

Growing By Grace

Sermon Series Resource

Growing By Grace Sermon Series August 3- August 31, 2025

Come and grow in knowledge and love of God, as we venture through Bible lessons that deepen our understanding of God's grace.

August 3, 2025: Treasured Grace
August 10, 2025: Grace in Fear
August 17, 2025: Baptized by Grace
August 24, 2025: Healed by Grace
August 31, 2025: Grace-Filled Invitation

Resource:
ELCA Lectionary Year C
Prepared by Pam Miller, Adult Ministry Coordinator

August 3, 2025
Growing By Grace: Treasured Grace

Today's texts offer instruction and encouragement for all who are occasionally overwhelmed by the "unhappy business" of life. Jesus urges us to take care and be on guard against all kinds of greed. We who have died with Christ in holy baptism have also been raised with him and are encouraged to elevate our thinking, seeking the "things that are above." To that end we seek the sustenance of the Lord's supper and the encouragement of God's word.

Opening Prayer: Benevolent God, you are the source, the guide, and the goal of our lives. Teach us to love what is worth loving, to reject what is offensive to you, and to treasure what is precious in your sight, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen

Sermon Reflection:

- As you reflect on the sermon, what stands out as being particularly helpful, insightful, or difficult to grasp?

Psalm 49:1-12 My mouth shall speak of wisdom.

Gospel Reading: Luke 12:13-21 In God's reign, the "rich will be sent away empty." Jesus uses a parable to warn against identifying the worth of one's life with the value of one's possessions rather than one's relationship with God.

Notes:

Daily Discipleship

Sunday, July 31-August 6 (C) - Luke 12:13-21

Stories of Discipleship: *A Rich Fool's Story*

Focus Question: *How do you guard against greed?*

word of life

“And [Jesus] said to them, ‘Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of possessions.’” Luke 12:15 (NRSV)

Read Luke 12: 13-21

A crowd including his disciples gathers around Jesus to hear him teach. He uses clear statements and parables to warn and prepare his followers for when he would no longer be with them. (See Luke 12:1-12) Jesus is facing his own death in Jerusalem and the intensity of his words reflects his limited time with them.

His teaching is interrupted by someone from the crowd who asks a specific question about his family’s inheritance. It appears this man has conflicts with his own brother and wants Jesus to intervene. The man is bold enough to tell Jesus precisely how he wants Jesus to settle the dispute, but Jesus does not want any part of it. He does not get baited into the disagreement.

1. *What do you think the dispute is really about?*
2. *Why won't Jesus get involved?*

Jesus understands the real issue is greed and issues a timeless warning against its power. This man’s dilemma over inheritance is only one illustration among many kinds of greed.

3. *What are some other kinds of greed?*
4. *How is this a timely warning for today?*

Jesus tells a parable about a rich man who had an abundance of crops. He leveled his barns to build bigger and bigger ones. His wealth was quite a comfort to him as he made plans to relax and enjoy the fruit of his labor. But God said to him, “You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you.” (Luke 12:20 NRSV)

5. *Does it seem fair to you for the man to die?*
6. *Why did God call him a fool?*
7. *Are all rich people fools? Why or why not?*

Apparently, the man in the parable lived only for himself and without regard for others who might be in need. He had plenty, but rather than share with anyone, he hoarded his wealth. He had more crops than he could ever hope to use.

8. *How is possible to be poor on this earth, but rich with God?*
9. *How is possible to be rich on this earth, but poor with God?*

The theme of the reversal of the rich and poor is interwoven throughout Luke’s gospel, beginning with the Magnificat sung by Mary (Luke 1:46-56) “He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty.” (Luke 1:52-53 NRSV) A person’s wealth does not reflect that person’s relationship with God. Jesus’ warning extends to this and every time and place.

10. *What is the message of this passage for today?*

word among us

Sherry was only four years old, but she begged her parents to buy her the pink tennis shoes advertised on television. She had never seen anything so pretty in her life. Plus, she knew she the shoes would help her run fast. On her birthday, she received many presents, but no pink tennis shoes. She couldn't hide her disappointment, and tears came to her eyes.

But then her grandpa leaned back on his chair and pulled one package from behind the couch. It was wrapped in pink paper with pink ribbons and a pink bow. Her eyes began to sparkle as she ripped open the box with those pink shoes. Her feet danced around the room. She knew her life was perfect now and forever.

1. *Will pink shoes make her life perfect? If so, for how long?*
2. *Tell a story of coveting an item, convinced it might complete your life.*
3. *When did you learn possessions will not complete your life?*

We are bombarded by the media and marketing wizards who try to convince us of all the items we need to complete our life. Possessions once considered a luxury are now regarded as necessities. Our desks, rooms, and lives are cluttered with non-essentials. In reality, we actually *need* very little to survive in this life. Yet, we accumulate much in our lifetimes, but for what purpose? Some of us purchase far more than we can afford, hiking up our credit card debts. It is a vicious cycle whether we covet pink shoes, pink cars, or pink houses.

4. *What is the hot item which the advertisers are trying to lure you to buy?*
5. *How do you resist keeping up with the latest fad?*

Jesus warned his disciples about greed by telling the parable of the rich fool. This man was not foolish because he was rich but because he had lost his perspective and confused his priorities. His possessions had become primary in his life – even to point of becoming his god.

6. *How do you keep from being possessed by your possessions?*
7. *List different kinds of greed.*
8. *As people mature, do we get less greedy? Explain.*

Jesus concludes with these words, “So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich toward God.” (Luke 12:21 NRSV) Take a moment to ponder what it means to be “rich toward God”. We often think of God extending riches and blessings toward us. Hopefully, we respond with a life of gratitude. But, this phrase suggests a particular quality in our relationship towards God. It includes entrusting one's wealth to God and God's care.

9. *How would you describe the richness of your relationship towards God?*
10. *How does one lay up treasures in heaven without adopting a works righteousness attitude?*
11. *If someone feels they have a poor relationship with God, what would you suggest?*

Prayer

Mighty One, you are so generous in your gifts to us. Help us to freely share our bounty with others. Create in us generous and loving hearts. Amen.

Dig Deeper

Luke 12:22-31

last word

This week lessen your possessions
by giving to someone in need.



Daily Discipleship

Written by John and Robin McCullough-Bade

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August 10, 2025
Growing By Grace: Grace in Fear

Jesus says, “It is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.” It is God’s promise from the beginning, to Abraham, to the early church, and to the “little flock” of which we are a part in today’s assembly. Faith, God’s baptismal gift, trusts the promises of God.

Opening Prayer: Almighty God, you sent your Holy Spirit to be the life and light of your church. Open our hearts to the riches of your grace, that we may be ready to receive you wherever you appear, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen

Sermon Reflection:

- As you reflect on the sermon, what stands out as being particularly helpful, insightful, or difficult to grasp?

Psalm 33:12-22 Let your lovingkindness be upon us, as we place our hope in you.

Gospel Reading: Luke 12:32-40 Jesus encourages disciples to invest their hearts and live fully into God’s reign. Instead of facing life with fear, those who know God’s generosity are always ready to receive from God and to give to others.

Notes:

Daily Discipleship

Sunday, August 7-13 (C) - Luke 12:32-40

Stories of Discipleship: *A Prepared Person's Story*

Focus Question: *Are you prepared for Christ?*

word of life

"You also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour." Luke 12:40 (NRSV)

Read Luke 12:32-40

This passage begins with a refreshing and tender reminder of God's pleasure to share God's kingdom with "the little flock". A flock of sheep depends on a shepherd who tends to its needs, defends it from danger, and leads the flock to green pastures. Ultimately, God's will is to have believers receive the blessings of God's reign.

1. What image comes to mind with the phrase "little flock"?
2. What does it mean for God to receive pleasure by giving believers the kingdom?

It is one thing for Jesus to tell his listeners to not be afraid, but another for them to listen and trust his word. Fear can immobilize or send people into a panic. Thus, Jesus encourages 'the flock' to act intentionally and overcome fear.

Jesus calls them into action with a long 'to do' list, beginning with selling of their possessions. Once disciples place their lives in God's protective care and trust in the promises of the kingdom, then they will change their attitudes towards earthly possessions and their time on this earth. They will invest their time and energy in treasures with God, not finite things of this world.

3. *What might have been some of the responses from the disciples to such a list?*
4. *Is Jesus micromanaging his disciples by providing such a list? Why or why not?*

Jesus challenges his followers to always be ready. He adds to the list, "Be dressed for action and have your lamps lit." (Luke 12:35 NRSV) In the house, the robe was worn loosely and without a belt. To be dressed for action is have your belt on and prepared to walk out the door.

Next, he uses the illustration of servants who wait for their master to return from a wedding banquet. They do not know the hour, but hopefully they will be ready to open the door when he knocks and be prepared to serve him. In the first century, there would have been no refrigeration or electricity. Thus, the role of the servant to make preparations would have been significant. If there was to be any food at the home, it would have been prepared during the day. That would be true of trimming the wicks and having oil in the lamps. The master on his return would have known if the servants had wasted their time or wisely prepared themselves for his visit.

5. *What might be a modern-day example?*
6. *What makes waiting so difficult?*

If indeed the servants are prepared, then the master will be pleased and bless the servants not just with words, but by his own actions. He will fasten his own belt, invite his servants to sit at the table, and he – the master—will serve them. Roles will be reversed. The master becomes the servant, prepared to bless those who kept ready and believed in his return.

The bottom line: be prepared. Christ is returning at an unknown time.

7. *How prepared are you for the return of Christ?*

word among us

Jacob and Rebeca waited anxiously for the Internal Revenue Service agent to show up at their home. They were told which week to expect the agent, but not the specific time or date. Supposedly, they would get a phone call to announce the agent's arrival time. And so they waited. This couple never had their taxes audited by the IRS, so they were anxious. They felt they had completed the forms accurately and honestly. Rebeca was the one who actually took the time to complete their tax forms each year. She spent hours pouring over every detail. She wondered if it was a mistake not to consult with an accountant. Otherwise, why would the IRS waste their time with them?

Finally, the inspector came and was escorted to a study filled with neat boxes. Each box was clearly marked with a year and filled with neatly filed receipts. The inspector was impressed at their readiness for his visit. After the IRS agent spent some time with their taxes, he too questioned his assignment to their case. Quietly and apologetically, he left.

1. *Share a story of being prepared.*
2. *Share a story of not being prepared.*

During the four weeks before Christmas, the church celebrates the season of the church year called Advent. We emphasize being awake and prepared for the second coming of Christ. Preaching and teaching about being awake as people move in high gear to complete their personal preparations for Christmas can be a challenge. In reality, it is difficult to spark any real urgency about the Son of Man coming. We have waited for over 2000 years for the return of Christ; what makes anyone think it will be soon?

3. *How often do you think about the return of Jesus Christ?*
4. *How often do you consider the end of time?*
5. *Explain your answers.*

Jesus begins this passage by reassuring disciples of all ages of God's commitment. God cares as a good shepherd watches over a flock. Jesus affirms God's delight in sharing the kingdom. We do not deserve God blessing us in such a way. We have not earned God's generosity. God gives not out of obligation, but sheer delight. It gives God pleasure to share God's kingdom with us.

6. *Describe a time when you delighted in extending a gift to someone.*
7. *How was that gift received?*
8. *What if the gift would have been rejected or ignored?*
9. *Relate your delight in giving gifts to God's pleasure in sharing God's kingdom with us.*

It is humbling to ponder God's joy and delight in sharing with us. As recipients of the gift of grace extended to us, Jesus urges us to be conscious, aware, and prepared to receive such a gift.

10. *What might you do this week to be ready to receive God's gifts?*
11. *How do you personally delight God?*

Prayer

O God, create in me a clean heart so I might be ready for you. Amen.

Dig Deeper

Luke 12:41-48

last word

Stop and ponder God's good gifts to you.



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August 17, 2025
Growing By Grace: Baptized by Grace

The word of God is a refining fire. Jesus is the great divide in human history. He invites our undivided attention and devotion. Today in worship we are surrounded by a great “cloud of witnesses.” In the word and in holy communion we are invited yet again to look to Jesus, “the pioneer and perfecter of our faith.”

Opening Prayer: O God, judge eternal, you love justice and hate oppression, and you call us to share your zeal for truth. Give us courage to take our stand with all victims of bloodshed and greed, and , following your servants and prophets, to look to the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, your Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen

Sermon Reflection:

- As you reflect on the sermon, what stands out as being particularly helpful, insightful, or difficult to grasp?

Psalm 82 Arise, O God, and rule the earth.

Gospel Reading: Luke 12:49-56 Jesus delivers harsh words about the purifying and potentially divisive effects of obedience to God’s call. The way of the cross often leads followers to encounter hostility and rejection, even from those they love.

Notes:

Daily Discipleship

Sunday, August 14-20 (C) - Luke 12:49-56

Stories of Discipleship: *A Judge's Story*

Focus Question: *How has your choice to follow Jesus caused friction in your life?*

word of life

"You hypocrites! You know how to interpret the appearance of earth and sky, but why do you not know how to interpret the present time?" Luke 12:56 (NRSV)

Read Luke 12:49-56

Jesus continues his teachings to the disciples as he prepares them for the end of time. Many times, Jesus is cast as a gentle peacemaker, but in this passage he describes himself as one who brings fire to the earth. He yearns for the fire to be lit and kindled.

1. *What does it mean for Jesus to bring fire to the earth?*
2. *Why would Jesus want that fire to be kindled?*

Some scholars associate the fire with the oncoming of the Holy Spirit, but others see it as a reference to the final judgment. Jesus feels the pressure and stress of the mounting tensions. He is preparing for his own death. His stress or distress is understandable. It is clear his reference to baptism is not of water placed on his head by John the Baptist in the Jordan River, but a deluge of strife. Yet, despite the conflict, Jesus remains on the path towards Jerusalem and completion.

3. *What does it feel like to know Jesus faced stress?*
4. *Since Jesus chose the path to the cross, does it make it easier? Why or why not?*

Jesus knows he is inviting his followers to make some important decisions about their lives and their loyalties. Many of his audience were Jews who like their ancestors anticipated and prepared for the Messiah but may not be able to recognize Jesus as God's anointed.

In the same family unit, others may have open eyes, hearts, and spirits to the good news proclaimed by Jesus Christ. People in the same family may come to different conclusions about Jesus. That is a harsh reality. Instead of peace and goodwill, Jesus brings friction and discord, particularly with those who reject Jesus.

Jesus asks, "Do you think that I have come to bring peace to the earth? No, I tell you, but rather division!" (Luke 12:51 NRSV) Anyone who has attended a Christmas Eve worship service might be inclined to believe Jesus came to bring peace. When Jesus was born, the angels proclaimed, "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favours!" (Luke 2:14 NRSV)

5. *Does this image of Jesus bringing division fit with your image of Jesus?*
6. *Why is this division necessary?*

Jesus is depicted as a judge, ready to cast down fire. He is ready to hold people accountable. Just because a person becomes a disciple of Jesus, this does not mean a life without conflict or friction. Jesus confronts the religious powers of his day and invites them to a new relationship with God. Yet, not all could hear and respond as people individually choose to follow or not.

7. *Does this image of Jesus as a judge fit your image of Jesus? Why or why not?*
8. *Why is there a need for Jesus to judge?*
9. *What about grace?*

word among us

Judith began her freshman year at college with deep curiosity and a thirst to learn. Her parents urged her to stay close to her Jewish roots and attend synagogue regularly. She laughed inside when she heard those words because their family rarely attended services or respected the Sabbath. Their words seemed hollow. Why were her parents pretending to be religious?

Once Judith arrived at college, she chose not to attend Sabbath services at the synagogue, but visited every church and mosque in town. She had no idea what was happening during the worship service, but she became fascinated by the rituals and music. At night, she would search the web for the doctrine and faith practices of religious groups. Exploring faith became a hobby with her. At meals, she would enter religious dialogue with anyone who might be interested in such a conversation. Prayerfully, she discerned her own relationship with God.

On spring break, her parents were dismayed when Judith announced her decision to become a Christian. They took her to the rabbi for counseling. At one family meal, her grandma began to wail and her grandpa stomped out of the room. Her mother stroked Judith's hand and asked again, "Honey, one more time, why do you want to follow Jesus?"

1. *How did you come to believe in Jesus?*
2. *Did you ever go through a "seekers" time period when you questioned your belief in Jesus? Explain.*
3. *Why do you believe some people struggle in their seeking of God?*

Some families still split over religious beliefs while others choose not to discuss religion in their homes. The conflict is too great. Jesus seems to realize he is bringing a crisis into people's lives. Each person makes choices about following Jesus Christ. Faith cannot be passed from one generation to the next generation like an inheritance, but it can certainly be nurtured in the home. But if parents do not believe, a child is not excluded. The Holy Spirit uses people in a variety of settings to share the good news of Jesus.

4. *What situations have you known when a person's decision to follow Jesus meant rejection by others?*
5. *How might you support someone who faces conflict due to following Jesus Christ?*
6. *How do you nurture faith in your home?*

It is tempting to become a Pollyanna and expect all people, especially within the church, to have peace with each other. In this passage, Jesus turns that hope upside down. Some churches have people who are not open to Jesus at work in their lives. They are oblivious to the mission of Jesus Christ and do not want to change from their ways. In those churches, strife can develop as followers of Jesus Christ claim the mission to be the church. In those cases, conflict can be a gift if the conflict serves to clarify the issues and help people claim mission.

7. *How can conflict help people to follow Jesus?*
8. *Why must there be a division, rather than harmony?*

Prayer

Jesus, bring your fire and kindle faith. Give me clarity of purpose. Amen

Dig Deeper

Jeremiah 23:23-29

last word

Take a moment and ask someone to share their faith story.



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August 24, 2025
Growing By Grace: Healed by Grace

Remember the sabbath day. Call the sabbath a delight. This is the Lord's day, and the Lord will do for us what the Lord does: feed us, forgive us, help and heal us. Rejoice at all the wonderful things God is doing.

Opening Prayer: O God, mighty and immortal, you know that as fragile creatures surrounded by great dangers, we cannot by ourselves stand upright. Give us strength of mind and body, so that even when we suffer because of human sin, we may rise victorious through your Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen

Sermon Reflection:

- As you reflect on the sermon, what stands out as being particularly helpful, insightful, or difficult to grasp?

Psalm 103:1-8 The Lord crowns you with mercy and steadfast love.

Gospel Reading: Luke 13:10-17 Jesus heals a woman on the sabbath, offering her a new beginning for her life. When challenged by a narrow reading of the sabbath command, Jesus responds by expanding "sabbath work" to include setting people free from bondage.

Notes:

Daily Discipleship

Sunday, August 21-27 (C) - Luke 13:10-17

Stories of Discipleship: *A Freed Woman's Story*

Focus Question: *How do we share our joy in being freed by Jesus Christ?*

word of life

“When Jesus saw her, he called her over and said, ‘Woman, you are set free from your ailment.’ When he laid his hands on her, immediately she stood up straight and began praising God.” Luke 13:12-13 (NRSV)

Read Luke 13:10-17

Jesus is a practicing Jew, so it is not unusual for him to be teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath. He was brought up to be faithful in his religious practice.

1. *What is the significance of Jesus being a practicing Jew?*
2. *What do you know about honoring the Sabbath in the first century?*
3. *What could or could not be done on the Sabbath?*

A woman appears in the synagogue, but does not ask for anything. She appears to do nothing in particular to attract the attention of Jesus, and not much is known about her. Yet, her appearance catches the attention of Jesus. She is bent over and cannot stand upright. Her condition has lasted eighteen years. It is not clear if her condition has caused internal complications. In a time when people did not live long, eighteen years is a significant length for such a disease.

Jesus calls her over and extends healing to her through his words of proclamation and his touch. Immediately, this woman stands up without delay. After suffering eighteen years, this woman can look straight in front of her, rather than at the floor. Without making a request or speaking a word, she is healed! This miracle of healing is grace upon grace.

And so this woman praises God. Who else would be able to restore her health? Who else would be able to free her from binding illness? There is nothing to indicate this woman had a clue how her life would be changed on that day. Her transformation is remarkable and breathtaking.

4. *Describe the possibility of feelings experienced by the healed woman.*
5. *How might her life change after such a healing?*

The mighty power of God seems to be the point of this passage describing the story of a freed woman. Yet, the healing leads to conflict. The leader of the synagogue is indignant that Jesus would break the basic laws of the Sabbath and heal. He believes there are enough other days in the week for working, including healing. After all, this woman was bound by the illness for eighteen years, what difference would one day make?

Jesus sees through the hypocrisy. The Sabbath is intended to draw us closer to God. Is that not what happened when the woman was healed? Did she not immediately praise God? There was no doubt this woman connected her healing with God's blessing through Jesus Christ. She was drawn to worship God on the Sabbath with a depth and joy beyond any other Sabbath of her life. The words of the psalmist captures it, “You have turned my mourning into dancing; you have taken off my sackcloth and clothed me with joy, so that my soul may praise you and not be silent. O Lord my God, I will give thanks to you forever.” (Psalm 30:11-12 NRSV)

By the time Jesus finished his speech to the synagogue leaders, they were put to shame.

6. *Why could the leaders not rejoice with the woman?*

word among us

Rules are rules.

The chemistry teacher believed in rules and loved enforcing them. His parents always thought he would be a lawyer as much as believed in rules. Some might describe this teacher as rigid, but he understood himself to be consistent and orderly.

Then, one day his favorite student came out from the lab in a panic. He dashed to his teacher to whisper, “Come quickly, I think I invented a bomb.” This boy was very cautious, but he thought he made an error – a big error. Now others were at risk.

The teacher ran to the lab, turned the corner, glanced at the bottles, and gave a sigh of relief. All was well. So, the teacher let out a big laugh – even though laughing was against the rules in his classroom. But he couldn’t help himself. He felt such relief.

Calmly, he assured his student of their safety. Eventually, they laughed about the situation, but the teacher admitted that he was scared. He was actually terrified. That one situation led to some deep reflection on his life and his teachings. What if a bomb had been created and destroyed others as well as himself? What did a lot of his rules matter? Did those rules help foster learning in his classroom or was he just hiding behind all the rules?

1. *Are all rules necessary?*
2. *Give examples of rules which might not be unilaterally helpful.*
3. *Who gets to decide when there is an exception to the rule?*

Jesus healed a woman on the Sabbath. He broke the rules in front of the leader of the synagogue. He didn’t even try to keep it quiet. He blatantly healed a woman who had been ill for eighteen long years. As she walked in the synagogue, it was clear her problem had been long in coming. In healing her, Jesus restored her life. She could function with greater ease and comfort.

4. *Can you think of any reasons not to heal this woman on the Sabbath?*
5. *Did the end justify the means?*
6. *Why did Jesus not wait one more day to heal this woman?*

Once freed, this woman rejoiced. Those aching, constricted muscles were released. Finally, she could stand upright and tall. Finally, she could look at people’s eyes rather than their feet. Finally, finally! No wonder she began worshipping God immediately. It was her first response. She had been given new life.

7. *What can we learn from this woman who was healed?*
8. *What can we learn about Jesus from this story?*

Prayer

Loving Lord, free me to dance and rejoice with those who receive your gifts. Help me to see your surprises of grace in daily life. Amen.

Dig Deeper

Isaiah 58:9b-14

last word

Take joy
in this day.



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August 31, 2025

Growing By Grace: Grace-Filled Invitation

Invited and inviting—that is the nature of the church. By God’s grace in holy baptism, we have a place at Christ’s banquet table. When, by the power of that same Spirit, humility and mutual love continue among us, the church can be more inviting still.

Opening Prayer: O God, you resist those who are proud and give grace to those who are humble. Give us the humility of your Son, that we may embody the generosity of Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen

Sermon Reflection:

- As you reflect on the sermon, what stands out as being particularly helpful, insightful, or difficult to grasp?

Psalm 112: The righteous are merciful and full of compassion.

Gospel Reading: Luke 14:1, 7-14 Jesus observes guests jockeying for position at the table. He uses the opportunity to teach his hearers to choose humility rather than self-exaltation. Jesus also makes an appeal for hosts to imitate God’s gracious hospitality to those in need.

Notes:

Daily Discipleship

Sunday, August 28-September 3 (C) - Luke 14:1, 7-14

Discipleship: *A New Hospitality*

Focus Question: *How do you welcome and include the less fortunate?*

word of life

“For all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.” Luke 14:11 (NRSV)

Read Luke 14:1, 7-14

Chapter 14 begins with the announcement of Jesus choosing to dine with the Pharisees despite their habit of watching him. This is not his first dinner with them, but Jesus uses the meal to teach a lesson on hospitality and manners. As usual, there is a deeper meaning behind his words.

1. *Why does it or does not surprise you that Jesus dines with Pharisees?*
2. *Why do you think the Pharisees watch Jesus closely? (See Luke 14:1)*

Although the Pharisees intend to watch and scrutinize Jesus, it is Jesus who watches the Pharisees select their seats for the meal. Without name cards on the tables, the guests wander around and select their own places at the dinner table. With bold audacity, some guests select places of honor for themselves and do not consider others who might be more distinguished. This creates an awkward situation for both the host and the guest. Who wants to be asked to move from the best seat in the room to an inferior one?

3. *What is surprising about this text?*
4. *Why does Jesus invest time and energy teaching manners?*

Jesus instructs it is better to sit at the lowest seat and be asked to come forward to sit at the place of honor. “For all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.” (Luke 14:11 NRSV)

5. *What are examples in the Bible of the humbled being exalted?*
6. *What are examples in the Bible of the exalted being humbled?*

Jesus also addresses the host of the dinner. His concern is the cycle of entertaining where people continue to invite each other to dinner, trying to pay each other back for the previous meal. There is no end to such indebtedness. In fact, there can be a gradual escalation as one tries to impress or out-entertain the previous event.

Jesus introduces a whole new approach to hospitality. “When you give a luncheon or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, in case they may invite you in return, and you would be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind.” (Luke 14:13 NRSV) That is not a common list of people to invite to a banquet.

7. *What point is Jesus trying to make?*
8. *What is wrong with inviting friends and relatives?*

Throughout Luke’s Gospel, there is an emphasis on including the outsider. The specific four-fold list of the poor, crippled, lame and blind is repeated in Mary’s song (Luke 1) as well as in the first sermon by Jesus. (Luke 4:16-21) Disciples of Jesus are encouraged to go beyond giving food to the stranger but actually eating and interacting with those humbled by life’s circumstance. In doing so, there is a foretaste of the feast to come at God’s inclusive banquet of heaven.

word among us

There was a middle-aged couple who received an invitation to an engagement party located in a town several hours away. The groom was the son of some dear friends, so they decided to make the trip even though they would know very few people at the party.

The party was at night and the dimly lit street made it difficult to find the house. Thus, they were greatly relieved to see balloons on a mailbox and a party overflowing with people. As they walked up the drive and into the house, everyone was quite friendly and welcoming. But after a while, they got confused when they didn't see their friends. When the couple began asking people, they discovered that no one knew their friends.

It turned out they were at the wrong house and wrong party. Their party was on the next block. Somehow they had managed to stay forty-five minutes at the wrong party. They were horrified! But on the way out, people shouted, "It's ok to stay!" "Come back and enjoy our party."

1. *What would that have felt like to be the couple at the wrong house?*
2. *What etiquette have you learned about being a "good guest" at a dinner party?*

Imagine another party where a guest walked into the kitchen, grabbed some spices, and began adding seasoning to the food before it was served at the party.

3. *How would you respond to a guest who acted in such a manner?*
4. *If you are a guest, what is the role of humility?*
5. *In all circumstances, what is the role of humility?*

Although Jesus provides instruction about meals on earth, he is also pointing to heaven. Who among us is worthy to be at the banquet feast which has no end? Who among us is prepared for such a feast?

6. *Describe heaven in terms of a feast.*
7. *How does a human become worthy to be at such a banquet?*
8. *What does it feel like to be invited to and included in God's feast of heaven?*

It's hard to imagine heaven. Jesus suggests we can get a glimpse of the magnificent meal in heaven by hosting meals on earth which include all kinds of people, particularly those who are in need. But Jesus is not just suggesting we provide food at a food pantry or a once-a-year Thanksgiving meal for the homeless. Jesus encourages the hosts to dine with the guests.

This instruction is consistent with the inclusive and interactive nature of Jesus throughout his ministry. He continually chooses to eat and interact with sinners. He invites and includes those who have been traditionally left out. He pushes back boundaries and challenges his disciples to do likewise. Jesus is introducing a new kind of hospitality, one not built on common practices, but on grace and gracious sharing of resources. No paybacks are to be expected.

9. *How might this passage influence you doing the coming week?*
10. *What do you hope to remember from this passage?*

Prayer

Gracious God, instill in us a gracious spirit to invite and include those in need. Amen.

Dig Deeper

Psalms 112

last word

This week, invite someone to lunch who cannot repay you.



Daily Discipleship

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