



WHERE LIFE & PURPOSE CONNECT

Grow, Pray, Study for the Week of August 20, 2023

Weekly Prayer

God of the world, through Jesus Christ, you reached out to humanity to bring salvation and abundant life. Help me to love as you love, so that all creation may live in the fullness of your abundant life. Amen.

Monday, August 21

Matthew 28:16-20

Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus told them to go. When they saw him, they worshipped him, but some doubted. Jesus came near and spoke to them, "I've received all authority in heaven and on earth. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to obey everything that I've commanded you. Look, I myself will be with you every day until the end of this present age."

Observation

Our guiding verse for this series comes from the final verses in Matthew's gospel, shortly after the resurrection. Jesus is preparing his followers for "what's next," knowing that the season of traveling and ministering together has closed. Now the ministry of Jesus will continue through his followers, their love, and teachings.

Application

Jesus begins, saying he's "received all authority in heaven and on earth" (v18). How might this bring you confidence in the ways you follow Jesus? Might these words help minimize any worry or fear, remembering that Christ has "received authority" and now shares it with you?

Prayer

Beloved Jesus, as I study your story and teachings, help me to understand your intention, giving me guidance for the ways that I follow you today. Amen.

Tuesday, August 22

Luke 4:1-13

Jesus returned from the Jordan River full of the Holy Spirit, and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness. There he was tempted for forty days by the devil. He ate nothing during those days and afterward Jesus was starving. The devil said to him, "Since you are God's Son, command this stone to become a loaf of bread." Jesus replied, "It's written, *People won't live only by bread.*" Next the devil led him to a high place and showed him in a single instant all the kingdoms of the world. The devil said, "I will give you this whole domain and the glory of all these kingdoms. It's been entrusted to me and I can give it to anyone I want. Therefore, if you will worship me, it will all be yours." Jesus answered, "It's written, *You will worship the Lord your God and serve only him.*" The devil brought him into Jerusalem and stood him at the highest point of the temple. He said to him, "Since you are God's Son, throw yourself down from here; for it's written: *He will command his angels concerning you, to protect you and they will take you up in their hands so that you won't hit your foot on a stone.*" Jesus answered, "It's been said, *Don't test the Lord your God.*" After finishing every temptation, the devil departed from him until the next opportunity.

Observation

Jesus' ministry begins with temptation in Luke's gospel. He is baptized, and then immediately tempted by the devil in the wilderness. The Devil tempts him three times, collectively offering Jesus control over the whole world. At its core, Jesus is being tempted to place his trust in a place outside of God.

Application

What tempts you to minimize your trust in God? Are there areas where you rely more on _____ than God? Of course, God has given us experience, reason, and resources to better equip us. Trusting God does not mean excluding or ignoring experts, trusted friends, or technological advancements. But, as you listen to the beating of your heart: is your life grounded in trust of God? Or does something else -- fear or worry, desires for success or stability -- drive you? How might you center yourself in God today?

Prayer

God of my life, be my life. Guide my actions, feelings, behaviors, thoughts, and words to be rooted in you. Be at work in my life, in the people and circumstances around me, and help me to be guided and grounded by your grace. Amen.

Wednesday, August 23

Luke 4:14-21

Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee, and news about him spread throughout the whole countryside. He taught in their synagogues and was praised by everyone. Jesus went to Nazareth, where he had been raised. On the Sabbath he went to

the synagogue as he normally did and stood up to read. The synagogue assistant gave him the scroll from the prophet Isaiah. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:

*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because the Lord has anointed me.
He has sent me to preach good news to the poor,
to proclaim release to the prisoners
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to liberate the oppressed,
and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.*

He rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the synagogue assistant, and sat down. Every eye in the synagogue was fixed on him. He began to explain to them, "Today, this scripture has been fulfilled just as you heard it."

Observation

Having been baptized *and* tempted, Jesus returns to Nazareth (his hometown) and preaches in his home synagogue. He grounds his message in the words of Isaiah, telling the people that Jesus is *the one* who has come to fulfill these words.

Application

I love this passage, because it gives us immediate insight into the words that will guide the *entire* ministry of Jesus. He is telling us up front what his priorities will be: preaching good news to the poor, releasing the prisoner, recovery of sight to the blind, liberating the oppressed, and proclaiming God's goodness. I think this tells us, as followers of Jesus, what we should set as priorities, too. Spend time today reflecting on these words: what do they mean to you? How is "the spirit of the Lord upon you" today?

Prayer

Spirit of God, pour out your wisdom and clarity upon me today. Help me to notice the people and places you are calling me. Give me courage to make the guiding principles of Jesus' ministry my own. May all the world, at last, know your liberating justice, love, and peace. Amen.

Thursday, August 24

Luke 4:22-30

Everyone was raving about Jesus, so impressed were they by the gracious words flowing from his lips. They said, "This is Joseph's son, isn't it?" Then Jesus said to them, "Undoubtedly, you will quote this saying to me: 'Doctor, heal yourself. Do here in your hometown what we've heard you did in Capernaum.'" He said, "I assure you that no prophet is welcome in the prophet's hometown. And I can assure you that there were many widows in Israel during Elijah's time, when it didn't rain for three and a half years and there was a great food shortage in the land. Yet Elijah was sent to none of them but only to a widow in the city of Zarephath in the region of Sidon. There were also many

persons with skin diseases in Israel during the time of the prophet Elisha, but none of them were cleansed. Instead, Naaman the Syrian was cleansed." When they heard this, everyone in the synagogue was filled with anger. They rose up and ran him out of town. They led him to the crest of the hill on which their town had been built so that they could throw him off the cliff. But he passed through the crowd and went on his way.

Observation

The people hearing Jesus' message are "raving about Jesus" and impressed by his words. Apparently, Jesus couldn't just say "thank you" and be done with it. Instead, he tells them that "no prophet is welcome in their hometown" and one day, Jesus will disappoint them. Turns out, that moment is now -- because the people turn on him, and run him out of town!

Application

I, too, have preached in my home church early in my ministry. It was incredibly meaningful – and frightening – as I wanted to "do good" by the people who raised me and fostered my call to ministry. Fortunately, they did not try to run me off a cliff, but instead were encouraging to my continued discernment of ministry. I wonder who the preachers, leaders, and teachers are among our congregation now? Who are the young adults that our community can encourage and foster their own discernment and growth? How are we adapting as a congregation to embrace and encourage them? Say a word of thanks for the kids, youth, and young people in your life and church.

Prayer

God, stir up your presence within our community. Light a spark within your young people, that they might clearly identify the ways you are present to them, and encouraging them to lead. Help us who are "more seasoned" to be flexible and curious, as we raise up new leaders. Amen.

Friday, August 25

Luke 4:31-37

Jesus went down to the city of Capernaum in Galilee and taught the people each Sabbath. They were amazed by his teaching because he delivered his message with authority. A man in the synagogue had the spirit of an unclean demon. He screamed, "Hey! What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are. You are the holy one from God." "Silence!" Jesus said, speaking harshly to the demon. "Come out of him!" The demon threw the man down before them, then came out of him without harming him. They were all shaken and said to each other, "What kind of word is this, that he can command unclean spirits with authority and power, and they leave?" Reports about him spread everywhere in the surrounding region.

Observation

Never discouraged by the previous day, Jesus' ministry begins at a fast pace. He moves on to Capernaum, about 40 miles from Nazareth. He immediately begins to heal those around him. And even the demons are quick to recognize Christ's authority.

Application

Jesus frequently heals people physically. But Christ also brings us healing in other ways, too: in our spirits, our relationships, our thoughts and feelings. What areas of your life might you offer up to Christ today? How might you ask Jesus to bring healing and wholeness to your life?

Prayer

Healing Christ, you know the places in my life -- my heart, body, and mind -- that are in need of healing today. Make your tender voice, your gentle touch, your everlasting love, bring healing and wholeness to my life. Amen.

Saturday, August 26**Luke 4:38-44**

After leaving the synagogue, Jesus went home with Simon. Simon's mother-in-law was sick with a high fever, and the family asked Jesus to help her. He bent over her and spoke harshly to the fever, and it left her. She got up at once and served them. When the sun was setting, everyone brought to Jesus relatives and acquaintances with all kinds of diseases. Placing his hands on each of them, he healed them. Demons also came out of many people. They screamed, "You are God's Son." But he spoke harshly to them and wouldn't allow them to speak because they recognized that he was the Christ. When daybreak arrived, Jesus went to a deserted place. The crowds were looking for him. When they found him, they tried to keep him from leaving them. But he said to them, "I must preach the good news of God's kingdom in other cities too, for this is why I was sent." So he continued preaching in the Judean synagogues.

Observation

This chapter closes by making clear that Jesus continues to heal many people. Understandably, as he does, communities have a strong desire to keep Jesus close. But rather than stay, Jesus says, "I must preach the good news of God's kingdom in other cities too, for this is why I was sent." (v 43)

Application

This encourages me in a few ways: Jesus (1) keeps clear to his ministry and calling, (2) understands that even he cannot "do it all," and (3) seems to model that even fruitful ministries have a season. How might this guide your living today? Can you name, with clarity, how God is calling you? Can you understand and trust that you have boundaries too, and cannot do it all (yes, you). Is there something you need to pause, or let go, so that you can follow God more fully?

Prayer

Holy Christ – you are my Savior, brother and friend. But you are my teacher, too. Thank you for the ways that you teach and model ways of living that keep the focus on God's call, while setting boundaries and limits. Help me to do the same. Amen.