

February 21: Luke 6-7

Chapter 6

Vs. 1-11, Jesus' conflicts with the Pharisees escalate in this passage regarding Sabbath observance. When his disciples are criticized, Jesus connects his authority as the Son of Man with that of King David (the royal ancestor of the Messiah) who allowed his companions to eat the bread of the Presence (the bread dedicated to God in the Temple, which only priests were allowed to eat). This would have been seen as a much greater offense than merely plucking grain on the Sabbath. Jesus strives to teach the Pharisees that the Sabbath is God's gift to people, not meant to be an undue burden on them, but a gift of rest and peace. *Is it lawful ...on the Sabbath* was a traditional rabbinical teaching formula used to discuss what kind of emergencies take precedence over Sabbath observance. The hard-hearted Pharisees did not see healing a disabled man as an emergency worth breaking the Sabbath for, but Jesus did. For Jesus people are always more important than rules. People always take precedence.

Vs. 12-19, Jesus spent the night in prayerful discernment before choosing his 12 apostles ("sent ones") from among his larger crowd of disciples (students) who had been following him around, learning from him. The crowd of disciples and the great multitude are from diverse backgrounds (cities, rural villages, Gentile territory). The crowd gathered around him in hopes of receiving healing or learning from him, he healed everyone who touched him.

Vs. 20-49, Luke's "Sermon on the Plain" is harsher and more concrete than Matthew's "Sermon on the Mount." Though the content is similar, Luke's version speaks to people's physical realities of hunger and poverty, and includes a litany of curses for those whose injustice causes the poverty in the first place, as well as for those who oppress Jesus' followers. BUT, Jesus then shifts immediately from the curses to vs. 27, urging his followers to love and do good to and bless and pray for all of those people whom Jesus just declared woe upon. The gospel of love is the power to transform those who have been unjust into those who work for the kingdom of God to come. Certainly Jesus loves every person in this world, even those whose present behavior of injustice displeases him. Jesus urges his disciples to employ non-violent resistance as a means to transform their oppressors' hearts. "Turn the other cheek" and "Whoever takes away your coat, do not withhold even your shirt" these are two examples of shocking and shaming those who are abusing you into better behavior. Jesus urges us to follow in

our heavenly father's footsteps of kindness and compassion –even toward those who don't deserve our kindness. By living in this openhearted fashion, Jesus promises that we will receive abundant blessings: "A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over will be put into your lap; for the measure you give will be the measure you get back." We don't have to judge and condemn others, we're simply to love them and pray for them, and leave the declarations of woe to Jesus.

As we enter into Lent, we engage in spiritual practices which put an end to hypocrisy and cultivate good spiritual fruit, kind hearts, and good speech. Jesus expects us to take his teachings seriously for our own and our neighbor's wellbeing. Living our faith gives us a foundation of strength and peace to weather the storms of life as they come.

Chapter 7

Vs. 1-23, Jesus embodies the role of prophet in these two stories, like Elisha healing Namaan the Syrian (a foreign officer), and Elijah raising the widow's son from the dead. It's worth noting that the Centurion was a rich man, the patron of the local synagogue. Jesus does not declare woe in chapter 6 on all rich people, but specifically on those whose behavior harms the less fortunate. This centurion has slaves, which was a common practice in Jesus' time, but he cares enough about his slave to seek out the very best care for him (Jesus, the miracle healer). The centurion exhibits sincere trust in Jesus, even without seeing Jesus.

A widow who had lost her only son would have been in an extremely vulnerable position in society. Jesus' gave her back not only her son, but her own life as well.

Jesus' answered John's question by showing forth himself to be the Messiah according to the criteria of the prophet Isaiah. He answered affirmatively by showing what he has accomplished already as God's anointed.

Vs. 24-50, John marks the end of the era of the prophets. John is the last prophet sent by God, the one who prepared the way for the Messiah. Jesus is irritated by the fact that neither he nor John was accepted by the religious elite of his time. They thought John was crazy and they thought Jesus was sacrilegious, Jesus is basically saying "nothing pleases you!" God's wisdom will reveal those who are truly faithful (and it turns out those are often the ones the Pharisees and scribes reject).

In Luke's gospel, we are not given the identity of the sinful woman. We are also not told the nature of her sin, though tradition assumes she was a prostitute. She would have known that she would not have been welcome in the home of a Pharisee, since as a "sinner" she was estranged from the worship life of the community, but she boldly entered the home and found Jesus and began anointing him. We can assume that she has already had a life-changing encounter with Jesus, and here she has come to offer what she has in gratitude for Jesus' grace toward her. She knows that she's been forgiven, which is why she's come to anoint Jesus' feet (a duty that not even slaves were forced to perform in this day –people's feet were gross from the dusty roads). Her footwashing and anointing is an extremely intimate act – aside from the fact that this woman was a known sinner, the act itself would have been viewed as scandalous between a woman and a "holy teacher". The guests at the banquet may have assumed that Jesus was interested in soliciting her services. All of these assumptions and righteous indignations are made via internal monologue, but Jesus knows what they're all thinking and so uses this bizarre scenario as a teachable moment for the crowd gathered. He shames Simon the Pharisee for failing to provide even the most basic hospitality (providing water to guests for them to wash their own feet), and lifts up the woman as an example of extravagant love in response to the extravagant grace that has been shown to her. Jesus then publicly proclaims her sins forgiven, for the benefit of the Pharisees gathered around. However, they are skeptical and further offended because only God has the authority to forgive sins.