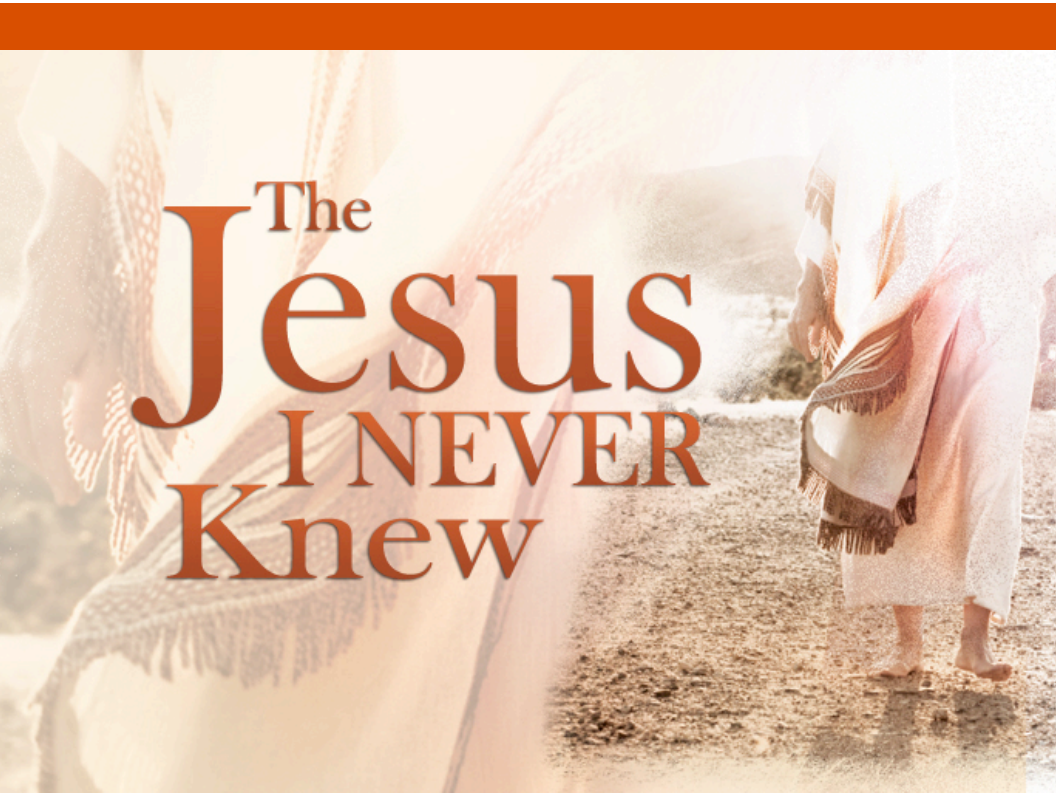


Weekly Devotional



The Jesus I NEVER Knew

September 19 - 23, 2011

Questions

Luke 7:36-50

1. How might you describe the various individuals at the dinner? What was each of their motivations for being present?
2. What limits do we put on hospitality? What behaviors do we find most shocking?
3. Which character in the story do you most identify?
4. What are the limits of Jesus' compassion towards us?
5. What can you do to foster your own thankfulness towards God this week?
6. What people do you want to view more with Jesus' eyes?
7. What do you learn about following Jesus in this account?
8. What was Jesus' double blessing on the woman? How have you received a similar blessing?



Monday

Luke 18:15-30



N.T. Wright in *Luke for Everyone* writes: “In God’s new age, so the Jews believed, everything will be new, fresh, and free from corruption, decay, evil, bitterness, pain, fear and death. ... There will be new possibilities and opportunities, new joys and delights. Heaven and earth will be joined together; God and His children will live with each other. ... And that is what Jesus was bringing in the present.”

The rich ruler became sad “because he began to realize that to live in this new age he had to abandon the values of the old and trust himself totally to the new. ... He couldn’t seriously be seeking for the new age if he couldn’t abandon the symbols of the old. The commandments were good and important; but if he was wedded to possessions—which formed an important symbol of identity for the Jew—then he would never be able to accept God’s kingdom like a child, with the humble trust that allowed God to be God.”

“Luke emphasized how young the babies were that people were bringing to Jesus. Jesus’ rebuke rings out still today in a world where thousands of children are treated as sub-human, as disposable commodities. These are the ones, he says, who most truly show us what it means to accept and enter God’s kingdom. There is something about the helplessness of children, and their complete trust of those who love and care for them, which perfectly demonstrate the humble trust He [is calling us to]. He sees to the heart of what it means to receive God’s kingdom; it is like ... learning to see—and to smile” as when we are newborn babies. (pp. 215-217)

How do we come to Jesus? Do we come with our lives together, striving to have it together, striving to earn or at least show ourselves worthy of our salvation, or do we come as children ready to trust, grow, learn and experience the joy of life, knowing we are fully loved and cared for?

Pray for children around the world, especially in places where parents make decisions to sell their children in order to make ends meet.

Tuesday

John 4:1-26



Many women speak on this passage. For me it was just another passage until last year when Dottie McKissick spoke on it at Women's Refresh. Dottie mentioned that most people read this passage focusing on how sinful the woman was. She continued saying that 2000 years ago women could not seek a divorce; they were divorced without their having any say. In reality, this Samaritan woman had been rejected five times. Yes, now she was living with a man who was not her husband; but after five rejections, it was almost a necessity to have someone just to provide for her. The Samaritans themselves were outcasts. The Jews saw them as unclean and would not associate with them because many had inner married with gentiles during the Assyrian and Babylonian occupations of Israel.

In studying Luke 1 recently, I was reminded of what it must have been like for Elizabeth, John the Baptist's mother. Being barren was grounds for divorce. Other women would have talked about her. At best, they would have shaken their heads saying, "Poor Elizabeth. I wonder why God dislikes her." At worst, they would have said things behind her back about how sinful she must be. Such was the mentality of the time.

Elizabeth was barren because God had something great in mind for her. Jesus went to the Samaritan woman, sought her out, and loved her even in the midst of her shame. Many of us grow up feeling rejected or struggling with shame. Many of us constantly try to live up to someone's idea of who we should be. Many of us feel like outcasts with little or nothing to offer. Many of us are in some way "different" and wonder why. Jesus comes to the lowly, the hurt, and the rejected with these words: "I love you. You are precious in my sight. I would die for you if you were the only person on earth."

Today celebrate how precious you are to Jesus and then try to enable another person to feel precious.

Pray for couples who are struggling with infertility.



Wednesday

Mark 14:27-31, 66-72; 16:1-7

My guess is that just about everyone can relate to Peter in one way or another. Maybe not in his leadership skills (not all of us are called to be the leader of the team). But when it comes to sticking his foot in his mouth or boasting only to be caught up short....Ha! Then we can relate. We like Peter because we see our failures and our shortcomings in him. I especially like this story in Mark. Maybe it is because I know myself all too well and pray that what is true for Peter will be true for me.

Peter loves Jesus; he promises to be with Jesus to the bitter end. Jesus cautions him on such bold statements, but Peter remains firm. But then Jesus gets arrested. Now Peter is not standing physically with Jesus, but struggling to make sense of what is going on when he is asked, "Aren't you with Jesus?" Now Peter is on the hot seat. Now if he says "yes," he cannot control the outcome. Now if he says "yes," he might find himself being arrested. And so Peter just shakes his head "no." Gently at first, but eventually—maybe because he is dealing with his own emotions and inability to live up to his word—he says "no" more forcefully. Then the rooster crows and it all comes back to Peter. Now that he is out of immediate danger, he is safe to deal with his inability to live up to his own ideals of who he should be.

But then Easter comes and Jesus singles out Peter. Jesus wants Peter to know that he is still one of the disciples, that he has not forfeited his standing because of his failures and lack of ability. What great news! Forgiveness extends even to those who, despite all warning, purposefully blow it! We are included in God's family not because of our abilities but because of Jesus' cross. Wow! What great news!

Our walk with Jesus is never based on our abilities. We are called to do things that we can only succeed at doing with the Holy Spirit's power. Jesus' grace extends to the very areas that we don't want to face. Where do you need to accept the gift of grace and forgiveness for yourself? Where do you need to extend it to another?

Pray for those in prison and those who minister to prisoners.

Thursday

John 21

It is always interesting to read how various theologians interpret this passage. Three times Peter betrayed Jesus. Three times Jesus asks, "Peter, do you love me?" Those who know the Greek language know that the third time Jesus changes the word for love from *agape* to *philo*, from unconditional love to friendship love. Some will say that Jesus will end up lessening His demands of Peter, coming down to the level of love Peter is able to give and that is why Peter is hurt by the third question. However, there is a lot of speculation in this.

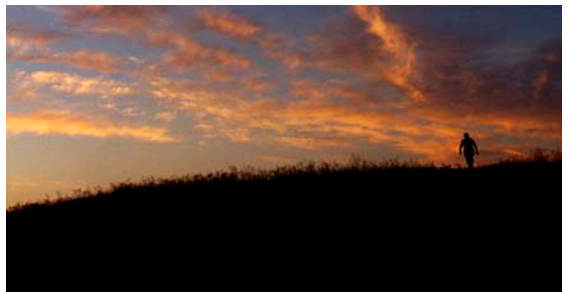
A few years ago I heard someone take a somewhat different viewpoint. This individual felt that Jesus' questions were really asking Peter, "Peter, do you love me more than your job (these boats, these fish, the life you have built for yourself)? Peter, do you love me more than these other men (meaning more than acceptance and popularity)? And finally, Peter, do you love me more than you love yourself, your own life? Peter, if you love me more than your possessions and popularity, then feed and care for my sheep, my lambs, the people I care about. Follow me by spending your life for others and recognize that this will cost you your life. Peter's first response was, "What about John?" Jesus' response was, "Leave John to me. You just worry about yourself and what I am asking of you."

Jesus continually asks us the same questions and gives us the same warnings. Our job is continually to look at our priorities and make sure we are being good stewards with everything God has given to us, ready in a heartbeat to give it all back to God because we trust God explicitly. Our job is not to worry about how others are doing their ministry; our job is to care for those whom God puts on our hearts.

The grace part of this story is that Jesus knows our weaknesses. He knows what we can handle. He knows when He needs to give us more insight and when we need to be challenged to trust. And He knows that even when we fail, there will be grace for us to begin again.

How is your heart with Jesus? He takes us as we are, but through His Spirit calls us to greater things than we can imagine.

Prayer: Pray for those who are struggling in their walk with Jesus, especially in the midst of hardships and disappointments.



Friday

Luke 7:36-50



The Pharisees were known for their opposition to Jesus. Some, like Nicodemus in John 3, eventually come to faith. Some, like Simon, are curious and seek Jesus out to discover for themselves who He might be. So Simon invites Jesus to his home. Three times we are told that Simon is a Pharisee (a presumably upright person who kept the law), and twice we are told that the incident took place at Simon's home. When someone comes to your home, certain courtesies would be appropriate, and these courtesies were not extended by Simon.

N.T. Wright, commenting on this passage, wrote that Luke "writes about what will happen when God brought in His kingdom. It would be a time of exuberant generosity, surprising grace, and at the same time fierce opposition, which would meet God's judgment. Now we see, in a single incident, what this looks like in practice. Social convention is thrown out the window; forgiveness and love set new standards and raise new expectations; human beings appear, not as society has 'constructed' them, but as God sees them....When we look closer at the detail of the story, one of the things we notice is the way in which Jesus turns the tables on the Pharisee. He is the one who is guilty of poor hospitality—almost as much of a social blunder as the woman's letting down of her hair. The Pharisee has never come to terms with the depths of his own heart, and so he doesn't appreciate God's generous love when it sits in person at his own table. For Luke, true faith is what happens when someone looks at Jesus and discovers God's forgiveness; and the sign and proof of this faith is love" (Luke For Everyone, pp. 91-92).

Where do you find yourself in the story? When I discover myself judging another, I am reminded of this passage. When I am more concerned with outward actions and activities than I am with my heart, I am reminded of this story. When I check on my love for God, I am reminded of this story and find myself seeking forgiveness.

Prayer: Pray for the women throughout the world caught up in the sex trafficking industry.



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