




Theme: Summer Stories with Jesus


“Risky Business”

Weekly Memory Verse:

²⁷ “You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your strength, and all your mind.” And, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ – Luke 10:27


Monday, August 8 – Read Luke 10:25-29. Lawyers or legal experts worked closely with the Pharisees in ancient Judaism. Luke Timothy Johnson wrote that, “the religious convictions concerning Torah (the law books of the Old Testament) was shaped by the interpretive skills of the scribes.” The legal expert, a skilled interpreter of religious traditions, asked Jesus a rhetorical question. He knew the answer. So, did Jesus, and turned it back on him. Then the savvy lawyer, knowing that “neighbor” was a nuanced, complex noun, pushed Jesus for a definitive answer: “Who is my neighbor?” But Jesus answered with a story that turned legal arguments upside down.


 In Jesus day, and in many circles today, the Talmud was a book that aimed to discuss and answer questions about Jewish history and law. It helped the Jewish culture think about how to apply laws to everyday life. Like our modern laws, people interpreted the law in a variety of ways. The legal expert, knowing different teachers gave different answers, tried to trip up Jesus by asking, “Who is my neighbor?” “Neighbor” can still mean many different things. Who do you consider your neighbor?

 In our culture, we spend a significant amount of time detached from even our next-door neighbors. Electric garage door openers allow us to stay in our vehicles and enter our homes through an interior door, without having to set foot outside. Some of us in the Durango area can’t even see the next house! This means we can go days without seeing a single neighbor. Who might you see or reconsider as a neighbor given these realities?

Prayer: *Lord God, I want to love you with my whole heart, whole mind, and whole soul. I want to love my neighbor as I love myself. Help me open my eyes to see the neighbors who live, work, and breathe all around me. Amen.*


Tuesday, August 9 – Read Luke 10:30-37. Jesus portrayed two men in elevated religious positions who, for unstated reasons, totally ignored the plight of a man beaten, robbed, and left lying in the road. Then he imagined a character who messed with their heads and boxes into which they put people. He pictured a Samaritan (a group Israelites in his day regarded in about the same light as many of them regard Palestinians today, or those holding signs for assistance on a street corner) who acted with extravagant compassion and caring.


 In the story, the Samaritan didn't just offer casual roadside help. He put the injured man on "his own donkey" (which would have meant he had to walk), brought him to an inn, cared for him, paid two days' wages for more care, and offered to pay more on his return if needed. How did Jesus' picture of the Samaritan reflect God's vast generosity to us? How can knowing God has been generous to us move us to be generous to other people in ways we'd be unlikely to achieve out of our own goodness?

 We usually apply this parable to the need for us to help others, which was a big part of Jesus' teaching. But in this story, an Israelite also accepted a Samaritan's help, though Israelites usually shunned such help. How open are you to accepting help from others (even unlikely others) when you need it? Have you ever seen a situation in which asking for or accepting help opened the door to a warmer relationship?

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, I don't mind being generous if it's easy and inexpensive, in time and certainly in money. Help me incorporate your idea of sacrifice into my thinking about what it might mean to be a true neighbor. Amen. Love your enemies—but not to gain.*


Wednesday, August 10 – Read Matthew 5:43-6:4. The Old Testament did not plainly teach "hate your enemy," but some rabbis thought it did. The command to hate enemies, while emphasized by some contemporary Jewish sects, was not explicit in Scripture, but extrapolated from pious examples such as in Psalms 31: 6; 119: 113; 139: 21. Jesus' teaching was (and is) counter cultural. Ancient Greek and Roman culture did not urge personal charity; Jewish piety often made it central but limited. Jesus stressed God's mercy to all people through his faithful servants. He taught us to do good not for reward, but with a humble spirit, and promised an eternal, not temporal, reward from the heavenly Father.


 Jesus said in Matthew 5:45, "He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good." What do you think his point was? The great Church father and theologian Augustine said in his book, *On Grace and Free Will*, "When God makes straight our path, and we walk in peace, man can only do so because it is the Lord God who enables us to do so." In what ways do evil and good collide in you? Why is it that without God's help, even your most well-intentioned actions fall short of glorifying the Father?

 Christ is, as Hebrews 1:3 put it, the exact representation of God. The reward Jesus spoke of is not of this earth, but the privilege of abiding in the everlasting presence of the Father. If you depend on such an amazing reward, how can you go about remaining humble in spirit while serving God faithfully in all walks of life?

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, it's hard for me, but teach me how to love all the people you love. And help me to do the right things, not because I'm addicted to human approval, but because your love has changed me inwardly. Amen.*


Thursday, August 11 – Read Matthew 25:14-18. The “coins” in this story were valuable indeed. The Greek word is *talanton*, often translated as “talent,” refers to a monetary unit equal to more than 16 years of earnings for a worker. But in Jesus’ story, the emphasis was less on the amount of money, and more on how faithful each servant was or wasn’t. Jesus said our faithfulness to God shows in our willingness to use whatever resources of energy, time, skills, money, or other assets God gives us to bless others and build God’s kingdom.


 Jesus’ story wouldn’t have worked if the three servants had all immediately forgotten the source of the large sum of money they had to manage. Our culture tends to teach us to think, “You earned all this money and these possessions, so you can do anything you want with them.” Read Deuteronomy 8:12-18. How easy or hard do you find it to make the inner shift from “I OWN all this” to “I’m a steward to whom God has entrusted these things to use for God’s purposes”?

 With the idea that we are stewards or managers, and God is the owner, what resources has God placed in your life? How are you using those resources to serve God’s Kingdom and bless others? Are there any resources or life-giving abilities you have “buried in a hole in the ground,” so to speak? If so, how can you begin to use them actively for God’s purposes?

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, thank you for the good abilities and resources you’ve placed in my life. Forgive me when I sometimes wish there were more of them. Help me to manage them in ways that are faithful to your principles. Amen.*

Friday, August 12 – Read Matthew 25:19-30. In this parable we have three servants—two were called “good and faithful,” the third was fired for being “wicked and lazy.” The apostle Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 4:2, “it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful.” He also followed Jesus’ teaching when he wrote in Galatians 5:13-14 that living selfishly destroys our freedom and serving each other in love is the divine antidote for selfishness. God’s Spirit guides us to be faithful to our commitments to serve God and bless others.

 John Wesley, Methodism’s founder, was a “good and faithful servant.” He made a remarkable entry in his Journal at age 81 when he wrote, “On this and the four following days I walked through the town and begged two hundred pounds in order to clothe them that needed it most. But it was hard work as most of the streets were filled with melting snow... so that my feet were steeped in snow water nearly from morning till evening.” What sacrifices do you sense God calling you to make as one of God’s servants?

 Richard Foster, well-known author of *Celebration of Discipline*, also wrote a book called *Freedom of Simplicity*. The first chapter bore the paradoxical title “The Complexity of Simplicity.” The complexity comes as we realize that it won’t do to just try to imitate some other person’s actions, whether John Wesley’s or your pious grandmother’s. How do you cultivate a listening heart, a spirit receptive to God’s direction? What do you believe it means for you to respond to God as a “good and faithful servant”?

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, “good and faithful servant”—what beautiful words to hear from your lips. But, sometimes, what difficult words to live into in my day-to-day routine. Keep shaping and guiding me into faithfulness. Amen.*

Saturday, August 6 – Read Luke 17:11-19 and Psalm 126:1-6. Jesus healed a group of ten lepers—men with visible skin diseases, shunned and outcast. Of the ten, only a Samaritan came back to say, “Thank you.” This real-life experience echoed Jesus’ parable of the good Samaritan. Israel’s long history included incredibly low times of misery at the hands of tyrants, notably exile in Babylon that we read about in 2 Kings 24:13-14, 25:11. It also included their joyous gratitude for God’s action to deliver them from exile. Psalm 126 poetically recalled the gladness of the times when God lifted Israel up from their lowly status and prayed that God would again allow them to live in the joy of divine deliverance.



Unlike the story in Luke 17, where only one of ten bothered to say, “Thanks,” Ephesians 5:20 invited God’s people to, “always give thanks to God the Father for everything.”

Whatever your current problems, take time to list anything you’re thankful for, such as a glorious sunset, a child’s giggle, the velvety texture of a dog’s ears, your favorite meal, a roof over your head, Jesus’ love, or any other simple things, and thank God for it. Make a game of it—make daily gratitude your way of life.



The second half of Psalm 126 was a confident prayer, trusting that the same God who delivered in the past would do it again. How can weaving the practice of gratitude into your life help you to pray, and mean, the words of the psalm: “Let those who plant with tears reap the harvest with joyful shouts”?

Prayer: *Lord, it’s easy for me to celebrate the raise, the new job, the healthy new baby. I wish it weren’t so easy for me to forget my gratitude every time things don’t turn out as I’d wished. Make me more and more like the Samaritan who remembered to express gratitude. Amen.*