



WHERE LIFE & PURPOSE CONNECT

Grow, Pray, Study for the Week of October 8, 2023

Weekly Prayer

Holy One, you have made us one with you and taught us to be one with one another. Be with me, helping me to encounter your presence throughout the day. Make me to embody your love, mercy, and justice and guide me to see others fully as your beloved ones. Amen.

Monday, October 9

Scripture: Mark 10:46-52 (Common English Bible)

Jesus and his followers came into Jericho. As Jesus was leaving Jericho, together with his disciples and a sizable crowd, a blind beggar named Bartimaeus, Timaeus' son, was sitting beside the road. When he heard that Jesus of Nazareth was there, he began to shout, "Jesus, Son of David, show me mercy!" Many scolded him, telling him to be quiet, but he shouted even louder, "Son of David, show me mercy!" Jesus stopped and said, "Call him forward." They called the blind man, "Be encouraged! Get up! He's calling you." Throwing his coat to the side, he jumped up and came to Jesus. Jesus asked him, "What do you want me to do for you?" The blind man said, "Teacher, I want to see." Jesus said, "Go, your faith has healed you." At once he was able to see, and he began to follow Jesus on the way.

Observation

In the verses immediately before this passage, the disciples are asking Jesus who is "the greatest" among them. Jesus tells them to follow in his example, as one who has come to serve, rather than be served, and to bring liberation and healing for all people. The disciples, with full sight and full access to Jesus, did not fully understand his mission. Now we meet Bartimaeus, who is blind and without regular access to Jesus, who is able to see Jesus fully and understand that Christ is the one who redeems and restores us. While the disciples sought glory, Bartimaeus sought understanding.

Application

Many accounts of Jesus' healings can be challenging for our modern ears. While the ancient world was quick to cast aside people based on their gender, relationship, economic status, neurodiversity or physical abilities, we live in a time where our differences and diversities can be embraced and celebrated. Our goal, and calling, is to be an inclusive body of Christ, who see and celebrate diversity within rather than making a goal of "sameness." Unlike the crowd around him, Jesus sees Bartimaeus fully and

recognizes his deep faith. Bartimaeus was not “broken” in his blindness, but like all of us is made whole by our love of Christ. Even without sight, Bartimaeus is able to see Christ fully, identifying him as the Son of David. What Bartimaeus teaches us, is that it is our faith, not our status, that brings us to our whole selves in Christ.

Prayer

Holy Christ, thank you for seeing and knowing me fully. Help me to embrace the others, that together we can experience the fullness of your kingdom. Remind me that I am made wholly perfect by your love. Amen.

Tuesday, October 10

Scripture: Mark 7:24-30 (Common English Bible)

Jesus left that place and went into the region of Tyre. He didn't want anyone to know that he had entered a house, but he couldn't hide. In fact, a woman whose young daughter was possessed by an unclean spirit heard about him right away. She came and fell at his feet. The woman was Greek, Syrophenician by birth. She begged Jesus to throw the demon out of her daughter. He responded, “The children have to be fed first. It isn't right to take the children's bread and toss it to the dogs.” But she answered, “Lord, even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs.” “Good answer!” he said. “Go on home. The demon has already left your daughter.” When she returned to her house, she found the child lying on the bed and the demon gone.

Observation

This is a complicated and difficult passage, with lots to unpack. The woman and daughter in our story are Greek immigrants and Gentiles. With bravery, she approaches Jesus and asks for healing. And at first, Jesus dismisses her to instead care for the people of Tyre. The woman is insistent and pleads with Jesus to see her fully and heal her daughter.

Application

I'll admit, I struggle with this passage and hearing Jesus initially overlook the woman's request. But then I wonder, what is Jesus modeling for me? For us? He was busy in his ministry with a long list of goals and objectives. This woman disrupted that, challenging Jesus to accept the interruption and see the need in front of him. When he did? We see healing and restoration.

How often do the tasks and agenda of your day limit the interactions in front of you? Have you missed an opportunity to show love? To experience full community and healing, because it wasn't “scheduled” or written on your to do list? I know I have. Jesus reminds me here that the most important work is always the person in need who is in front of us. Our child in need of a hug is more pressing than laundry. The visit with a neighbor is more important than lawn care. A smile and word of gratitude to a barista is greater than our rush for coffee. When we pause, and redirect our attention, we too will find community and healing. How might Jesus open your eyes and heart today?

Prayer

Jesus, my Christ, be with me today. Open my eyes, hands, and heart to be present to those around me. Disrupt the order of my day, that I might embrace opportunities to love and see those around me more fully. Amen.

Wednesday, October 11

Scripture: Mark 4:21-25 (The Message)

Jesus went on: "Does anyone bring a lamp home and put it under a bucket or beneath the bed? Don't you put it up on a table or on the mantel? We're not keeping secrets, we're telling them; we're not hiding things, we're bringing them out into the open. "Are you listening to this? Really listening? "Listen carefully to what I am saying—and be wary of the shrewd advice that tells you how to get ahead in the world on your own. Giving, not getting, is the way. Generosity begets generosity. Stinginess impoverishes."

Observation

This passage is in the middle of several parables, where Jesus is helping us learn how to be a disciple. Here, Jesus reminds us that the story of God's grace in our lives is something to be shared, as a lamp on a table. We are to be bold in our listening and our living, that all we do is wrapped in the generous love of Christ.

Application

This passage reminds me of a song I learned as a child: "*O be careful little ears what you hear ... for the Father up above is looking down in love, so be careful little ears what you hear.*" In this age of information, it reminds me to be cautious in the words and messages we receive. Are we listening to the word of Jesus in our life? Or are we focused on messages that cause us to doubt our worthiness, our abundance, our gifts for the world? God desires that we are transformed by Christ's love. How might you take time to pause, sit in the presence of God, and reflect on God's presence in your life today?

Prayer

Good and loving God, open my heart and my senses that I pay attention to your word and guidance. Help me to embrace your Gospel of love, mercy and grace, that it transforms my whole life. Amen.

Thursday, October 12

Scripture: Psalm 116:1-2 (Common English Bible)

I love the Lord because God hears my requests for mercy. I'll call out to God as long as I live, because God listens closely to me.

Observation

The Psalmist continues, in this chapter, to praise God for being faithful through times of distress and worry. It is because of God's faithful presence and listening, that the Psalmist

feels comforted and confident that they will be okay. "I tell myself, you can be at peace again, because the Lord has been good to you." (v7)

Application

Throughout this sermon series, we are considering the ways that our listening can help us better respect, affirm, and care for one another. I'm guessing each of us has an example of when we felt valued because God, or others, "really listened" to us. Listening helps us feel seen. I'll admit, I am not always good at this! Recently, one of my boys said to me, "Mom, stop interrupting me!" And while I hadn't interrupted their speaking, I realized I was talking over their space to listen deeply and respond. I was so rushed in the conversation, and quick to "listen so I could respond," that I wasn't really *hearing* them.

Listening is also a practice. It takes time and intention to do well. How might you practice deep listening today? Try this: be fully present when others are speaking to you. Don't rush to consider your reaction or response, but solely listen. Then pause and reflect before responding. Does this make an impact? How does it feel to practice this same deep listening while in prayer, trusting that God is offering you the same?

Prayer

God who hears, thank you for listening to the longings of my heart, the words of my mouth, and the sighs of my lungs. I trust you to see and understand me fully. Help me to practice this same art of listening, that I give space for others to be fully seen, too. Amen.

Friday, October 13

Scripture: Matthew 7:24-29 (Common English Bible)

"Everybody who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise builder who built a house on bedrock. The rain fell, the floods came, and the wind blew and beat against that house. It didn't fall because it was firmly set on bedrock. But everybody who hears these words of mine and doesn't put them into practice will be like a fool who built a house on sand. The rain fell, the floods came, and the wind blew and beat against that house. It fell and was completely destroyed." When Jesus finished these words, the crowds were amazed at his teaching because he was teaching them like someone with authority and not like their legal experts.

Observation

This is another passage I was taught as a child through song. Perhaps some of you were, too? (If you're unfamiliar, or want a reminder, you can listen to it here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Eu5bBDRpzPM>) Jesus teaches us to be wise in building our lives and faith practices – placing them upon solid ground that withstands many treacherous elements. Christ is our firm foundation and is strong enough to hold us throughout every time and circumstance.

Application

I love how easily understood this passage is, and all of us can immediately picture a house

on rock or sand, and make a connection to our faith practices. We're not alone, because the passage ends by saying those hearing were "amazed" at Jesus words because he taught them in ways they could understand. Here's my challenge today: when we talk about our faith and impact Jesus has made on our life, can we share in ways that people can easily understand? Can we use simple imagery and words, so that folks who have not grown up attending worship or reading scripture, or folks who have been hurt by the church, can see and understand your story more easily? How might your words and actions about your faith story be shared in a way that is understandable and invitational?

Prayer

God, you are my rock and my redeemer. I give thanks for your faithfulness throughout my life and in every circumstance. Give me wisdom to embody your story of love and share it in such a way that others, through me, can get a glimpse of your redeeming love. Amen.

Saturday, October 14

Scripture: Mark 9:7 (Common English Bible)

Then a cloud overshadowed them, and a voice spoke from the cloud, "This is my Son, whom I dearly love. Listen to him!"

Observation

This single verse is part of the Transfiguration story in Mark. (*Read the whole thing here: <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Mark+9%3A2-12&version=CEB>*.) It is one of my all-time favorite stories in scripture. It's literally a mountain-top experience, where Peter, James and John see Jesus *transfigured* before them. They have followed him as a disciple, but here they see Jesus as both fully human and fully divine. It's a life changing moment, where they see Christ *fully* for who he is. It not only changes their lives, but their relationships. And it better equips them for everything else ahead.

Application

As we close out this week, I want you to consider: how does being *fully seen* change your life and relationships? The disciples have already shaped their lives by following Jesus. But here, in this transfiguration, they see him dazzling in all his divine glory. There is no going back now; everything has changed. This moment allows their understanding and love to deepen. It doesn't stop doubt, misunderstandings, or conflict from happening in the future, but seeing Christ fully awakens them to new possibilities in their love of God and one another. When have you felt fully seen? How has that changed your relationships?

Prayer

God of creation, you have given me your beloved and dearly loved Son. Help me to listen and to follow. Guide me, that I trust that you love me with that same delight and help me to love others as deeply. Amen.