

Devotions for Week of April 7, 2019
5th Sunday of Lent
LARGE-PRINT
North East United Methodist Church
By Rev. Dr. Drew M. Christian

Sunday, April 7, 2019

Read John 12: 20-33.

In our Gospel reading this morning, some Greeks came to Philip and said, “*Sir, we wish to see Jesus.*” We never discover if they had the opportunity to see Jesus, but when Philip and Andrew go to Jesus, Jesus uses the moment to teach them about His upcoming death and to challenge them to, not focus on this world, but to follow Him.

Jesus tells His disciples that the “*Son of Man [must] be glorified*” and that “*those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life.*” We know that Jesus is on a mission in the world because God loves the world, because the world is alienated from God because of sin. Jesus explains that one must “hate” one’s self and the world that is alienated from God. We must not love that which is opposite the God “*who so loved the world He gave His only begotten Son.*” We must not love that which is sinful, unholy, and unrighteous, and remember, “*no one is righteous, not one.*” Instead, our goal must not be of this world but must be to love God, to serve God, to be drawn to God through the Son. Jesus says, “*And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself... Whoever serves me, the Father will honor.*”

Jesus goes on to explain that when we “die” to self, focus on God, we will “*bear much fruit,*” like a single grain that “*falls into the earth and dies.*”

Our ability to say “yes” to God, to turn from focusing on a life in this world to our eternal life, to recognize and grasp the love of God seen in the cross of Christ, to serve and follow Christ working to bear fruit for the kingdom of God, is only possible because Jesus allowed Himself to be “*lifted up from the earth*” on the cross, sacrificing Himself for our sin. As Margaret A. Farley writes, “*The No of humanity, with its resulting radical incapacity to reverse itself, could be changed only by the Yes of God...*” Farley goes on to write, “*The God who became human will effect an action of ultimate love by dying on the cross of human existence...mak[ing] possible the Yes of humans into an unending future, and reveal[ing] the kind of God whose love can no longer be questioned.*”

Through Christ, God has given us the opportunity to say “YES” and “*follow*” Him. And in following Him, we will “*bear much fruit,*” as we no longer focus on our life in this world but on the One we serve and life eternal. Take time tonight to sit with Christ, to say “Yes,” to “*follow*” Him wherever He leads.

Monday, April 8, 2019

Read Luke 5: 27-32 and Luke 7: 34.

Unlike many of the pictures we see of Jesus where he is ministering to men and women like ourselves or asking the little children to come to Him, Jesus was criticized by others for eating and drinking with, as the New Living Translation puts it, “*scum.*” He had gained a reputation as a “*glutton*” and a “*drunkard.*” Yet, Jesus continued to reach out to the destitute,

the homeless, the criminal, the prostitute, the poor (*I wonder what people would say about me if they heard I was hanging out down at the local bars talking to people there*).

Jesus continued to reach out to people, love them, and walk with them. There was no one Jesus did not see to be a child of His Father God in heaven. Today, Jesus would have lunch with the abortion doctor, walk with the death row inmate, and spend time with the homosexual.

How often do we judge our neighbor and instead of ministering to them, being with them, we allow ourselves to feel superior in our walk with the Lord and/or we turn away from the person that is very different than we are. Is there a time you did not welcome someone into the church or your home because they were different, because you judged them? Is there someone you are not spending time with now because they are different? Where in your community is the message of Jesus not being preached due to fear and unfair judgment? Remember, Jesus said, *“Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, my servant also will be.”*

Pray that God will help you become more and more like Jesus, allowing you to see all people as children of the Most High God.

Tuesday, April 9, 2019

Read Luke 6: 1-11 and Luke 11: 38-54.

Jesus was not the long-haired, peace-loving hippie we sometimes picture Him as; in fact, Jesus was offensive. He spoke up boldly against the religious leaders and establishment of the day. He broke the religious laws that the priests handed down. He told those who went to church that not only had they not entered the kingdom but they were preventing others from

entering the kingdom of God. He was quick to point out the Pharisee's hypocrisy. Jesus did not believe in religion; Jesus believed in the heart.

Have you ever found yourself, like the Pharisees, judging someone based on rules you and your church have set up? Have you ever judged another for breaking the Sabbath? Have you ever found yourself sitting in church but not focusing your heart on God? What would Jesus say about the church if He came back today?

Jesus was not afraid to speak the truth. It upset Him greatly that people were acting as if they loved God on the outside, going through the motions, yet, on the inside, there was no heart change. He spoke up, even calling the church leaders "*children of the devil*." Jesus was clear that He did not come to bring peace but to bring a sword (Luke 12:51). He said He would bring division within families, within churches, and within communities. The division would come between those who choose to live by world standards and those who choose to live by God's standards. The division would come between those who choose to live by legalism and religion and those who choose to live by faith and love. Jesus was offensive to the church people of the day, challenging them to "*tear their hearts*" (Joel 2) and to get "real" with God.

Pray that God would help you to give Him all your heart. Pray that God would help you to be bold in your faith and stand against the hypocrisy that sometimes rises in yourself. Pray that you would help and not hinder others from looking up to Jesus.

Wednesday, April 10, 2019

Read Luke 11: 14-23.

Jesus said, *“Anyone who isn’t helping me opposes me, and anyone who isn’t working with me is actually working against me.”* It is an all or nothing proposition. There is no middle road, no lukewarm, no both/and. Jesus called for commitment. John MacArthur, in his book Hard To Believe, explains, *“If we are not willing to separate from our families, from the world, from the material things we possess, then Jesus is not so valuable to us – it is an all or nothing proposition – Following Christ is not about our self-esteem...It is about our being sick of our sin and our desperation for forgiveness...It is about seeing Christ as the priceless Savior from sin and death and hell – so that we willingly give up as much as it takes even if it costs us our families, our marriages and whatever else we cherish or possess – it may even cost us our lives.”*

Jesus did not simply walk around offering a message of love and forgiveness; Jesus challenged people to be willing to give up everything in order to be His disciple. In Luke 9: 23-26, Jesus says, *“He who keeps his life will lose it.”* In Luke 9: 57-62, Jesus tells His disciples that you are not fit for the kingdom of heaven if you look back, if you put family first. Our hearts must be given over to Christ completely.

This is a powerful message...a challenging, toe-stomping message. Have you given everything to Jesus? Are you constantly challenging yourself to focus more of your life on Him? Are you willing to let go of family, possessions, and friends for Jesus? Pray for that kind of faith. Pray to be “hot” in your walk with Christ and not simply “lukewarm.” God has promised to give you strength for the journey. Ask Him for that

strength now that you might let go of whatever is holding you back from giving everything to Him.

Thursday, April 11, 2019

I want to share with you an excerpt taken from a novel by Bill Myers, entitled Eli. This is a great book because it puts Jesus coming back today and suddenly His boldness, His challenging words, His uncompromising position, His anger against the religious establishment seem more real, more shocking, set in today's world and language. In this story Jesus is born into our world, not 2,000 years ago, but today. His name is Eli. There has been no Jesus before this. Eli, Jesus, begins to preach. In one scene, he goes into a center that has been built and dedicated to God, looks around at the marble, tiers of angels and biblical figures, beautiful fountains spouting water...

Eli speaks, "If you only knew what really brings fulfillment!" he shouted. His voice echoed through the plaza. "You can't find it in blessings! You can't find it in healings! You can't find it in wealth!" He let the phrase finished its reverberation before continuing. "And you certainly cannot find it in religion!" The last sentence surprised them all. Eli said nothing, letting it sink in as he carefully surveyed their faces..."Real joy – I mean deep, welling-up-inside-of-you joy – and real peace, they can only come from one thing...a relationship with God...All the splendor that you see here, all of this glory, it is nothing but so much plaque upon the teeth of God!" The crowd stirred unhappily. "For without the Spirit of God, this center [this church] means nothing! It is nothing!" "How can you say that?" a younger woman shouted. Others agreed. "Look at all the work and sacrifice that's gone into this place. And it's all for

God's glory!" More people cried out, voicing their agreement. Eli shook his head and did his best to shout over them.

"God does not want your sacrifice! He wants your obedience! He does not want your works. He wants your faith. God does not want your religion of concrete and marble, your traditions of service and dead programs. He wants your living hearts! He cries out for your friendship."

Read over this passage again. Take the words in. Where are you? Are you worshipping Jesus or the church? Are you walking in faith or religion? Is the Jesus you know one of heart, passion and strength? Is the Jesus you know one that challenges you to take a hard, deep look at yourself during this season of Lent? Pray that God will challenge you and show you the way to the way, the truth and the life. Pray that not only will you be saved as a believer in Jesus, but that you will be a disciple, going into the world, taking the Gospel to all those who would confuse the world & its religion with the Savior's world.

Friday, April 12, 2019

We are so quick to remember the beautiful stories of Jesus. We remember the story of Jesus reaching down and pulling Mary up by the hand, not allowing the crowd to stone her. We remember Jesus feeding the five thousand, Jesus walking on water, and Jesus calming the storm. We remember Jesus dispelling demons and healing the crippled and sick.

But what about the Jesus that got angry and with a righteous anger laid into the church people of the day? What about the Jesus that called for a radical, all-or-nothing, discipleship? What about the Jesus that came to bring a sword and not peace? What about the Jesus that challenges us to leave the world behind and

hold to things that “*moth and rust cannot eat away*”? Or what about the Jesus that tells us to offer the other cheek when someone slaps us across the face, to forgive the murderer, to love our enemy?

May Lent be a time to explore the many facets and teachings of Jesus, however challenging they may be. Read through the Gospels, the stories of Jesus, and get to know this Jesus. Allow Him to step on your toes and pray to Him for strength to follow Him down the long, dusty road.

Saturday, April 13, 2019

Read John 12: 20-33; John 14.

Jesus was controversial. He laid out there the decision that all have to make. Jesus said, “*I am the way, the truth, and the life...no one comes to the Father except through me.*” Period. Here’s where, as Henry Blackaby describes, occurs a crisis of belief. Do you believe what Jesus said? Is He the way, the truth and the life? Or not? Jesus calls for you to make a decision...He does not force you...He simply offers.

Lent is a time we explore what this decision means for our lives. What are we holding on to we must let go? Do we only see one side of this Jesus? Have we truly given our lives over to Him? Are we religious or are we disciples of Jesus? Are we loving those Jesus would love? Are we willing to sacrifice for this Jesus?

These are not easy questions but they are important questions. In answering these questions, we must remember the sacrifice Jesus calls us to make is a small thing to ask in comparison to the great sacrifice and love Jesus has shown us. Take time to simply give thanks and to talk to Him. **And remember to invite someone to church tomorrow.**