

MONDAY, 11/11

Read Luke 12:35-40.

³⁵ "Be dressed ready for service and keep your lamps burning, ³⁶ like servants waiting for their master to return from a wedding banquet, so that when he comes and knocks they can immediately open the door for him. ³⁷ It will be good for those servants whose master finds them watching when he comes. Truly I tell you, he will dress himself to serve, will have them recline at the table and will come and wait on them. ³⁸ It will be good for those servants whose master finds them ready, even if he comes in the middle of the night or toward daybreak. ³⁹ But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have let his house be broken into. ⁴⁰ You also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him."

When Jesus was on His way to Jerusalem to lay down His life, He took the time to teach about His return. Jesus' return is also called the Day of Judgment, the Day of Redemption, and other names. It is a day of both joy and dread. Jesus will come to make all things new--to merge heaven and earth--so that God can dwell with us again. That also includes Jesus' judging the ones who do not want to be a part of God's Kingdom to make way for His Kingdom to come. How you perceive it is based on whether you are a part of God's family or not.

One of Jesus' instructions to His followers is to be ready. He tells us the "day and the hour" of His return is unknown. We must be prepared for the day to come at any time. He uses the image of servants ready to receive their master after he returns from a wedding banquet. Wedding celebrations in Jesus' day carried on for days. The servants wouldn't know when to expect their master, so they just needed to be ready to receive him so that they might serve him.

Jesus calls on us to be waiting expectantly for His return. What does it look like to be ready? John Wesley was once asked this question. He replied that when Jesus returns, he hoped that Jesus would find him busy doing the work of the Kingdom. Wesley said the person who is faithful to Jesus' call is ready for Him to return at any time.

If Jesus were to return today, would you be ready? If you answered yes, what makes you prepared? If you said no, then why not? What can you begin doing that will make you prepared for His return?

Praying Together:

"Lord, we want to be dressed and ready for Your return. We long for the day when You will come and make all things new. May You find us doing Your will at that time. Amen."

TUESDAY, 11/12

Read Luke 13:31-35.

³¹ At that time some Pharisees came to Jesus and said to him, "Leave this place and go somewhere else. Herod wants to kill you."

³² He replied, "Go tell that fox, 'I will keep on driving out demons and healing people today and tomorrow, and on the third day I will reach my goal.' ³³ In any case, I must press on today and tomorrow and the next day—for surely no prophet can die outside Jerusalem!

³⁴ "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing. ³⁵ Look, your house is left to you desolate. I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.'"

We often think of the Pharisees as opponents to Jesus. While that is true in many cases, there are several places in the gospels where we see them stand with Jesus. This is one of those instances.

Some Pharisees, who we imagine respected Jesus, came to Him with a warning. Herod wanted to kill Jesus, and they wanted to save His life. Jesus' reply points to what He knows is to come. Death is before Him, but not at Herod's hands. Herod will not deter His ministry. Jesus will continue His work even when He is placed on a cross. He will triumph over demons, disease, and even death. This will be accomplished in Jerusalem and no other place.

As Jesus' mind turns toward Jerusalem, He is filled with grief. Jesus weeps for the city where He will be rejected. He grieves for the city whose rejection of Him will symbolize the rejection of the world.

Jesus could easily have been outraged by what they will do to Him, but instead, He mourns for them. He wishes He could have gathered the people to Himself like a "hen gathers her chicks under her wings". What a powerful image. Mother hens often serve as a refuge for their chicks. By bringing them near, they keep their chicks from outside dangers. This was Jesus' desire, but they rejected Him instead.

Jesus often points to the heart of God toward humanity. This is one of those moments in His life where we see His desire to restore us at all costs. Jesus was driven to make a way for a broken humanity to be redeemed. Nothing would get in His way, even us.

How grateful we are for Jesus' determination to save us, for One who loved us more than we loved ourselves, who wanted better for us than we wanted.

Jesus proves over and over again that He is good and worthy of our trust. Moments like these in the gospels should serve to bolster our confidence in Him.

Praying Together:

"Jesus, we are humbled by Your heart. You love us and want better for us than we do. Your love is amazing. Continue Your work of empowering us to love as You do. Give us hearts that are eager to serve others like You did. Amen."

WEDNESDAY, 11/13

Read Luke 14:15-24,

¹⁵ When one of those at the table with him heard this, he said to Jesus, "Blessed is the one who will eat at the feast in the kingdom of God."

¹⁶ Jesus replied: "A certain man was preparing a great banquet and invited many guests. ¹⁷ At the time of the banquet he sent his servant to tell those who had been invited, 'Come, for everything is now ready.'

¹⁸ "But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said, 'I have just bought a field, and I must go and see it. Please excuse me.' ¹⁹ "Another said, 'I have just bought five yoke of oxen, and I'm on my way to try them out. Please excuse me.' ²⁰ "Still another said, 'I just got married, so I can't come.'

²¹ "The servant came back and reported this to his master. Then the owner of the house became angry and ordered his servant, 'Go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame.'

²² "'Sir,' the servant said, 'what you ordered has been done, but there is still room.' ²³ "Then the master told his servant, 'Go out to the roads and country lanes and compel them to come in, so that my house will be full. ²⁴ I tell you, not one of those who were invited will get a taste of my banquet.'"

One of the images for life with God in the Kingdom is that of a feast. It is often called the Messianic Banquet. It is the time when we will have complete fellowship with Christ, the Gracious Host who has invited us to share in His life.

I love this image of eternal life because I have often encountered people who believed God was a killjoy, some kind of cosmic party pooper. That is so far from the truth. Jesus' table is a table of joy, of feasting and delight.

A better understanding would be to see God as the source of our joy. He is the reason we can rejoice, not just here but for all eternity. God's Kingdom will be one of great celebration. Rejoicing in Him is the order of the day, actually all our days. Imagine One so great that we feel compelled to worship and celebrate Him for eternity. In the Kingdom, people aren't forced to worship. When they see the Lord, they cannot help but praise Him.

The Parable of the Wedding Banquet reminds us that Jesus, our Host, made a place for us at the table. It's unfortunate that many who had received invitations refused to take their place. This is an image of the Jewish people who rejected Jesus. They had a front row seat to what God was doing but refused to accept it. They will, by their own fault, miss the party.

The good news is that the invitation to Jesus' table extended far beyond the initial invitations. Jesus is still inviting people to His table. We are simply the messengers sent to deliver the

invitations. May we fulfill such a glorious call that we may see His table filled with those with whom He longs to celebrate.

Praying Together:

“Jesus our Savior, we praise You for making a place for us at Your table. We heed Your call to be messengers who invite others to come to Your table. We look forward to the celebration. Amen.”

THURSDAY, 11/14

Read Luke 14:25-35.

²⁵ *Large crowds were traveling with Jesus, and turning to them he said: ²⁶ “If anyone comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, even their own life—such a person cannot be my disciple. ²⁷ And whoever does not carry their cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.*

²⁸ *“Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Won’t you first sit down and estimate the cost to see if you have enough money to complete it? ²⁹ For if you lay the foundation and are not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule you, ³⁰ saying, ‘This person began to build and wasn’t able to finish.’*

³¹ *“Or suppose a king is about to go to war against another king. Won’t he first sit down and consider whether he is able with ten thousand men to oppose the one coming against him with twenty thousand? ³² If he is not able, he will send a delegation while the other is still a long way off and will ask for terms of peace. ³³ In the same way, those of you who do not give up everything you have cannot be my disciples.*

³⁴ *“Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? ³⁵ It is fit neither for the soil nor for the manure pile; it is thrown out. “Whoever has ears to hear, let them hear.”*

Ok, so this is likely not anyone's favorite saying of Jesus. This passage often stirs up questions for us. We wonder, *are we really supposed to hate ourselves and our loved ones?*

In short, no. Jesus is using hyperbole to make a point. Jesus both calls us to love completely and empowers us to love in such a way. He has called us to love our neighbors and our enemies. What Jesus is doing is grabbing our attention in order to make us consider whom and what we love and how much.

Often the greatest loves in our lives will be our parents, spouses, children or ourselves. We place them at the center of our world. While it is far from a bad thing to love those, they aren't meant to be our chief love; God is. In fact, when we make any of them our chief love, we actually do a disservice to them. Here is what I mean. When we put them at the center of our lives, we place a tremendous burden on them to fill our needs. We expect our spouse to make us feel whole. We look to our children to give us purpose. We may look to ourselves to create a meaningful, rich life. What happens then when your spouse has a bad day and doesn't meet

your need? What happens when your children disappoint you? What happens when you can't make the life you dream of?

When we get our chief love right by placing God as our greatest love, He sets everything in its rightful place. He is the One who makes us feel whole and gives us purpose and meaning. With those needs fulfilled in Him, we are freed now to love our parents, spouses, children, and selves as we were meant to. We don't have to clobber them with our need because God has already met our need. This is the only way to keep us from harming our closest relationships with our neediness.

Jesus is calling us to get our loves right. If we don't have Him as our greatest love, then something or someone will eventually take that place.

Praying Together:

"God, You and You alone satisfy my deepest needs. You are my chief love. Thank You for freeing me to love those You've placed in my life as I am intended to. Amen."

FRIDAY, 11/15

Read Luke 15:1-10.

Now the tax collectors and sinners were all gathering around to hear Jesus. ²But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them."

³Then Jesus told them this parable: ⁴"Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Doesn't he leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? ⁵And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders ⁶and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.' ⁷I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent.

⁸"Or suppose a woman has ten silver coins^[a] and loses one. Doesn't she light a lamp, sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it? ⁹And when she finds it, she calls her friends and neighbors together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost coin.' ¹⁰In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents."

This great chapter begins with this rather interesting vision of Jesus' ministry at this point in time: "Now all the tax collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to Him." Even the religious outcasts were coming to Him.

Verse 2 tells us that the religious leaders were not all that thrilled about Jesus' spending time with these known sinners. Their complaint was that "this man welcomes sinners and eats with them." In their culture, eating with someone meant that you accepted them. For Jesus to fellowship with the religious outcasts put His own reputation and standing in the religious community at risk.

For Jesus, sitting at the table with sinners did not mean that He readily endorsed everything they did; instead, it was an effort to invite them into His Kingdom. It was to give them a glimpse of the Kingdom through their fellowship with Him. We see over and over in the gospels that many of these "sinners" are so profoundly touched by Jesus that they willingly separate from what they have been to take up a new life with Him.

Jesus will go on to tell several parables about people taking risks to find something of value that was lost. First, it is a shepherd who loses one of his sheep. He leaves the 99 others in a safe place before setting out in pursuit of the one lost sheep. When he finds it, there is much rejoicing. The second is of a woman who has ten valuable coins and loses one of them. She tears the house apart in search of the coin. When she finds it, she calls her neighbors to celebrate. Jesus' point is that He is the One who has come to seek and save the lost. He still does. That means that we too should join this work and be ready to celebrate when one of His precious lost ones is found.

Praying Together:

"Jesus, we love Your heart toward us--that even when we were lost, You chased after us. Help Your church to share Your heart toward those who may be far from You. Amen."

SATURDAY, 11/16

Read Luke 15:11-24.

¹¹ Jesus continued: "There was a man who had two sons. ¹²The younger one said to his father, 'Father, give me my share of the estate.' So he divided his property between them.

¹³ "Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living. ¹⁴After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. ¹⁵So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. ¹⁶He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything.

¹⁷ "When he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! ¹⁸I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. ¹⁹I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired servants.' ²⁰So he got up and went to his father.

"But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.

²¹ "The son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.'

²² "But the father said to his servants, 'Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. ²³Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and

celebrate. ²⁴For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' So they began to celebrate.

Have you ever been at rock bottom? It's not a fun place to be. The prodigal son found himself in just that place. When "his eyes were opened" to the reality of his situation, he knew what he had to do. He had to go back home--only it wasn't that easy. He left home in what was considered in his day to be the most disrespectful way. The prodigal son knew he had forfeited his place as his father's son. That's why he hatches the plan to go back to his father as something less than a son, as one of his slaves.

As the son makes his way home, Jesus says that when the son was "still a long way off," his father saw him and "ran to him, hugged him, and kissed him".

Now, this part of the story would have stunned Jesus' audience. Jewish men, especially elders of the family, didn't run. It's not that they were fearful of getting injured, but that they considered it undignified. And yet, that is what the father does. He runs. He runs to a son that his community said should have been cut off. He gives up his dignity to embrace his lost child.

Now, we know this image is more than a fictitious story. It captures our Heavenly Father's love for His lost children. This is our story. When we were at rock bottom, realizing that we were far from the Father, we turned back home, hoping to be received as something less than what we were made to be. Yet when the Father saw us, He threw His arms around us. He welcomed us as His beloved and made us more than sons and daughters.

Praying Together:

"God, You are love. That is evident in this story that reveals Your heart toward us and all those who are far from You. You long to meet us and offer us a place in Your home again. Thank You for seeking us and embracing us when we did not deserve it. Amen."

SUNDAY, 11/17

Read Luke 15:25-32.

²⁵ "Meanwhile, the older son was in the field. When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. ²⁶ So he called one of the servants and asked him what was going on. ²⁷ 'Your brother has come,' he replied, 'and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.'

²⁸ "The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him. ²⁹ But he answered his father, 'Look! All these years I've been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. ³⁰ But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!'

³¹ *“My son,’ the father said, ‘you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. ³²But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.”*

The parable continues with the dutiful older son who was out in the field when he discovered that his younger brother had returned. For the father, the news produced joy. For the older brother, this news made him furious.

The older brother captures the attitude we would expect, especially in a patriarchal society like that of the first century. Honor would demand the younger son be written off and considered dead to the family.

Jesus introduces this component to the story because He was experiencing a similar attitude from the Jewish religious community in regard to His ministry to the Gentiles. Luke emphasizes Jesus' interaction with the Gentiles because they needed to know Jesus gave them the same invitation to life. Some in the religious community didn't see it that way.

Jesus wants to extend the invitation to the Kingdom to all people. He wants everyone to come home and to be reunited with their Heavenly Father. As the church, we must always check our spirit and attitude toward others. Are there people we refuse to invite? It is our responsibility to align our hearts with the Father whose love and generosity compels Him to reach out to the lost.

Praying Together:

“Lord, examine our hearts. We don't want the attitude of the older brother to seep into us. We want to share Your spirit so that we can be true partners with You in reaching the world. Amen. “