

February 8

One sabbath while Jesus was going through the grainfields, his disciples plucked some heads of grain, rubbed them in their hands, and ate them. But some of the Pharisees said, "Why are you doing what is not lawful on the sabbath?" Jesus answered, "Have you not read what David did when he and his companions were hungry? He entered the house of God and took and ate the bread of the Presence, which it is not lawful for any but the priests to eat, and gave some to his companions?" Then he said to them, "The Son of Man is lord of the sabbath." Luke 6:1-5

Jesus was out for a Saturday stroll. He had been to Temple to worship, pray, sing, and even enjoyed a cookie and cup of coffee at fellowship time afterwards. So, he decided to continue his worship with a walk out in the beauty of God's creation with his disciples (more on them later this week). Suddenly that snack after the service didn't last, linger for his friends. Their stomachs started rumbling and grumbling, they saw some grain, plucked/picked some to enjoy a sandwich right there. When suddenly out from behind a wheat stalk, I guess, some Pharisees jump out and say, "Caught you red handed!" Insert frownie faces and fingers wagging here. Jesus replies, responds by saying, "Well, David ate the Bread that was for God." That is what the bread of Presence was. It was food that was left on the altar in the Holy of Holies in case, I guess, God got hungry? Only King David one time decided that God was okay with sharing some of the holy manna with him. Like a friend who reaches across the table at a restaurant with his fork to "test, try, taste" some of your entrée or snags a French fry from you when you look the other way.

I believe that scripture has moments of holy hilarity that are meant to teach, tell us something through laughter. I wonder if one truth to carry is that we can get caught up in rules, regulations, and the right way rather than staying open to God. Sometimes we are so convinced to the point of complacency with our ways. Plus, our minds tell us that it is too hard to change. And, this helps us feel like we are in control. I felt that with this pandemic and constantly washing my hands as something to cling to in the midst of an invisible virus floating around. The Pharisees, by the way, are not the bad guys. They are more like Jesus. Just like I can be frustrated with those who are slightly different and close to me then I am with those who are distant and disconnected and diametrically opposed to my understandings.

A few insights to ponder:

How are you being fed literally and figuratively?

What ways do you cling to control so much that your knuckles turn white?

Who might the Pharisee be in your circle? Those who are close by, who you care about, but who sometimes push all the buttons?

May God's wisdom guide you and God's love ground you this day as we let this story speak and sing to our story. Amen.

February 9

On another sabbath he entered the synagogue and taught, and there was a man there whose right hand was withered. The scribes and the Pharisees watched him to see whether he would cure on the sabbath, so that they might find an accusation against him. Even though he knew what they were thinking, he said to the man who had the withered hand, "Come and stand here." He got up and stood there. Then Jesus said to them, "I ask you, is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the sabbath, to save life or to destroy it?" After looking around at all of them, he said to him, "Stretch out your hand." He did so, and his hand was restored. But they were filled with fury and discussed with one another what they might do to Jesus. Luke 6:6-11

First the grain and now the healing. Does Jesus not know how to turn down the temperature rather than elevate the tension in the room? Why does Jesus keep poking the bear and provoking people? And what will the children think when he keeps on trampling on the rules we have been trying to teach them? (That last question was a joke, by the way).

But, this passage causes me to pause and ponder, what would Jesus challenge me on? What precious peril of righteousness to do I cling to, convinced I am right, which Jesus might call me to let lose my grasp upon?

Those are difficult questions? But heartfelt ones. Scripture doesn't always confirm, these words can challenge. The wisdom I hold onto is the second I think I have scripture understood, I should be sent back to the start, do not pass, "Go," and do not collect two hundred dollars. I don't know why Jesus is trying to push the boundaries of what was kosher and clean. I do not know why Jesus is provoking people. I do know that I want to be careful to assume that God is on my side and to ask the question, if I am on God's side. And, if the answer too often is, "Yup, got it all under control. Nothing to see here." There is probably something sacred to see there.

How might I stretch out my hand, empty my heart, open my life so that Jesus' wisdom and God's light of love can shine brighter?

May that question sit in my life and your life today with more than a trace of God's grace. Amen.

February 10

Now during those days he went out to the mountain to pray; and he spent the night in prayer to God. And when day came, he called his disciples and chose twelve of them, whom he also named apostles: Simon, whom he named Peter, and his brother Andrew, and James, and John, and Philip, and Bartholomew, and Matthew, and Thomas, and James son of Alphaeus, and Simon, who was called the Zealot, and Judas son of James, and Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor. Luke 6:12-16

Show of hands...how many of you before you read the passage above could have named all the disciples? To be clear, my hand is stuck to my side and my head is studiously looking at the ground avoiding looking anyone in the eyes. Oh, I know a few. Peter. Check. James and John and Andrew. I am on a roll. Philip and Thomas, feeling good about myself. Oh, then there is Judas, Mr. Betray Your Best Friend. Then, my mind goes blank. On a good day, I might remember there was a second one named James. Other times, my mind starts naming the seven dwarfs from Snow White or Smurfs from the cartoon I watched growing up. Unfortunately, we don't get a bio on all twelve, we get bits and pieces of their stories. Unfortunately, some of the disciples, I am looking at you Bartholomew – with the cool name – don't stand in the scripture spotlight very much for us to get to know them.

There is a great line from the musical Hamilton asking, “Who tells your story?” We don't get to know all the disciples' stories. We have this list of their names and know that Jesus saw something stirring in each of their souls. I encourage you today to speak, say aloud each of the disciples names...even Judas (that is important for tomorrow!). Then, pause, imagine, conjure and create a story. We know Simon/Peter; James and John were fishermen. We know Matthew was a tax collector. We know Thomas is the one who gives us permission in faith to ask questions and to seek God through such means. We all know Judas. But dive deeper. Why did Simon leave his net? What did Matthew feel surge in him that caused him to get up out of his tax booth? Why did Judas sell Jesus out? Hold your insights and ideas lightly and let God's light shine brightly on the ways the disciples' stories sing to your story today.

God, You come down to the lakeshore of my soul and call to me to be a partner in Christ's service; call to ministries of grace. I pray I will respond with deep compassion, fresh new lines of faith of your grace to trace today. Amen.

February 11

“But I say to you that listen, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also; and from anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt. Give to everyone who begs from you; and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again. Do to others as you would have them do to you. Luke 6:27-31

I wonder who Jesus was looking at when he spoke these words about loving your friend-mies? Of all the verses in scripture, Luke 6:27 is one of the most challenging. It is one we quote at others, but I find these words so hard to embrace and embody in these days. And if that wasn't enough, which it is, Jesus goes on about blessing those who curse me; pray for those who abuse me; and turn the other cheek. Why not just tell me to walk on water and then turn that water in wine! The lofty language of scripture set the bar high for us to clear in our day-to-day lives. We are intimately familiar with these words, but often leave them abandoned because they are so difficult to practice in our lives.

Maybe the point isn't just to give us tasks to do that we can complete, but invitations that take a lifetime to explore. Maybe the point isn't that we have gain a doctorate degree in faith but that we are always learners and students. Maybe the point is not that we reach a point where our haloes glow and glisten, but that we are always needing to grow. Maybe the point isn't that we get it at all because grace is never earned or deserved. Grace is.

On my wall is this quote from Reinhold Niebuhr, ““Nothing that is worth doing can be achieved in our lifetime; therefore we must be saved by hope. Nothing which is true or beautiful or good makes complete sense in any immediate context of history; therefore we must be saved by faith. Nothing we do, however virtuous, can be accomplished alone; therefore we must be saved by love. No virtuous act is quite as virtuous from the standpoint of our friend or foe as it is from our standpoint. Therefore we must be saved by the final form of love which is forgiveness.”

May these words settle into your soul and sing to your life this day. Amen.

February 12

We wind down and wrap up another week. I find that after offering you thoughts for four days, it is good to give you space to breathe and be. Rather than just pile on more words, I pray you will listen to what words are rising and roaming within you. Rather than more thoughts from me, for you to pay attention to your thoughts.

To give space for you.

What new insight or idea came to you this week?

What struggle still swirls restlessly within you?

What might be that next right step as we move toward the middle of February?

May these questions invoke and invite God's listening, loving presence for you this day and throughout the days to come.

May traces of God's grace be with you now more than ever. Amen.