

My Prayer Journal

Use this weekly prayer to help you begin your time with God each day.

Prayer of Confession:

O God, we confess the blindness that is not even aware of sinning; the pride that dares not admit that it is wrong; the selfishness that can see nothing but its own will; the righteousness that knows no fault; the callousness that has ceased to care; the defiance that does not regret its own sins; the evasion that always tries to make excuses; the coldness of heart that is too hardened to repent. God, we are sinners; be merciful to us.

My Prayers this Week:

Family Time:

Did you know that disagreeing with others is part of the human race? Sometimes we forget that God did not create us to be exactly like each other so that causes us to have differences. I am sure you can think of a time in your family when you did not get along with someone. Maybe a sibling, friend, or even a cousin. In the passages we read this week Jesus is being questioned by a number of people who believe in different things than Him. Yet He knows who God is and that's all that matters to Him. Their views won't change His belief. Take time this week to remind yourselves as a family Whose you are and where your Truth lies.

MONDAY 2.1.21

Matthew 18:15-35

Chapter 18 of Matthew begins Jesus' fourth teaching discourse. These teachings of Jesus primarily concern relations among members of the community of faith—including subjects such as humility, forgiveness, and avoiding causing others to stumble in their faith. Today's reading begins with the practical issue of church discipline. Jesus teaches that while the integrity of the church community is important, it must be set within the context of the expansiveness of grace. Jesus suggests ex-communication of those who refuse to repent of their sins against their Christian brothers and sisters, but only after all efforts at reconciliation have been exhausted. Of course, in Matthew's day, such "casting out" would leave someone with no other options for Christian community. Today, such a measure would result in them simply driving to a different church! Still, the teaching insists upon mutual accountability within Christian community. It is no coincidence that this teaching is followed up by the parable of the unmerciful servant, which is all about severe punishment for those who do not forgive, especially when they know that they, themselves, have been forgiven. Disciples of Jesus forgive because they are forgiven.

- How might churches practice accountability today?

TUESDAY 2.2.21

Matthew 19:1-30

With the fourth teaching discourse concluded, Matthew now turns, in chapters 19 and 20, to events and discussions that occur on Jesus' journey to Jerusalem, in the territory of Judea. As in the previous narrative section, controversy and conflict with the Jewish authorities takes center stage. First, they "test" Jesus with the question of divorce. Jesus had touched on this subject in the Sermon on the Mount, but now elaborates further, appealing to the creation narrative. The Kingdom Jesus brings is no less than a restoration of the perfection of the pre-fall creation. The divorce permitted by Moses is a result of the imperfection of this world. We need to be careful not to apply this teaching as another law forbidding divorce. Until the Kingdom arrives in full, divorce will still exist ... but it will not in the ideal Kingdom Jesus envisions. Jesus addresses the difficulty this, and all, the teachings about the Kingdom, entail. After all, a rich young man is told to sell everything to follow Jesus. But if the demands of the Kingdom seem difficult, Jesus assures His disciples that the rewards more than compensate for the sacrifices.

- Why is it tempting to turn Jesus' teaching into a different set of laws? Is Jesus creating a new law against divorce, and a new law requiring poverty? What do you think He IS doing?

WEDNESDAY 2.3.21

Matthew 20:1-34

The theme of "reward" that ended chapter 19 is the theme of the parable that opens chapter 20, as well. The focus here, though, is on the grace given to those who only enlist in the work of the Kingdom at the last possible moment, and yet receive the same reward as those signing on earlier. The story drives home the point that in the way grace works, the least worthy are equal to the most worthy. No hierarchy of reward places anyone above anyone else. Now, as Jesus approaches Jerusalem, He makes the third and final prediction of His suffering, death, and resurrection. This comes as a strong contrast to all the talk of rewards that has come before. Again, isn't it fascinating that just as Jesus has finished talking about equal rewards, and has predicted that He will "come in last" by dying, the disciples argue over who will be first, sitting next to Jesus in His Kingdom? Jesus reiterates His ministry of servanthood to them, and just before entering Jerusalem demonstrates its meaning once again, by healing two blind men who utter the phrase that becomes part of the church's liturgy: "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on us!"

- Does the parable seem unfair to you? At the same time, do James and John seem greedy? What do you really want?

THURSDAY 2.4.21

Matthew 21:1-46

Jesus' arrival in Jerusalem marks a turning point in Matthew's Gospel. All that remains are events, deeds, and teaching that lead up to Jesus' suffering, death, and resurrection. Here at the beginning of the week, Jesus receives the acclaim of the people on His entry to Jerusalem, as they laud Him as the Son of David! But Jesus begins to demonstrate He is not the Messiah everyone expects by overturning the tables at the Temple, leading to a serious confrontation in which the chief priests demand to know the source of the authority His actions portray. In the parable of the two sons and the parable of the vineyard tenants, Jesus portrays the disobedience and the unfaithfulness of these Jewish leaders. Even a barren fig tree serves as a metaphor for barren Israel, with Jesus foreshadowing God's judgment of Israel by cursing the fig tree. Events and teaching point to the same reality: the authority of Israel's leaders will be taken from them, and given to others. What Jesus has been doing with His disciples all along has been training for them to become the new leaders of the new Israel—the church. Knowing Jesus has spoken against them, the chief priests begin looking for a way to arrest Jesus.

- Jesus said the Kingdom was being taken away and given to others who would produce fruit. Are you producing fruit?

FRIDAY 2.5.21

Matthew 22:1-46

The parable of the wedding banquet is the third in a series of parables concerning the failure of the Jewish leadership to respond to Jesus and His message. Yet this failure becomes an opportunity for others to attend! Still, some who do try to attend are not “clothed” for the event—metaphorically, they have not truly repented and been “clothed” with the righteousness of the Kingdom. The three parables of rejection further intensify the evil intent of the Pharisees and Sadducees, who issue three more challenges to Jesus, concerning the paying of taxes, the resurrection of the dead, and the greatest commandment in the Law. Having silenced them, Jesus now takes the initiative in asking them for their understanding of the Messiah (the Christ). In their limited perspective, they cannot provide an answer as to why David would refer to his own son as “my lord.” They could not conceive of the reality of the divine Son of God becoming a human descendant of David. In a very parallel way, those Christians today who see in Jesus a merely human teacher, rejecting His divinity, miss Jesus’ point entirely. Matthew’s Gospel insists on this truth: Jesus is the divine Son of God, incarnate.

- Remember from the beginning of our study Matthew’s emphasis on Jesus’ identity. Who do you say Jesus is?

SATURDAY 2.6.21

Matthew 23:1-38

Although chapter 23 is certainly a distinct discourse of Jesus in Matthew’s Gospel, it is not considered one of the five discourses of Jesus. Unlike those five, this discourse is largely negative and condemning, aimed at criticism of a very specific group of people—the Pharisees and teachers of the law who we have seen parables against earlier this week. It is vitally important to recognize the historical context of these condemnations, and not use them to substantiate anti-Semitic thoughts or actions, as some in church history have done. Jesus begins with admiration of the way the teachers of the law seek to interpret and teach, advising His listeners to obey their teaching. The problem, as we saw in Jesus’s similar comments in the Sermon on the Mount, in Matthew 6, is their hypocrisy. Jesus pronounces seven woes upon them, with bitter indictments of their behavior. These words are some of the most painful in the entire New Testament, and it may surprise us to hear them from the mouth of Jesus. Remember that Jesus’ invitation was still open to these Pharisees and teachers of the law, and that it is hypocrisy, and not the individuals themselves, that is Jesus’ enemy.

- Why is hypocrisy so damaging to a faith community? Have you seen hypocrisy in the church? How did it affect you?



Daily Study Guide

January 31—February 6, 2021

Sermon Series: God + Me = Great Things

Week Four: “Just Beyond Your Nose” - Rev. J. David Israel

Scripture for Sunday, January 31: Matthew 18:6-14

“As for whoever causes these little ones who believe in me to trip and fall into sin, it would be better for them to have a huge stone hung around their necks and be drowned in the bottom of the lake. How terrible it is for the world because of the things that cause people to trip and fall into sin! Such things have to happen, but how terrible it is for the person who causes those things to happen! If your hand or your foot causes you to sin, chop it off and throw it away. It’s better to enter into life crippled or lame than to be thrown into eternal fire with two hands or two feet. If your eye causes you to fall into sin, tear it out and throw it away. It’s better to enter into life with one eye than to be cast into a burning hell with two eyes. Be careful that you don’t look down on one of these little ones. I say to you that their angels in heaven are always looking into the face of my Father who is in heaven. What do you think? If someone had one hundred sheep and one of them wandered off, wouldn’t he leave the ninety-nine on the hillsides and go in search of the one that wandered off? If he finds it, I assure you that he is happier about having that one sheep than about the ninety-nine who didn’t wander off. In the same way, my Father who is in heaven doesn’t want to lose one of these little ones.” (CEB)

Things that really impacted me from today’s sermon:

Prayer Requests

- Pete Bolinger
- Charlotte Ottley
- Delaney Digman
- Bill Reichter
- Bob Vincent
- Sophia Miller
- Judy Hoffman
- Nini Schneider

Everyone affected by the COVID-19 outbreak

Our country and its leaders

Family and friends on the passing of Gary Bader

The Leonard family on the passing of Dave Leonard’s mother, Jeanne Leonard

Share prayer requests online at livingwordumc.org