

LENTEN DEVOTION – WEEK 3

MARCH 24–30, 2019

BY JILL DUFFIELD, PRESBYTERIAN OUTLOOK EDITOR

Sunday | LUKE 4:38–40

“They asked him about her.” This simple sentence represents compassion, connection, communal care. Consider how often we ask about others. “How’s your mom doing?” we might say. If someone fails to show up to worship a few weeks in a row, we may ask one of their friends if they have any news: “Are they out of town? Sick?” We may give them a call just to let them know they were missed. When we run into a friend we’ve not seen in a while and we ask how they’ve been, we get updates and maybe worries or challenges. We may even say, “I’ll be praying for you.” Or that much maligned phrase, “We will keep you in our thoughts and prayers.” Hopefully, we really will — like the disciples in this story, we will ask Jesus about them. Healing and wholeness includes our asking to Jesus about others.

In a number of congregations with which I’ve been affiliated, we had a time during worship to share our “joys and concerns.” Just before the pastoral prayer or the prayers of the people, the congregation is invited to ask Jesus about those people and circumstances about which we are concerned. We ask Jesus to bring healing, even when a cure seems impossible. I confess, when I was younger, at times I found this part of the service frustrating. Didn’t we pray for that concern last week and the week before that, too? I wondered if God didn’t have bigger issues to address than some of what his flock voiced. Occasionally, I wished that certain members would practice the art of brevity.

However, now I look forward to hearing whatever is shared. The joys and concerns feel as sacred as the words spoken at the Communion Table or font. Each request for comfort, healing, thanksgiving, wisdom and relief remind me that Jesus is in the room and we are asking him about one another. And I picture him responding: getting up, standing beside each person, rebuking the suffering, embracing the hurting, calling for healing, listening as we ask him about one another.

Jesus, we ask you about those for whom we are concerned. We tell you about friends and family in need of healing. We ask about tragic situations in our world. We lift up circumstances beyond our control and yet ever present on our minds. We know you hear us and will respond. Amen.



Monday | LUKE 5:12–13

The pain of this person comes through the page all these thousands of years later. His disease caused physical pain and it also separated him from community. Pain upon pain. Jesus chooses to make him clean, restoring him and reconciling him. Today, remember that Jesus still chooses to restore and reconcile. What do you need Jesus to cleanse you from this day?

Lord Jesus, you see our suffering, our physical and spiritual pain, the ways we are cut off from community and compassion. You see us and you choose to act. You bring restoration and reconciliation not just to us, but to those we too often dismiss as irredeemable and to those we have shunned for nothing and no one is God forsaken. For choosing to make us clean, we give you thanks. Amen.

Tuesday | LUKE 5:17–20

One of the powerful messages of this text is the reminder that when we have no agency, no ability to help ourselves, the community of faith brings us to the feet of Jesus in prayer and through acts of love. When have faithful friends helped you find healing? Who do you need to lift up to Jesus in prayer today?

God of all space and time, there are seasons when we are spent, worn out, too sick or tired in mind and body to even pray. We find comfort in the knowledge that we do not always need to seek you out because you come to us and you send others to bring us to you. We give thanks because we are part of the Body of Christ, the household of God, never alone or abandoned. Amen.



Jesus heals



Wednesday | LUKE 6:17-19

Jesus stands on a level place with a multitude from a vast region surrounding him. He teaches and heals, brings relief to those troubled with unclean spirits. Healing entails word and deed, proximity and a willingness to be surrounded by those in deep need. Today, think about those troubled and in need. How might you be called to bring a word or deed that would bring them relief?

Lord, when we hear the news and suffering of the multitudes around your world, we feel overwhelmed. The needs are so great, the problems seemingly so intractable. We want to turn away rather than stand with those who suffer. Grant us the courage to remain with those who are troubled and give us a word to say and the wisdom to know what we are to do to bring relief. Amen.

Thursday | LUKE 7:11-17

When the Lord saw the widow grieving the death of her son, he had compassion on her. Acts of healing begin with the feeling of compassion. Often, we suppress the urge to act with compassion and look for excuses not to or we second guess ourselves. Today, give in to any compassionate impulses. Pay attention to what happens when you act.

Compassionate Lord, over and over in Scripture we hear of how you are moved with pity. Your tender-hearted responses to the grief of human beings gives us hope. You comfort those who mourn and promise to wipe the tears of every eye. Help us to carry those losses and griefs we can no longer bear. Hear our weeping and give us a word of grace. Amen.

Friday | LUKE 8:26-37

What is your name? This simple question asked to the man so dehumanized that he'd been relegated to the graveyard reveals to the man and all who have ostracized him that he is a beloved child of God, known and remembered. As you go about your day today, take time to ask those you encounter the simple but profound question: What is your name?

You tell us, God, that you know us so well that before we speak a word, you hear it. You know us so well that even the hairs on our heads are numbered. You know our failings and goodness, our gifts and greatest insecurities and you claim us and call us beloved. You know us all by name and call us to see each other as you see each of us. Amen.

Saturday | LUKE 9:37-43

This story highlights Jesus' power, but it contains a rebuke that is difficult for disciples then and now to hear. The disciples could not heal the boy and Jesus calls them out for their lack of faith. Do we, too, lack faith in ways that prevent us from participating in the healing of the world? What might we do if we truly believed that through Christ all things are possible?

Lord God, you promise us that if we ask we will receive. You tell your disciples that you give them power to do the very ministry you did: preaching, teaching, healing. Move us this day to be just a little bolder, braver and courageous for the sake of the gospel. Amen.