

## Morning Meditations – February 1

<sup>12</sup> While Jesus was in one of the towns, a man came along who was covered with leprosy.<sup>[b]</sup> When he saw Jesus, he fell with his face to the ground and begged him, “Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean.” <sup>13</sup> Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. “I am willing,” he said. “Be clean!” And immediately the leprosy left him. <sup>14</sup> Then Jesus ordered him, “Don’t tell anyone, but go, show yourself to the priest and offer the sacrifices that Moses commanded for your cleansing, as a testimony to them.” <sup>15</sup> Yet the news about him spread all the more, so that crowds of people came to hear him and to be healed of their sicknesses. <sup>16</sup> But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed. Luke 5:12-16

There is such a humanity woven into this passage. You have the passionate plea of a person who has suffered, struggled, and deep in his soul longs to be well. You have Jesus’ willingness to embrace and enfold the one who was hurting (and considered untouchable because of the skin disease) with a tender hand laid upon this Son of God’s shoulder. You have the gentleman being asked not to share, only to then Tweet out and post to social media a selfie with a before and after. Insert Jesus shaking his head, muttering and mumbling, “You ask people to do one thing. One simple thing!” Then Jesus decided to get away to pray.

A couple of questions:

1. Where does it hurt today? Where is there pain that throbs physically or emotionally or spiritually or communally?
2. Where do you long for help and healing, long for a loving touch or to feel the brush of angel’s wings with the sacred stirring, supporting, strengthening you?
3. What Good News of God’s grace can you not but help share? Where has been that moment where hopelessness doesn’t seem like it has the last word over the last few days?
4. Finally, do you find the space and place to pause, to breathe and be, to get away and pray?

The power of Scripture is not only for our minds, but our whole lives to encounter and experience. The power of Scripture is not in these words you are reading from me, but when you let the words from Luke above be embraced and embodied and expressed in your life.

Go back to the four questions above, hold them, enter them, let your life respond and react to them. Lean into Luke and sense the way Luke’s wisdom is seeking to be lived out in you.

**And may God’s grace, peace, and love be with you now more than ever. Amen.**

## Morning Meditations – February 2

<sup>17</sup> One day Jesus was teaching, and Pharisees and teachers of the law were sitting there. They had come from every village of Galilee and from Judea and Jerusalem. And the power of the Lord was with Jesus to heal the sick. <sup>18</sup> Some men came carrying a paralyzed man on a mat and tried to take him into the house to lay him before Jesus. <sup>19</sup> When they could not find a way to do this because of the crowd, they went up on the roof and lowered him on his mat through the tiles into the middle

of the crowd, right in front of Jesus. <sup>20</sup> When Jesus saw their faith, he said, “Friend, your sins are forgiven.” <sup>21</sup> The Pharisees and the teachers of the law began thinking to themselves, “Who is this fellow who speaks blasphemy? Who can forgive sins but God alone?” <sup>22</sup> Jesus knew what they were thinking and asked, “Why are you thinking these things in your hearts? <sup>23</sup> Which is easier: to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Get up and walk?’ <sup>24</sup> But I want you to know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins.” So he said to the paralyzed man, “I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home.” <sup>25</sup> Immediately he stood up in front of them, took what he had been lying on and went home praising God. <sup>26</sup> Everyone was amazed and gave praise to God. They were filled with awe and said, “We have seen remarkable things today.” Luke 5:17-27

The titles that appear in section breaks in your Bible are not original. The Gospel writers didn't have chapter titles. As a matter of fact, if you have ever seen the Dead Sea Scrolls or writings from the time of Jesus there was no punctuation or vowels or even spaces between the consonant letters. This sentence would look like this: thsntncwldlklkths. Sort of makes my head hurt honestly.

Since the titles of section breaks were added later, we have a permission slip to let our own imaginations loose with our thoughts on what a particular passage of the Bible might be titled. If I had been asked I might give the section of Scripture above this title:

I get by with a little help from my friends (you are going to be singing that all day long).

Or

Hold up your corner.

Both titles are important. The first emphasizes that all of us stand on the shoulders of others. There is no self-made man or woman. You are who you are because of your family and friends – past and present. You exist because workers grow food that you buy at the store or restaurant take out. You drive on roads someone else plotted and planned and paved. You live in a house, or at least I do, that I did not build. I was taught by teachers who shaped and formed ideas. I know what it is like to be on the mat, because others have carried me.

And there are moments I try to carry others too. I do this with my kids. I do this when someone in our church is grieving or hurting. I try to hold up my corner in these morning meditations and by supporting causes I believe in and sharing/shining my light where I can.

Healing happens in moments where we support each other, care for each other, and are willing to be supported by others. Healing is dynamic. There is a difference between healing and cure. I can still struggle physically or emotionally, yet at the same time feel like the weigh of the wound is not as heavy because of those around me.

Where are you helping and who is someone who is helping you?

Let the question above sing to you, soak into you, and let your life respond and react to this question today. Lean into Luke and sense the way Luke's wisdom is seeking to be lived out in you.

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## Morning Meditations – February 3

<sup>27</sup> After this, Jesus went out and saw a tax collector by the name of Levi sitting at his tax booth. “Follow me,” Jesus said to him, <sup>28</sup> and Levi got up, left everything and followed him. <sup>29</sup> Then Levi held a great banquet for Jesus at his house, and a large crowd of tax collectors and others were eating with them. <sup>30</sup> But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law who belonged to their sect complained to his disciples, “Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?” <sup>31</sup> Jesus answered them, “It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. <sup>32</sup> I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.” Luke 5:27-32

Jesus has just healed someone, he heads out of the house where he was at and there is a tax collector.

That ominous sound you hear is because tax collectors were looked down upon and pushed to the fringe of polite society. That ominous soundtrack that should accompany the words, “Levi sitting at his tax booth,” would be like the theme song to Jaws or what played every time Darth Vader walked in to a scene in Star Wars.

Tax collectors were not the heroes or sheroes in Jesus’ day. The reason was that they worked for Rome. The money you gave to the tax collector financed the Caesar who thought he was a god. You felt the weight of the boot of Rome on your neck. Some scholars suggest that the tax rate in Jesus’ day (between Rome, Herod, and temple taxes) could have been as high as 90 percent. Ouch. Suddenly, my tax burden doesn’t seem so bad.

Jesus goes and calls Levi to follow. Think of a person you see as a villain, the least likely candidate for Person of the Year... Jesus calls him/her? Before Jesus preached, “Love your enemy,” he practiced it right here and right now in the passage. Levi throws a party and all his tax collector friends with their calculators, glasses, and number jokes (like why is six afraid of seven? Because seven, eight, nine – read as seven ate nine.) When the Pharisees question the company Jesus is keeping, Jesus says that someone whose halo is shining doesn’t need polish. Someone who thinks s/he has it all figured out, is not going to listen.

One of my favorite quotes right now is that the more you know, the more questions you have the more you realize how much you fail to grasp. Amen to that! I don’t see clearly. I make a ton of mistakes and miscues and miss moments of the movement of God’s grace. Levi and I might have more in common than I care to admit or accept.

Where in the above description did you find yourself with a new insight or idea? Where did you find yourself shaking your head in disbelief? Was there anything above that frustrated you?

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## Morning Meditations – February 4

<sup>33</sup>They said to him, “John’s disciples often fast and pray, and so do the disciples of the Pharisees, but yours go on eating and drinking.” <sup>34</sup>Jesus answered, “Can you make the friends of the bridegroom fast while he is with them? <sup>35</sup>But the time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them; in those days they will fast.” Luke 5:33-35

This is another human moment in scripture. The religious people are comparing and competing who is being more faithful. The religious people are trying to prove that their haloes shine brighter and bolder than others. The religious people are pulling others down to prop themselves up. What breaks my heart is the previous three sentences are as true today as when Luke wrote down those words. Churches constantly compete and compare worship attendance and budgets. How many new members. The boasting and bragging sounds like the pastor thinking s/he is the “Thou” referred to in “How Great Thou Art,” rather than God.

Part of what I hear Jesus saying to us anew and afresh is that we cannot prove faithfulness. Not by fasting. Not by praying angelically. Not by faithfully writing a morning meditation each day. Faithfulness, the surge of the Spirit within, is creative and will call us to connect with others.

Yet, hearing this is not easy for us, because we want to think that our way of practicing faith is the correct way. Recently, in a class, I was talking about different biases we all have. We have a complexity biases in that we like simple explanation to a complex truth. We can’t see what we won’t see and we don’t want to be vulnerable. Also, our brains are wired when something gets too hard to tell us to stop and justifies it. Our brains are comfortable, like the neuro pathways that are there, and don’t want to put in the effort or energy to forge new understandings. This is why New Year’s resolutions are so difficult.

Is there an understanding of faith that might need to be let go of right now? Is there part of faithfulness that isn’t connecting you to God’s grace? Is there a place where you feel like you are going through the motions without feeling the movement of the Holy?

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## Morning Meditations – February 5

<sup>36</sup>He told them this parable: “No one tears a piece out of a new garment to patch an old one. Otherwise, they will have torn the new garment, and the patch from the new will not match the old. <sup>37</sup>And no one pours new wine into old wineskins. Otherwise, the new wine will burst the skins; the wine will run out and the wineskins will be ruined. <sup>38</sup>No, new wine must be poured into new wineskins. Luke 5:36-38

As we wrap up and wind down the first full week in February, I look back see that the questions we have held together have all pointed to the Jesus truth that you cannot put new wine in old wine skins. We know that life has changed and is changing since February 2020. At this time, one year ago, we were hearing about COVID, but had not fully felt the weight yet. At this time, one year ago, we knew that there was violence against our African-American sisters and brothers, but we had not begun our collective, communal lament that is needed. Perhaps we still have not. At this time, one year ago, we did not think an angry group would try to stop our elected leaders from certifying the election.

If we knew then what we know now.

Then, again, if we did, perhaps we would not have had the courage to live moment-by-moment; step-by-step.

Today, I invite you to take a long view of life and ponder prayerfully:

1. One learning from this last year – new wine.
2. How is that new learning fitting into your life – does it feel like you are putting new wine into old wineskins?

Let the questions above sing to you, soak into you, and let your life respond and react to these questions today. Lean into Luke and sense the way Luke's wisdom is seeking to be lived out in you.

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