenten Scriptures in anticipation of the need to provide this devotional. For in the beauty of the arriving tropical morning came a text message flashing across our handheld devices, "BALLISTIC MISSILE THREAT INBOUND TO HAWAII – SEEK IMMEDIATE SHELTER, THIS IS NOT A DRILL." The stark and alarming text, intended as a warning, was also an invitation into confusion, chaos and panic. My peace in this challenging moment originated in His truth, the ever present and real Word as expressed in today's Luke Scriptures (21:1-19).

Jesus, in ministering to those around Him, reveals, "*But when you hear of wars and commotions, do not be terrified, for these things must come to pass first, but the end will not come immediately.*" It became another lesson in learning to receive and live closer to the Truth, to the Word, to Jesus.

It really is a question of posture, isn't it? Investing one's self in the time to kneel into and focus on Truth. In the quietness of that posture, Truth resonates with a clarity and sharpness which gradually quenches the noise within my soul, the noise of this world, of my emotions, of my sin. From Truth run the waves of grace that give birth to worship, confession, repentance and forgiveness. In time, as reverence becomes the offering, it is "well with my soul" and I experience His peace. I must decrease so that He may increase.

Our passage ends with Jesus encouraging us to take a posture, a posture of "enduring patience" in the face of the world, that we might "possess our souls". Shortly after speaking these words, Jesus entered into the time of betrayal and all that followed afterwards...the violence, trials and crucifixion. Through it all, Jesus is perfect in His posture of enduring patience, always possessing His soul, always resonating as uncompromised Truth lived out; becoming that which allows us to possess our souls until the "Day" comes when He fully receives us unto Himself..."Come Lord Jesus, come"...

Rich Drinovz
Surrey, BC

Luke 5:33-39

"No one tears a patch from an old garment and sews it to a new one. If he does, he will have torn the new garment, and the patch from the new will not match the old." Luke 5:36

I work construction, building residential basements. I would say that I rip or snag my pants at least once a day. I mostly wear a pair of pants until they are no longer pants and then throw them in the trash. There is no need for washing or mending work clothes when you do what I do. So the idea of taking old material and sewing it to my new pants makes little to no sense to me. I would tear my clothes before the new one even got a chance to get wrecked on their own.

The truth is life as a disciple may be a little too much like my pants. We get ripped or snagged everyday by the world around us. I read recently that life is chancy. Somedays are harder than others and we don't always know what the day is going to bring. We start each day new and by the end of some days we are just down right ready for the trash.

Even worse we do it to ourselves, in that we take some old material from the life we lived before we became followers of Christ and we sew it onto our new garments. I say to myself, I can live my life the way I used to and still grow and be a fruitful Christian. However, the truth is that we are made new in Christ and we need to leave that which is old behind. Christ wants the best for us, life full of hope and joy—life that has been made new. We are to be stitched together with the same love and forgiveness that comes from the Father of Jesus, God, Creator of all things.

Lent has the power to force us to reflect on what Christ has done for us. Easter gives us the ability to come clean and be made new.

On Easter morning Peter finds Jesus' work clothes in an empty tomb that—I would bet—did not have any rips or snags in them.

Clayton Nelson
Winnipeg, MB

Luke 6:1-11

As we read this portion of Scripture, we quickly see the deadly legalistic system of the Pharisees. We can imagine that the Pharisees would be very zealous in seeing that the Lord would keep all their regulations. On the first Sabbath account in this passage, Jesus and His followers were passing through some grain fields. They were followed by a delegation of Pharisees. We are led to believe that they are hoping for something to happen that they could use against Jesus. We can picture these Pharisees bombarding Jesus with questions, hoping to trap Him. Some Pharisees may have been counting the steps the Lord was taking since they only allowed a limited amount of travel on the Sabbath. It wasn't long until the Pharisees had the ammunition they needed against the Lord. Maybe oblivious to the rules of the Pharisees, or maybe out of sheer hunger, Jesus' disciples did the unthinkable: they "harvested" on the Sabbath. The challenge is quickly given, 'why are you doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath?'

Jesus then spoke to them about David, asking them "have you never read?"—a slight chide as they were professional students of that law! But let's focus on verse five for a few moments and the magnitude of Jesus' claim: 'The Son of Man is the Lord of the Sabbath'. In using the term 'Son of Man', Jesus is choosing to describe himself in terms of His divine mission. It particularly highlights the humanity and humility of Jesus. He used this name a number of times as He spoke of His coming sufferings and death. In using the term, "Lord of the Sabbath", Jesus claimed to be the Sabbath's Lord in the sense that He was the fulfillment of all the Sabbath foreshadowed (Col 2:16-17). Further, Jesus was greater than the Sabbath and therefore was able to set it aside. On a broader scale, Jesus was not only claiming the right to set aside the Sabbath, but to set aside the whole law.

So as we use this time to prepare our hearts and minds to look to the cross and the empty grave, let us remember this Son of Man, who IS the Lord of the Sabbath. This God/man who humbly and willingly took the law upon Him and in doing so offers us the rest and peace that our lives so desperately need.

Laura Dyck
Melfort, SK



Collaboration
Karen Stein, Greeley, CO
Julia Sandstrom, Winnipeg, MB

Luke 20:27-40

In the middle of Luke 20, where Jesus' authority has been questioned by the chief priests and teachers of the law, the Sadducees come to Jesus with their question: "Now then, at the resurrection whose wife will she be, since all seven brothers were married to her?"

This issue is important to them. It is at the heart of their belief system, which declares that there is no resurrection. They too, are seeking to trap Jesus, or at the very least, to validate their beliefs so that they can feel "righteous", "superior". The Living God is before them, but they are so blinded by their desire to be right, that they miss it; they miss HIM. They miss that they are standing in the presence of God himself and plow ahead with their narrow agenda.

How often do we do this? How often do we get stuck on the merry-go-round of tradition or the band wagon of "this is how we've always done it", clinging to our safe, neat, "correct" beliefs, unwilling to see beyond our comfortable little boxes? How often do we miss God's fresh, "for today", life-giving, personal word, because we are focused on doing what we have always done and thinking what we have always thought? How often do we ignore Jesus' touch, his voice, his fingerprints, the miracle of the moment in our efforts to control our lives and the people around us?

What if God is standing in front of us with arms wide open, calling us to think in a new way, to see our small part of the world with a kind of open-eyed wonder rather than assuming we've got it all figured out? What if God is inviting us to step out of the confines of our limited perspective, releasing our preconceived ideas and restrictive expectations and step into the wide open spaces of His Kingdom, embracing love, humility, mercy, kindness, compassion, openness, and honesty?

Jesus compassionately answers the Sadducees question, but he also re-directed them to what is most important. He is the God of the living, not the dead; He has come to welcome us into the abundant life, the fully alive, open-eyed, wide awake life with Him. He invites us to see Him in all things, all situations, all people...walking in awareness, listening for his voice, extending grace and freedom to those we encounter, and practicing his presence in the middle of the busy, the crazy, the messy, broken places of our life. I want to live like that! I want to see Jesus more clearly, to be attuned to His voice, to extend grace and kindness and forgiveness in the middle of my brokenness! I want to increasingly live the wide awake, fully alive, "with Jesus" life every day.

Impossible without surrender! Inconceivable apart from God's grace and empowering!!

"Oh God, in your goodness, draw us to yourself."

Lori Snoxell
Strathmore, AB

Luke 6:37-49

The first six verses of today's reading speak to me about our shared humanity. These are not simply six verses focused on teaching people not to judge or condemn one another. These are six verses reminding us of the fact that we all fall short. We all have specks or planks in our eyes. We all need to be forgiven. The way we treat others is the way we will be treated. The behaviours, judgment, condemnation, and forgiveness that Jesus talks about in these first six verses can be viewed as an opportunity to really see one another more clearly.

Verses 43 through 45 continue this theme using the image of fruit. We can tell what a person has stored up in the heart by the fruit they produce. In some ways I really love this image, but in others, it makes me really uncomfortable. The concept is wonderful. I get it. It makes perfect sense. However, the reality can be a bit harder to deal with.

My parents have, in their new backyard in Arizona, a huge orange tree. I mean huge! But it is really bizarrely shaped. The first time I went out to look at it I was sure it was two trees, because one giant branch has curved all the way down to the ground, creating an arch between the end of the branch and the trunk of the tree. The tree takes up the space of two trees and that means that my parents really don't have a backyard. So, if I were judging this tree on it's beauty, or it's placement, or the ability to give helpful shade for the backyard, or the accuracy of looking like my mental picture of an orange tree, it would fail, miserably! However, that's not what we judge an orange tree on. An orange tree is judged by it's fruit. And by that measure, this tree is phenomenal. I couldn't count the number of oranges on it (or I wasn't willing to spend the time doing it). The tree was full of oranges and the few that were ripe when I was down there in December were delicious. This tree produces good fruit.

I wonder how many times I have used the wrong guidelines, the wrong score sheet, the wrong assumptions, the wrong metrics to consider the value of a person. I'm afraid it's all too often. I wonder how many times other people have used the wrong metrics to measure my value - probably all too often. I want to be recognized by my fruit. I want to be able to recognize others by their fruit. May we all be attentive to the fruit produced by those around us in this Lenten season.

Eric Hedberg
Surrey, BC

Luke 7:18-35

At the time of this account John the Baptist is in prison. The wilderness man now confined to captivity with brief visits from his disciples to hear the news from the outside. I imagine he's frustrated. It seems as though his circumstances have led to a spirit of doubt. He must be wondering why things have turned out this way, wasn't Jesus here to set the captives free? You can almost hear the mixture of doubt, frustration and hopelessness in his question to Jesus in verse 19. "Are you the Messiah we've been expecting, or should we keep looking for someone else?"

When we find ourselves in seasons of doubt, the questions creep in along with frustration, maybe even anger, or fear, what do we do with all of the emotions? When life feels like it has rattled us a bit too much and our faith isn't as strong as it maybe once was, our tendency may be to ignore the questions, push away the doubts, distract ourselves from this uncomfortable place in our relationship with Christ. Yet this account of John shows us the way forward. We see John reaching out right away to Jesus with his fears and doubts. He doesn't beat around the bush; he knows deep down the way through is always to draw nearer to Christ.

I wonder if we are so concerned with getting "this thing" right with Christ that we think He can't handle our doubts and so we decide to self manage. We look to all kinds of other things to find answers when the answer is clearly in Scripture as we see in this chapter in Luke. John knows he can trust Jesus with the deepest places of his heart; his question lays it all out on the table. I love how Jesus responds. Right away He begins healing, performing miracles, and loving people through His actions. He wants John and us to know that this Messiah thing is real. It may not have looked like what John expected—as our lives often don't look like what we expect—but nonetheless Christ was and is trying to say to us that all He really wants is our hearts, whether full of faith or plagued with doubting questions. He can see past our doubts to the true nature of our hearts as He did with John when He says in verse 23, "God blesses those who do not turn away from me." Very gently Jesus reminds John of what he already really knows about himself, that his faith is stronger than any circumstance John may find himself in. When we turn—as John did—to Jesus with our doubts, it is the biggest act of faith we can make and Christ is ready to meet us in that place to remind us of who He is and who we are in Him.

Allison Pluim
Wetaskiwin, AB

Luke 20:9-19

When I was a kid, my mother always told me that if I had nothing nice to say then I shouldn't say anything at all. This was generally her rebuke in regard to teasing my siblings, but she also employed it when we would talk back to her or a teacher. As far as she was concerned, if we were being disrespectful in any way, it wasn't a nice thing to say and we shouldn't say it. Reading through the gospels, I often times wonder if Jesus was ever told the same thing by Mary. If He had, He definitely fails to abide by such a rule time and time again.

Looking at this passage, we find ourselves in the last week of Jesus' life. He is creating endless amounts of havoc for the religious leaders as they attempt to prepare for the coming Passover. Jesus has wept for the city, cleansed the temple, and been questioned over the authority with which He speaks. The Pharisees are beginning to realize just how much of a threat He is to their way of life and to their traditional understanding of the scriptures. Knowing their hearts, Jesus offers them the parable of all parables.

Over and over again, Jesus has been a pain in the neck for the Pharisees, but not until now has He become a man they would seek to kill. Rather than keep his mouth shut and be a good little boy, Jesus angers those capable of ending His life. The old "WWJD" bracelets were intended to drive us forward in loving all who we meet. I doubt the makers ever considered how insolent and obstinate Jesus was on a regular basis. I do however believe that the sentiment remains. Jesus sought to live out the work of the Father. He sought out a way to flip the world on its head in order that the world would recognize the true truth. Because of that, we killed Him for it. Jesus reminds us all of the effort to which God has gone to save us from ourselves. God's effort included the death of His own Son. To those who don't believe, this remains nonsense, but for us, it is the cornerstone of our faith. I, for one, am glad that Jesus chose not to say anything when He had nothing nice to say.

Andrew Smith
Winnipeg, MB

Luke 19:28-47

When I was a child one of my favourite things to play was queen and princesses. My sister and I with our two best friends would negotiate over who would get to be the queen, the desired role. The Queen would be the leader, give the orders and would be served and honoured by the princesses.

Things haven't changed much for me over the years I still often prefer to take the lead rather than be the follower. Especially when it comes to living my life.

The parable preceding the text for today talks about those who didn't want to recognize the King and follow him. When the king trusted his servants with resources he expected them to use them wisely. Some people outright rejected the king. The outcome for this was, well let's just say it wasn't a fairy tale, live happily ever after ending.

The text (if you haven't read it please do) describes Jesus coming to Jerusalem as king. His royal entrance into the city did not occur in the way most had expected. Jesus was travelling from Jericho to Jerusalem, the text says Jesus went on ahead. He was leading the way giving direction to his disciples. Jesus said. "Go on ahead, you'll see a colt, untie it and bring it back to me". I don't know for certain what the disciples might have been thinking but I imagine they might have had a few questions about this like... "ok, think about this...the colt isn't ours but we are supposed to just untie it and take it? If this gets noticed, we just say the Lord needs it? As if that will be enough". I wonder if the disciples had hesitation in following and trusting Jesus that day. Hesitation is so often my response. Jesus is the king, he is the way, we choose to trust and follow or we don't. In this passage the disciples recognized Jesus as king, trusted him and responded with obedience and praise. This is the way it is meant to be...this is the best way for us to respond.

Jesus wept over Jerusalem that day grieving that they did not recognize who he was and the peace he offered. There were to be consequences for Jerusalem for not recognizing and following the king. We cannot escape the reality that how we respond to the king matters. I wonder why I often continue to battle to take the lead of my own life. It comes in subtle decisions like how I spend my time or my money, how I respond to people in need, or how I choose to complain rather than to be grateful. Do I miss the peace and adequacy of the king?

Could it be that you may struggle with this too? Today look for how Jesus is going ahead of you, what is he asking of you? Decide to follow his lead. I've seen over and over in my life that I am really not a very good queen, taking charge of my own way. God always has a better way for me. Before the rocks cry out can you join this princess in shouting praise; "Blessed is the king, blessed is our king".

Darlene Anderson
Minneapolis, MN

Luke 7:36-50

Have you noticed how in every encounter Jesus had with a woman, it is a liberating experience for her? The unnamed woman of Luke's Gospel who anoints Jesus is illustrative: she leaves rescued and covered in peace. The Gospels are rife with stories of the most unexpected people making room for Jesus in their lives. Undesirables such as reviled tax collectors, lowly shepherds, crucified thieves, the untouchably diseased, and—of course—women are some of the people who make room. They show hospitality to Christ in ways that the expected people of society, certain religious leaders and wealthy men, are not willing to do.

I am amazed at the unnamed woman's courage, belief, and single-mindedness. She was wholly focussed on Christ - so much so that she tracked Him down and came uninvited and unwanted to the house of a Pharisee to express her emotion at being forgiven. Once she is there, she very publicly affirms Jesus by anointing His feet with her tears and perfume, all while listening to the host of the dinner, Simon, vocally grumble about her presence. She lets down her hair to dry His feet, an act which would have been deeply improper for a Jewish woman. Was she thinking of the verse from Isaiah 52: "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who proclaims peace?" Who knows? Maybe. I know I am thinking about it. Jesus responds to Simon's complaints in terms of hospitality. He contrasts the woman's faithfulness, pouring out of all she has, with Simon's withholding coldness. One was a poor host; the other a marvel.

We can find in the Gospels three other stories of women anointing Jesus later in His ministry. Were they inspired by our unnamed woman's remarkable example? Who knows? Maybe. I know I am inspired. During the season of Lent, we often give up something (eating chocolate and watching TV are popular options) so that we have more room in our lives for attending to Jesus. I plan to give up reading novels, my favourite pastime, and by the time you read this, I will probably have already slipped up here and there. But the hope is that making more room in my life for Jesus will allow me, like the unnamed woman, to walk back into my life rescued and covered in peace.

Melodie Storey
Balfour, BC

Luke 8:4-15

Justo Gonzalez writes that “In spite of what we have been told since childhood, the parables of Jesus are not always simple illustrations to make a point clearer. On the contrary, quite often they point beyond themselves. In particular, they often point to the disobedience of the supposedly obedient, and they do so in such a fashion that, if his hearers take exception to what he says, by that very response they are proving the point of the parable.”* This often-overlooked truth implores us to reconsider how we teach and interpret parables. Parables are an essential component of Jesus’ teachings, and here—in these verses—Christ reveals to his disciples that “I use parables to teach the others so that the Scriptures might be fulfilled: ‘When they look, they won’t really see. When they hear, they won’t understand.’”

So, in many ways, this parable is about how one learns to truly see, hear, and understand. This parable lays out the primary things that prevent us from seeing, hearing, and understanding—the devil, a lack of Scriptural rootedness, and temptation—in general, but particularly “the cares and riches and pleasures of this life.”

Nevertheless, this parable is also about more than what causes us to miss what God is doing. It is also about the awesome power of God, the guidance Scripture provides, and the way the Spirit uses those whom lay their lives down before the Lord as a living sacrifice. Through the humility and faithfulness of these willing vessels, the Spirit of God moves, and transforms, everyday people into reapers of the divine harvest. These God fearing servants hear God’s word, cling to it, and produce an unexpected, and even seemingly impossible harvest for the kingdom.

Ultimately, this passage, like most of Jesus’ parables, is about the Kingdom of God. This parable serves as a divine promise to all those who hear the word of God—the inquisitive, the seeker, the vacillating, and the steadfast—that God’s harvest will ultimately come to fruition, and there is nothing that neither rocks, nor the birds of the air, nor even the devil himself can do to prevent what God is in the process of doing. God is in the midst of reconciling all things and God has chosen to partner with meager people like you and me as conduits for this kingdom crop.

*Justo Gonzalez, Luke: Belief, A theological commentary on the Bible. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2017), 104.

Luke 19:1-10

Well Zacchaeus, you are an interesting fellow. From this passage I can guess some things about you and what some of the people of your day may have thought of you as well. Because you were a tax collector, and a chief one at that, you were probably hated. Nothing much has changed since then. My sense is that because of this job you had, you were probably lonely as well. But I am curious to know how you heard about this Jesus who was passing through town. Did you have one close friend who let you know some things they had heard about Him? Did you overhear conversations of others who were close by but kept you out of their conversations? Something said to you or overheard by you made you very curious. And this I find is the one characteristic that stands out to me in this passage of Luke. You were extremely curious about this Jesus. You were so curious and determined to see Him that you did some things that were not characteristic of the men of your day, you ran hard and fast, to get ahead of that crowd and because of your height had to climb a tree to get a glimpse of Him. You really wanted to see what He looked like and know more about Him.

Your efforts payed off and you got a bonus to boot. He stopped and asked you to come down and take Him to your house for a while. Now you could truly find out about all those things you had heard. Your curiosity or pre-conceived ideas of Him would be satisfied.

He also took some criticism from this same crowd for going to be with you. He had your back on this one. I see that once you had met Him it changed you (and your household)—a lot! He does that to people who meet Him you know. He saves them and that changes them.

I hope I can be as curious and determined as you were that day, to keep on meeting Him each new day I am given. It will change me too! And just as you became a son of Abraham because He came to seek and save you, I too can be his child as well by faith in Him. Thank you Zacchaeus and thank you Jesus.

Luke 18:18-30

As someone who lives in North America I count myself as privileged. I really want for nothing. My needs are met and so are most of my wants. I have everything I need at my fingertips. If you are reading this you are likely in the same situation as I am. But, here is a question . . . If God asked you to sell everything and give the money away, could you do it? I have to admit that this would be a very difficult decision for me.

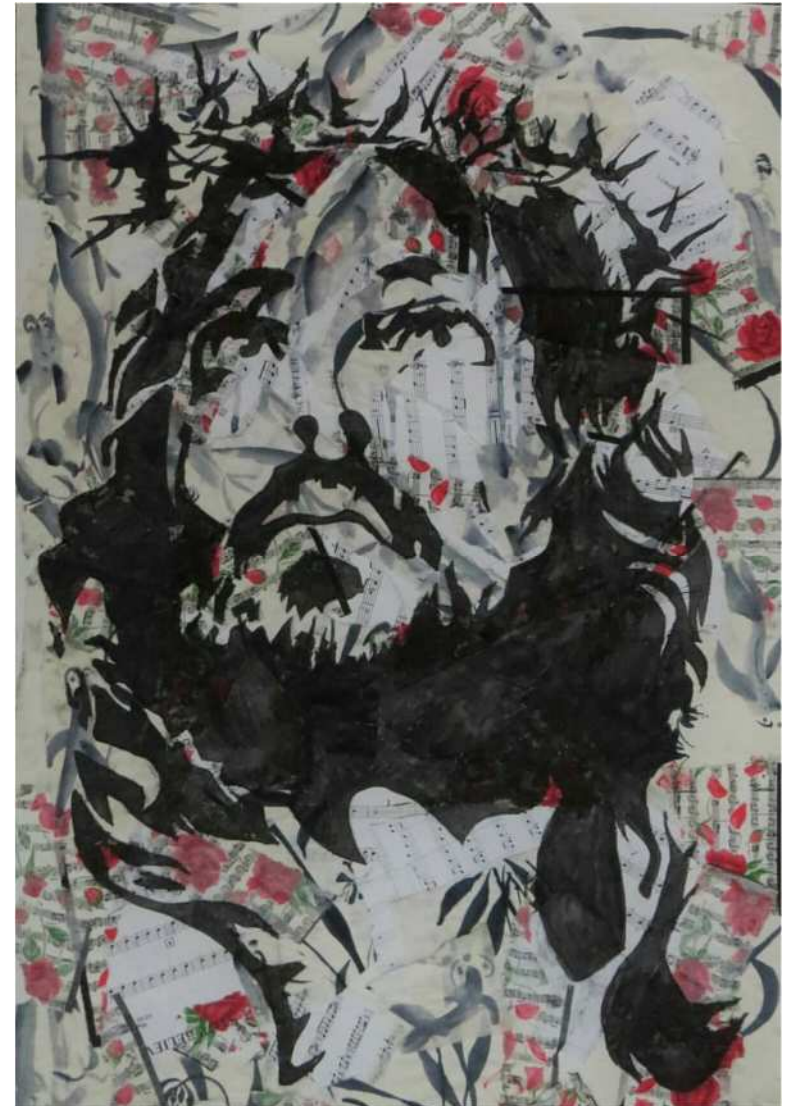
In our passage today we meet a young man who is very confident of his own abilities. He has set himself up with money and position. He knows the rules and follows them. However he recognizes that there is still something missing in his life. Like many of us, we may feel that there is something missing. That is what sin does to us. Romans 3:23 tells us that we have all sinned. We have all fallen away from God but that there is hope in filling that void. The young man comes to the very person that can fill this void.

He recognized Jesus and called Him good!! While I believe Jesus was testing him with his question “Why do you call me good?” that was not what Jesus wanted to focus on. Jesus wanted to take more of an in-depth look at the ethics of what this young man did.

The young man recognized and responded with all the right answers. He was very aware of the things that he needed to do and the laws that he needed to follow but then it came to Jesus’ final statement: “Sell all your possessions and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.” These were things that the man could not part with. He chose to walk away from God because he preferred his money and possessions instead. These are things he could not give up.

How many of us are in the same situation? We want to follow Jesus but there are things that he is asking us to give up BUT we just cannot let go. I challenge you this day to search and see what God is asking you to give up and to do it. It will not be easy but the rewards for it will be GREAT!!

Kelvin Kehler
Edmonton, AB



Saviour
Sara Goulder
Erickson, BC

Luke 8:22-25

The story of the storm on the Sea of Galilee is one of the most recognizable stories in the New Testament. One can only imagine the storms that may have happened on this sea and here we read of a particularly harrowing one. The storm was dangerous enough that the disciples were scared they were going to drown.

I find this fascinating. They had Jesus with them! Yet they were scared and did not have faith that Jesus would be there for them. For the past few months I have been challenged with that exact same question; ‘Where is your faith?’. I will find myself in an unfamiliar place and situation and am gripped with fear and uncertainty, instead of realizing that I have a God who can actually calm the seas and move mountains.

Why is it so hard to be faithful and to trust and obey? We are reminded in Scriptures of our lack of faith, "Why are you afraid; O men of little faith?" (Matthew 8:26). "Why are you afraid; have you no faith?" (Mark 4:40). "Where is your faith?" (Luke 8:25). Yet Scripture is full of passages that teach us just the opposite.

A month ago we set out to a very foreign land as a family of three and came home as a family of four. During those weeks away I had so many moments of asking, ‘where is my faith?’. We had a few of our own storms in a land that was far from things that were familiar and with a little one that was so unknown to us. I spent days worrying, being anxious and nervous. I had fear. I did not believe that some things were going to happen as we had anticipated. Yet, God was faithful in the last hour.

Even if it seems like He is not, Jesus is always there. Sometimes He may wait until the last hour so that we can sense how great our need really is. We see this in the boat before the disciples called on Him. Jesus was there with them, allowing the storm to happen, going through the storm together. Jesus promises us in Scripture that He will never desert us, nor will He ever forsake us, and no trial can separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

We have no excuse to lack faith and not to trust in our God. Jesus will never leave or forsake us, we can trust Him in the storms of life. Jesus never left His disciples, He was with them in the boat and He is with us in our ‘boat’. We just need to listen, be obedient, and have faith that He will provide what we need.

Let’s live our lives bravely as we realize and believe that we have a God who can actually calm the seas and move mountains.

Natasha Westerhoud
Norquay, SK

Luke 18:1-8

Why should we always pray and not give up?

Jesus tells this parable right after several parables on the “coming” Kingdom of God. At first glance, there is much about this parable that is difficult to understand: Why is God compared to an unjust judge? What does the final sentence mean? How does this fit into Lent?

I am reminded of the psalms of lament, where the authors cry out to God for justice. Where was God? Did he not hear their cries? Didn’t God care?

For example, from Psalm 143:

¹ LORD, hear my prayer,
listen to my cry for mercy
in your faithfulness and righteousness
come to my relief.

⁴ So my spirit grows faint within me;
my heart within me is dismayed.

^{7a} Answer me quickly, LORD;
my spirit fails.

Do not hide your face from me

^{9a} Rescue me from my enemies, LORD,

^{11b} in your righteousness, bring me out of trouble.

The persistent widow in our passage today is like the psalmist: she believes she is in the right, and that justice will ultimately prevail, but in the meantime, she suffers while her enemies prosper. Why does she persist? I believe her confident hope that God is both good and powerful gives her the patience and perseverance to keep at it.

The wicked judge finally gives her justice so she will stop “bothering” him. Therefore, how much more will our heavenly Father answer our prayers? But we also need to learn to persist, in confident hope. As we prepare for Good Friday and Easter, we should ask ourselves, “When the Son of Man comes, will he find us full of faith?”

Prayer: *God, please give us both patience and hope,
so that we may persist in prayer.*

*“May your kingdom come and your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.”*

Bill Gardner
Langley, BC

 Luke 8:26-39



Blood Moon
James Mitchell
Saskatoon, SK

I serve as the Spiritual Care Provider at the Forensic Psychiatric Hospital in Vancouver. We are the provincial facility for persons living with a mental illness and in conflict with the law. I smiled when I read my text: the story of the Gerasene demoniac—a man who lived among the tombs—screaming and unable to be controlled: I think I’ve met him before.

It might be helpful to read this story and write down the contemporary words we read every day about persons who are homeless, unkempt, street people, drug addicts, and the like. You might get a better feel for what Jesus found in this man. Jesus knew that living among the tombs would make this man unclean and unable to participate in normal synagogue worship. It would also create a barrier between him and the rest of his community, who would be made unclean by any contact with this person. His uncontrolled behaviour would prevent him from having any kind of relationship with a man or woman. To paraphrase the demon, this man’s name is Legion. And today, they’re still Legion.

Jesus is not put off by any of this. He challenges the demons in the man and restores the man’s sanity. However, a strange response comes from the locals: they ask Jesus to leave. Nothing is said about the man’s restoration to reality. I wonder if this man will be welcomed back into his community or if he will be stigmatized as a questionable person?

Our churches can be instruments of God’s peace by welcoming persons like this into our congregation. They do require a great deal of time and attention. And likely, they have a limited time they can stay with you. I remember when ‘Mike’ was getting ready to go to a church. I was concerned, because Mike thought he was Jesus Christ. That’s okay in the hospital, but I wondered how he would be received. I suggested he introduce himself simply as Mike. On Monday, I asked how it went. “Great. They greeted me, and asked me who I was. I said, ‘I think I am Jesus Christ’. And they said, ‘Welcome, we’re glad to have you.’” Mike remained with the church for about two years before taking his own life. It’s for people like Mike that Jesus came to offer His love and healing.

Luke 9:28-36

The disciples were very sleepy. Jesus was off praying again. Suddenly, they were awakened by bright light. Peter, John, and James 'saw his glory' and the two men standing with Jesus. Peter blurts out a suggestion. Luke says, 'He did not know what he was saying.' Then it happened. 'A cloud appeared and covered them, and they were afraid as they entered the cloud.' And then, a voice came from the cloud! Can you imagine? The voice said, '**This is my Son, whom I have chosen; listen to him.**' Wow? Can you imagine? In the presence of Moses (the Law), Elijah (the Prophet), and Jesus, the voice says, '**This is my Son, whom I have chosen; listen to him.**' Then it was over. They were alone with Jesus.

Mathew, Mark, Luke, and John (The Evangelists) all seek to reveal to us that Jesus is indeed the Son of God. They tell the stories, they record His miracles, and relay His words of teaching/preaching as they follow His journey to the cross/resurrection. John even clearly says that he tells us these things so that we will know 'that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing we might have life in his name' (John 20:30-31).

In this story about Jesus withdrawing to pray on a mountain, with his sleepy disciples, an extraordinary event takes place. Moses and Elijah appear in 'glorious splendor, talking with Jesus' about his departure.' Then, the voice; the voice (the Father) identifies Jesus as His Son, chosen, and then commands us, '**Listen to him.**' At the baptism of Jesus, the voice is also heard. Luke seems to indicate that only Jesus heard those words. 'You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased' (Luke 3:21-22). Here on the mountain, the voice speaks very directly to the witnesses, Peter, John, James, and us.

Do we need any further word this day? The Father has spoken, identifying Jesus as the chosen Son, and commands us to listen to him! Do we need any further word for this day?

Lord Jesus, Son of God, have mercy, on us.
Lord Jesus, Son of God, have mercy, on me.

David Johnson
 Durban, MB

Luke 17:20-37

The Kingdom is Now but not Yet, The certainty of Christ coming but the uncertainty of when.

Both John the Baptist and Jesus preached that the Kingdom of God was at hand. The Pharisees expected that if Jesus was indeed the Messiah he would introduce his rule with a sudden demonstration of power and a visible conquest of the land. Jesus goes on in His teachings to make clear that the kingdom at this point in time was not an observable political and military movement. At this time it was not a territory nor a system of government, but it was in you or with regards to the Pharisees it was "among" you.

The Pharisees and even the disciples could not understand the message about the Messiah and the Kingdom. It was here but He had to suffer first return to the Father and come again to take up the redeemed (1 Thess. 4:13-18) and judge and deal with evil and unbelief, then establish the Kingdom, his followers would be deprived of His personal presence and that many would come claiming to be the Messiah.

The lesson for us is that Gods kingdom is also in us and among us too. Christ is here, hidden but present in His Church and in His people. Christ is here in the hopeless and the weak, the needy and the oppressed. Lets not be deceived as the Pharisees were, by worldly wealth, by buildings, by glamour etc. We do not know when He will return, but return He will. Meanwhile, lets always remember, God's Kingdom is among us, as Christ expresses His love through us to a lost and hurting world.

This world will not get better before Christ returns and He not will find a receptive people. In this passage Jesus says that when He comes things will be as they were before the flood and before the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. There will be little faith left and people will be living for self, everyone will do what is right in their own eyes. The coming of Christ will be unexpected as a thief in the night, yet Scriptures says this day should not take us by surprise we need to be always ready.

The question to us is: How then should we live?

The answer: "*Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, where righteousness dwells.*" II Peter 3:11-18

Joe Orr
 Breton, AB

Luke 16:19-31

After Steve and I had Caleb, our first son, we wondered how we could possibly love another child this much. But then Asher arrived and our hearts somehow just got bigger. And when Eden arrived a couple years later, there was more than enough love to go around! Our hearts are not built to be small. Our hearts are built to be enlarged—to love more. I've noticed this—that whenever I let Him, God enlarges my heart for more love.

Lazarus is begging at the rich man's gates, infected and hungry, dog licking at his sores, while the rich man is eating and living in luxury. After they die, things are reversed and yet the rich man still wants to look out only for himself. All that time Lazarus was just outside the rich man's gate. But he was never SEEN. The gate was never opened.

The rich man would have known the law and the prophets - which clearly teach care for the poor. He acts as though he didn't know, however. He is blinded by his wealth and self-centredness. Even with their places reversed, the rich man continues to treat Lazarus as lower than himself by asking Abraham to get Lazarus to come serve him or at least go as a messenger to his own people. He still does not SEE anyone but himself (and his own). Because the rich man's vision is narrow, his heart is small.

It is hard to really SEE. It will mean that our hearts will need to become bigger and enlarging our hearts is sometimes painful. If the rich man had opened his gate, he would have had to deal with the disparity between him and his neighbour and that is uncomfortable. It means there might be a problem with our comfort and we would rather not think about that. It points towards dispelling our myths that we are in control—this could be me! Of course, we would rather not see dogs licking sores—it is disturbing and upsetting. Poverty is always more complex than a lack of money. It is often about family systems, addiction, mental health, and systemic evil and oppression in our society like racism and prejudice. These are not fun things to see.

Jesus is calling the wealthy (us) to SEE the poor. Jesus is calling us to see the people around us—to really SEE them and respond. Jesus invites us to live with enlarged hearts. He has actually built us to have hearts that grow and expand. Lean into seeing. Having stretched hearts is what we are made for.

Lord Jesus, what and who would you have me really see today?

Kirsten Waldschmidt
Saskatoon, SK

Luke 10:1-24

... *“for I tell you that many prophets and kings wanted to see what you see but did not see it... to hear what you hear but did not hear it.” Luke 10:24*

What did prophets and kings so desperately want to see but did not, could not—but these 72 (more than the 12... more than Jesus' inner circle of three) got to witness? What did the prophets and kings so long to hear, but did not?

For a text that I've often read through the lenses of mission, movement, ministry, joining God in his Kingdom work, I see something different today—an invitation to witness the gospel in sight and sound. Pastor/teacher Darrell Johnson describes Jesus' Gospel this way, “the Kingdom of God—life in God's presence and God's power—has now become available to ordinary people like you and me. It's right here, right now.” Luke 10, in this season, reminds me that not only am I invited to go, do, practice, live the gospel—I get to see, behold, experience, *witness* the gospel- and it's best, not watched alone.

What do you see of God's presence in this living word?

What do you hear of God's power in this text?

When you look around in this season of your life, what do you notice of God's presence?

Where do you hear the sound of God's power in your life?

Three of the traditional practices of Lent, this season of “putting something down so that we can pick something else up” are fasting, prayer, and alms giving. At root, they are expressions of paying attention to the present and powerful work of God in the world. Jesus' command to send the 72 out “two by two” so often read by me as a pattern for shared ministry, also seems to suggest, you need someone else with you to say, “Did you just see that? Did we just hear that?”

May your day(s) be marked by seeing, hearing, experiencing the presence and power of the in-breaking Kingdom of God—the truth that the living God, is powerfully and presently here.

Can I get a witness?

Glenn Peterson
Strathmore, AB

Luke 11:1-13

I am constantly reminded that Jesus took time to pray; how Christ cried out to His Father and asked, sought, knocked, gave praise and thanks, and wanted above all else, for the Father's will to be done. In this passage He shows us the necessity of consistent, persistent, and intentional prayer time.

In this season of life, God is walking and quite often carrying me through. I am intensely aware of Christ and how He prayed to His Father. He lays it out simply here for me, for all of us. I don't have to be educated and full of lofty words and phrases. God, our Father, simply wants me to come; 'come and talk with me' (Psalm 27:8). I give Him praise for who He is and for what He does. Whether I am aware of all His workings or not, whether I currently agree with all He is doing or not—is neither here nor there. I give Him unconditional praise and thanks because He is Lord; my Lord, and He fulfills my life with His will—not my will—His. We are to set our hearts right, to start with a posture of thankfulness, for who He is and for what is coming. We are instructed to ask for what we need; not to give a list of wants; but to ask for our needs to be fulfilled, each day. We are to ask for forgiveness and we commit to God to forgive others as well. We ask for help consistently and persistently.

Our heavenly Father loves us and wants us to come to Him; to ask for Him to fulfill our needs, to bring before Him our hearts desires (which He has written on our hearts to begin with), to cry out to Him. He longs to give us what He has planned, the Holy Spirit.

It's not just a one time prayer either. I am to be persistent in asking, seeking, and knocking. I am to daily come before my Lord, to give Him praise and glory, to ask Him to provide for my needs, for His will to be done, to seek after Him and His work; for Him to reveal himself, and to knock on the door, shows His will, and provides what He knows I need. This consistent, persistent, and intentional prayer time; a time of asking, seeking, and knocking; leads to one thing for me: surrender—constant dependence (not independence) on the Father, Christ, the Holy Spirit.

What would it look like for you commit to daily ask, seek, and knock? And then to accept, surrender, and step into His will?

Collen Nahnychuk
Nelson, BC

Luke 16:1-18

As I sat in a cafe by London Bridge, I started receiving text after text, asking if I was okay. What I soon realized brought stillness across the city - there had been a terror attack at Westminster Bridge, six individuals were killed and many others injured. Fear settled on London like a heavy blanket. Little did we know that the months following would test how far that fear would go: 22 claimed in a bombing at Manchester Arena, eight perished after London Bridge attacks, one person killed in Finsbury Mosque attack, 70 people lost their lives in an apartment block fire, and over a dozen people were injured in a failed bomb explosion on the Underground. Hopelessness was taking over London, as fear stretched its consuming arms. I felt the weight of it, as people asked "Why?". It was a daily battle to not be overcome by it all.

In this passage we see Jesus highlighting many teachings. One of which is integrity. It is normal to say one thing and do another. It is normal to "go with the flow", rather than grow our gifts and/or talents, but the challenge lies in stepping out of the norm. The challenge as believers is to stand out - to be the *light* of the world (Matthew 5:14).

The "norm" in London this past year was fear. I felt the burden of it. Though paralyzing fear wanted to take over, I had to look to God to reestablish the integrity in my faith. I had to remember that the battle was already won by Jesus' sacrifice on the cross.

*"I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. **But take heart; I have overcome the world.**"* John 16:33

What is holding you back today from intentionally living out your faith? It may not be fear, but maybe a relationship, work, family, finances, or past brokenness? Whatever it may be, go to Jesus. As The Message version puts it in verse 15 of our passage today, "God knows what's behind the appearance." The beauty of our relationship with Christ is He knows us. We don't have to put on a show. He meets us in the brokenness and speaks life into us, so that in response we may have courage to step outside the "norm", live with integrity, and be a beacon of light to those that God has placed in our lives.

Kaila Johnson
London, England

Luke 15:11-32

The prodigal son's story calls us to be humble and sincere before God, who in this story is the Father. The prodigal son, in demanding his father's inheritance, was demanding to be his own master; denying his position as son. Since his share is part of the father's estate, the son could have used this share of the resources according to the will of his father. Therefore, the son not only wanted to be his own master, but he was acting as if his father was dead. The proper response would have been to throw him out, penniless. That's not what happened. The father gave him what he wanted.

The son, after coming to his senses, declares: *I am no longer worthy to be called your son (v. 21b)*. The son is absolutely correct. The son had written himself out of the family, dishonored his father, and spent his portion. He has no choice but to be humble and contrite. The son deserves nothing but the poverty and loneliness that he has brought upon himself.

After the prodigal son is forgiven, the older son says: *'Look! All these years I've been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!'* (v. 29-30)

"My son," the father said, *'you are always with me, and everything I have is yours.'* (v. 31)

You see, the older son could have had the young goat all along, if only he requested it. For the father allows the son to partake in his estate.

Let's approach God humbly today. We are sinners who have denied the father as severely as the prodigal son. Also, let's not be like the older son who underestimates the grace and generosity of our Father. Be ready to ask the Father for what you need, because the Father is loving and generous.

Aaron Peat
Surrey, BC

Luke 11:33-36

Did you know that there are approximately 2000 different species of fireflies around the world? These luminescent winged beetles produce a light from within that emanates from their lower abdomen. This phenomenon is called bioluminescence, a term I recently discussed with my grade eight students during our Light and Optics science unit. Students tend to be fascinated by living organisms that emit their own light—everything from fireflies to jellyfish to plankton. I must admit that I am also intrigued, remembering those rare moments that fireflies were spotted around the campfire during childhood camping trips. "Fireflies!" we'd shout and everyone would frantically turn, desperately trying to catch a glimpse.

In reflecting on Jesus' words in Luke 11:33-36 and the "light within," I began to wonder, "What if we were bioluminescent? What if our bodies really were "full of light"?" (v.34b). I'm reminded of a refrain that is sung during chapel services at my school.

"Christ before us, Christ behind us, Christ under our feet."*

I believe that when Christ is behind us, before us, and around us He is also within us, and when Christ is within us, we can do no other than shine His light outward.

In all of the living organisms previously mentioned, bioluminescence has purpose whether it's for camouflage, attraction, defense, warning, communication, or illumination. Light has purpose.

"No one lights a lamp and puts it in a place where it will be hidden, or under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, so that those who come in may see the light" (v.33).

As the traditional gospel song says, "Don't hide it under a bushel, No! I'm gonna let it shine!". What if we live knowing that the light within us has purpose? What if it was a goal, not only for our own lives, but also for our churches that "those who come in may see the light"? When people enter our churches and our lives through relationship do they see the light or are they clouded in darkness? Jesus said, "See to it that the light within you is not darkness." Perhaps this can mean *make sure your inner light has purpose*. I can't say what this looks like for each one of you, but I have to wonder if it's about following in Jesus' way of love and compassion.

"This little light of mine. I'm gonna let it shine."

*"Prayer for Peace" lyrics by David Haas

Sherisse Spent
Winnipeg, MB

 Luke 15:1-10



Light into Darkness
 Gloria Mitchell
 Saskatoon, SK

It's quite funny that this specific passage was given to me to reflect and write on. I even chuckled a little bit to myself as I was reading this text over and over again. There's been a song that has been stuck in my head called "Reckless Love" which has a chorus with the following lyrics:

*"Oh the overwhelming, never-ending,
 reckless love of God.
 Oh it chases me down, fights 'til I'm found,
 leaves the 99."*

Although there have been some backlash for the use of the word "reckless" (and maybe it wasn't the perfect word choice), I can understand the intention that the songwriter was going for.

A shepherd leaving his 99 sheep just to find the one lost sheep isn't a sensible or even logical thing to do. In fact, most people would call it 'careless' or 'reckless' for leaving the other 99 unattended. While the world says it isn't worth it to chase down the one lost sheep, the love of God says otherwise. To the Lord, the one lost sheep is indeed so valuable and is most definitely worth being found.

Why? Because ALL people matter to the Lord.

This overwhelming, never-ending, reckless kind of love for His people is *SO* extravagant that He would go to extreme measures for humanity to have a restored relationship with Him. God's heart has always been and always will be about people.

Often within our church ministries, we easily get fixated with our service orders, the lights, the programs, and functions. We end up focusing more on production rather than people. I'm reminded in this text that what Jesus valued most in ministry was people—those who were broken, lost, sinners—those who had ears to **hear**.

Within the very seats of our churches are people who are lost, broken, and in need of knowing about this God who pursues them so intently. May each one of us and our ministries continue to capture and extend this overwhelming love of God. I pray that we would spend time engaging with our church community in deeper conversation and to put value in relationships above all else.

Darrick Tam
 Toronto, ON

Luke 14:25-33

'Anyone who comes to me but refuses to let go of father, mother, spouse, children, brothers, sisters—yes even one's own self!—can't be my disciple.' (vs. 26 MSG)

The invitation to follow Jesus is an invitation to live life in a way that is oriented differently than, and counter cultural to, this world we are called to live in. Jesus' invitation is a call to hold loosely all the things precious and valuable to me—my family, my friends, my work, my dreams, and my desires, in hands stretched open in front of God.

Of course I'm not good at this naturally. For a while I am mindful of the need to surrender and hold these things loosely. For a while I work hard at surrendering these things to God. But slowly the entitlement of following my own desires and determining how I live my life sneaks back in as I go about my days in a less focused and intentional way. Jesus in His grace convicts and draws me back to Himself, inviting me once again to trust Him with these things I care the most about.

It has been seven months since I preached a sermon on this very topic at my church. In this time I have slowly reclaimed the 'right' to determine what my life is about and what my priorities are. I have forgotten that Jesus asks me to be willing to lay these things down as I walk alongside Him. The request to reflect and respond to this passage today is not an accident, but another invitation to walk alongside Jesus, holding loosely the things I care about and desire, rather than grasping tightly onto these things that are so important to me.

In surrendering these things I am not giving up on them or even divesting myself of them. I am entrusting them to the God who knows the whole world, loves me, and cares about the things I care about. Our all-knowing God cares about these things infinitely more and better than I do. So the invitation to surrender these things to God is an invitation to place the things most important to me in hands far better at caring for and carrying these things.

Our God is so gracious!

Corinne Stoter
Chestermere, AB

Luke 12:4-12

Visit almost any Christian bookstore and it's easy to find books with positive messages of how God wants us to achieve our best possible personal happiness and to be blessed with material wealth and health. The same messages can be heard on many Christian radio and TV programs and from the pulpits of some churches. Jesus on the other hand was not a prosperity preacher. Today's passage as recorded by Luke stands in stark contrast to the prosperity gospel, making clear that following Jesus wasn't about prosperity but about being faithful to God even in times of persecution.

The persecution that Jesus was preparing His disciples for included beatings, stonings, and violent death. Even in the midst of those persecutions, the disciples were assured that the God who cared even about the sparrows valued them so much more and that the Holy Spirit would help in making their defence when called before the authorities.

Although Christians in some countries still suffer physically for their faith, we in the West are unlikely to encounter those kinds of persecutions. We may be tempted to consider ourselves persecuted if our faith is ridiculed by secularists or for some Christians even if we are greeted with "Happy Holidays" or "Season's Greetings" instead of "Merry Christmas." Even though our comfortable and privileged lives are radically different than those of the early disciples, it can still be difficult to heed the admonition in verses eight to nine about publicly acknowledging Jesus. Whether at the workplace, school, or a social setting, taking a public stand as a Christ-follower can seem odd to those we rub shoulders with. We all want to be valued and accepted and the temptation to fit into society's norms instead of standing out as someone with different values is very real.

During this Lenten season, may our priorities be aligned with those of Jesus.

Phil Loseth
Prince Albert, SK

 Luke 12:35-48

“Be dressed ready for service and keep your lamps burning” Luke 12:35

When I became a Christian, it was a powerful experience. I was in the first year of high school, and after several discussions about Jesus, God, and the Bible with a friend of mine, I was invited to ask Jesus into my heart to be my Lord and Saviour. I did so promptly after arriving home one day from school. Although the details are fuzzy in my mind, I remember how the world seemed to go from black-and-white to technicolour. I felt as if scales had fallen off my eyes and I eagerly entered into a process of growth that was characterized by a frantic effort to learn as much about what it meant to follow Jesus as possible.

Over time this acute, razor-sharp sense of God’s presence compelling me into His mission faded. It wasn’t long before I was tempted to shift into cruise control, sleep-walking my way through each day as a Christian. I found that I could complete my devotions, go to church, and fulfill basic requirements my faith called me to, all while following Jesus casually from a safe distance.

In today’s reading we discover a warning from Jesus to stay awake. Jesus’ command to “be dressed” is derived from the language of “girding one’s loins,” a practice that refers to readying oneself for a confrontation. At its heart, these two parables are a warning to those who have become complacent and no longer live with a missional urgency to follow and obey Jesus. As R.C. Sproul writes, “These servants could easily slip into a slovenly state and take a rather cavalier attitude towards their responsibilities.” Too often my own Christian life has reflected this cavalier attitude.

The command to remain watchful and awake should act as smelling salts to us. Amidst the fog of busyness, routine, and even outright apathy, Jesus points to where this complacency leads: not just spiritual stagnation, but spiritual deterioration. Without a felt sense of urgency and accountability, the manager’s attitudes quickly devolve into abuse of power and disobedience.

Israel’s leadership—the focal point of this parable—is clearly being warned to keep awake and turn from their exploitative practices. However, there are lessons here for all of us. We must diligently stay awake. Each of us must “gird our loins” and prepare for battle as we move into a world in bondage to sin and darkness. Our spiritual focus on Christ and His kingdom must be razor sharp. Our resolve to faithfully set about the work He has prepared for us must not waiver.

Jeff Strong
Nelson, BC



Evil Thoughts
Sonya Topaz Joyal
Winnipeg, MB

Luke 14:7-24

When I read this text the first time, it just seemed like Jesus was giving wise secular advice at a dinner party on how to gain status and recognition by the world's terms. But upon further study and reflection on the text, one realizes that Jesus is doing something quite different. He is leading His audience into seeing the big contrast between the social conventions of the world and the social conventions of God's Kingdom. In ancient middle-east the stipulations for being honored, accepted, and valued in society were governed by money and power (much like today). If you had significant wealth and power, you were able to throw big dinner parties. And if you were invited to these types of parties, it meant that you were also a person of similar standing in society. The expectation would have been that all invitees would eventually invite the host over for a similar dinner party in the near future. If you were not in a position to be able to reciprocate these types of invitations, then you were simply not invited. If you couldn't bear the expectations associated with attending and reciprocating a party, you lost status, you lost honor, and therefore, you lost value in society. The rules and stipulations for the world's social conventions exclude those who "do not have" from those who "have much."

In verses 7-11 Jesus addresses those who have much; the wealthy, the powerful, and the religious elite. He points out how acceptance, value, and honour work in their own culture.

In verses 12-14 Jesus challenges their social conventions and He invites them to see how social conventions work in God's Kingdom. Rather than being exclusive, shallow and only focused on self-gain, the social conventions in God's Kingdom are inclusive, allowing for a manifestation of deep relationships, and genuine hospitality and generosity.

In verses 16-24 Jesus tells a story of what it would look like if one of these highly esteemed dinner guests were to take on his invitation and his challenge to throw a dinner party based on God's social conventions. But to do this the host would need to completely sacrifice the norms of society! If one of them is willing to let go of their exclusive, shallow, self-seeking way of living, and embrace the inclusive, deep, Kingdom way of living, they will likely lose their seats of worldly honor (it is no coincidence that what follows verse 24 is about the cost of discipleship!). But they will experience "What a blessing it will be to attend a banquet in the Kingdom of God!" (v.15).

Rick Penner
Nelson, BC

Luke 13:6-9

How aptly C.S. Lewis allegorized our Lord when he wrote of Aslan: "He's not a safe lion, but he is good." For Jesus, the vinedresser, strongly desires the greatest good of his Church, and we are not safe from his love, but are rather in grave danger of seeing this very good come to pass! A skim-reading of this parable, and the preceding dialogue with "the crowd," might seem to suggest that an angry deity is dangling us above the unquenchable fire, waiting only to see if we are worthy to be spared. Jesus' interlocutors seem to have this very idea in mind when they suggest that some Galileans "got theirs" when Pilate mingled their blood with their sacrifices. But Jesus, never shy to speak openly, replies, "Unless you change your hearts you will all perish likewise." The axe is laid at the root of the tree.

The God of Israel, who owns the vineyard, has come in Jesus to see if His creation has borne fruit, but His three-year ministry has shown it to be barren. Is it good for anything then? Has God's plan to bless the world through Abraham come to nothing? But here Jesus is also our defense: "Wait. Let me dig down and spread manure." The imagery is strongly suggestive of Christ's own sacrifice: He will revitalize the tree with himself. With this interjection, mercy triumphs over judgement. Yet the threat stands: "if not..."

At last the axe falls, but instead of the tree, it falls on the vinedresser himself—and with him, Israel, the tree, us, and all things. Are we then to welcome the axe? The same instrument that fells the tree also trims the dead branches to the greater good of the tree. And God, in His mercy, has chosen to spare the tree, or rather to resurrect it in Christ, that the whole world may be grafted into it. Justice and mercy kiss, as David prophesies.

God has determined to bring forth fruit from the tree, and He has accomplished this in Christ. While we are being grafted into this vine, we are brought in through Christ's suffering, in which He bids us to participate. In this Lenten season, let us meditate on His suffering as we prepare to remember His Passion.

Jordan Dueck
Steinbach, MB

Luke 13:22-30

Texts like this are why people don't want to write for the Lenten Reader. Who wants to tackle the issue of God seemingly turning people away? This is the kind of passage that makes me pause to think, "Am I going to hear the words 'I don't know where you come from, go away?'" In reality, that is not fruitful thinking. It's the kind of thinking Jesus is directing His listener away from. Instead He is encouraging them to "strive to enter through the narrow door". And while many will try and fail, the end of the passage speaks of people coming from all over—north, south, east, and west—to eat in the kingdom of God.

Verse 30 is key to understanding this passage: "Indeed, some are last who will be first, and some are first who will be last." Many who think themselves first hold onto more than will fit through the narrow door—success, money, pride, position, and power—keep these *first-place-holders* from squeezing through the small opening. It is not true that the kingdom is not wide and welcoming, it is true that there is much to lay down before entering.

Following Jesus is going to cost you. Luke repeatedly makes this clear. The narrow door is just one image that conveys the cost of discipleship. In, *The Cost of Discipleship*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer writes, "Costly grace is the gospel which must be sought again and again and again, the gift which must be asked for, the door at which a man must knock. Such grace is costly because it calls us to follow, and it is grace because it calls us to follow Jesus Christ. It is costly because it costs a man his life, and it is grace because it gives a man the only true life."

Lord, Jesus Christ,
Disciple me.
Amen.

Julia Sandstrom
Winnipeg, MB

Luke 13:31-35

We always think of "giving up" something for Lent. Some people give up meat, or sweets, or alcohol, or television.

One friend asked another what she was giving up for Lent, and received the following answer: "Anne's giving up drinking, Terri's giving up chocolate, and I'm just giving up."

Ever feel like that? "Just giving up"?

"Just give up" was the Pharisee's advice to Jesus in today's Gospel text. Herod is after you. He wants to kill you. Run away, quick! Give up your mission!

When Jesus heard this warning, He surprised those Pharisees by both ignoring and embracing their message. Jesus dismissed the threat of Herod—he is nothing but a "*sly fox*,"—plotting but powerless against God's mission in the world. Jesus had His own schedule, His own agenda, His own mission to fulfill, and the time frame had already been set by the Father.

Boldness is necessary to accomplish redemptive purposes. Jesus was boldly assertive and wanted there to be no doubt about what His Father had sent Him to accomplish. Here's both a lesson and a model for us—Jesus is set on finishing His work or ministry. Are we set on finishing ours? When we come into a right relationship with the Father through His Son, Jesus Christ, our calling to redemptive work begins to unfold.

How much goes unaccomplished because we simply are not bold! There is no good reason to complicate the matter. We serve a risen Lord whose forthrightness always challenges.

A word of caution: we need to be very careful differentiating between our Lord's dictates and our personal, questionable agendas. Human nature can tell us to call down fire from heaven on most anyone who disagrees with us!

Further, Jesus embraced the message of the Pharisees by asserting that He will indeed give up—He will give himself up. He will travel to Jerusalem and continue in the sad tradition of that city alluded to in the phrase—"Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it" (v.34). Jesus will give up everything, His very life, in order to fulfill His eternal mission of salvation.

"Oh, Jerusalem!"—if Jesus was filled with compassion for them, how dare we fail in sharing His heart for a lost world. Amen.

Ray Wall
Rosebud, AB