

LENTEN DEVOTION – WEEK 1

MARCH 10-16, 2019

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Sunday | LUKE 4:42-44

Early in Jesus' public ministry, he states his purpose: I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God. I envy Jesus' clarity of purpose, his ability to say no to the people eager for him to stay, even as they offer him praise and affirmation, in order to say yes to God's call that entails uncertainty, risk and sacrifice. Jesus' unwavering confidence that God sent him to proclaim good news – not just in familiar Galilee, but in the unknowns of Judea – propels him forward. Thwarting someone with a deep sense of divine purpose proves all but impossible. Even Jesus' death on a cross could not silence the good news of the kingdom of God he came to proclaim and fulfill.

During Lent, we are invited into a season of discernment about our call and purpose. Remembering that Jesus tells his followers that they too must share the good news and be his witnesses to the ends of the earth, whatever we do entails preaching the gospel. Even if we never step behind a pulpit or stand to speak in front of a crowd, no matter how we spend our days, whatever our circle of influence, as followers of Jesus our unambiguous purpose is to embody God's good news of great joy for all people. This season of self-examination calls forth the question: Are we? Are we, like Jesus, offering the wholeness of God through our words and acts? Are we showing mercy and extending grace? Are we calling out evil and working for justice? Are we saying no to what may feel good or familiar so that we can say yes to taking risks for the sake of the gospel?

Before Jesus ventures out to preach in the synagogues of Judea, he departs to a desolated place. Jesus retreats in order to advance his ministry. These 40 days offer us the opportunity to do likewise. As we seek to discern how and where God is calling us to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ, we are invited to find a place without distraction, where we can notice our thoughts, name our fears and listen for a holy word of guidance that is no doubt very near.



Jesus proclaims

Monday | LUKE 5:1-3

Jesus notices not only the crowd pressing in on him, but his surroundings. He uses whatever is available to proclaim God's word. Often, we are unable to see the resources God has given us because we are fixated on the clamoring crowd. Today, if you feel overwhelmed, look around and use the gifts at hand to proclaim good news.

God of abundance, when the crowd presses in on us, their needs urgent and many, we feel inadequate. Transform our fear into creativity so that we can notice the gifts you place all around us. Embolden us to ask for help and accept what is offered in order to better proclaim your word. Amen.

Tuesday | LUKE 7:21-23

Jesus proclaims the good news of God's reign not just in words, but through life-giving, transformative actions. When John the Baptist questions if Jesus is the Messiah, Jesus instructs those coming on behalf of John to report what they have seen. When others observe your words and actions what do they reveal about who you are?

Jesus, you say plainly that not all those who say "Lord, Lord" truly follow you. Our actions must not contradict our claim to be your followers. Keep us mindful this day that our lives demonstrate who and whose we are. Send your Spirit so that when others look at us, they see you. Amen.



Jesus proclaims

Wednesday | LUKE 8:1-8

As Jesus travels with the twelve and a group of women who provide for them, he proclaims the word through parables. He uses metaphors well known to his hearers. Stories of seeds, birds, rocks and common things become instruments by which Jesus brings the kingdom of God near. Today, notice everyday objects that tell of the work of God in the world and in your life. Make a list of the common items you noticed that spoke to you of God's word.

God of stars and sand, sequoias and cells, as we go about our work and chores, our rest and routines, reveal to us your word, working for good in the world and in us. As we sow the seeds of the gospel, give us ears to hear the rocks shouting their praise, eyes to see the little children leading the way and the faith to trust that you will bring a plentiful harvest. Amen.

Thursday | LUKE 12:54-56

Jesus chides his hearers and tells them that while they understand the weather, they fail to see that God is as close to them as their own breath. He tells them they do not know how to interpret the present time. Today take time to pray the headlines. Consider the people and places impacted by current events and pray for them. As you pray, imagine Jesus in the midst of those circumstances and your own.

God of every time and place, often we fail to see you, even when you are right in front of us. We focus on that which we ought to ignore and ignore that which we ought to see. Give us the wisdom to know the difference and the strength of character to act accordingly. Amen.

Friday | LUKE 13:18-21

Jesus proclaims the kingdom of God and proceeds to help his hearers understand how to recognize that divine reign. The kingdom of God is like a mustard seed. The kingdom of God is like yeast. The kingdom of God appears small, sometimes undetectable to the eye, but exponentially able to grow, transform and nurture. Today take note of the little things that nurture you and bring growth and transformation.

Lord, we experience times that feel stagnant, your presence difficult to detect, impossible to see. When we doubt your ability to transform seeds into bushes and yeast into bread, forgive us. Thank you for the beauty of trees, the smell of food, all the little things that bring to mind the countless ways you sustain and nurture us. Amen.

Saturday | LUKE 14:25-33

Jesus came to proclaim good news, but good news does not mean easy or without cost. Jesus preaches the truth, not simply what people want to hear. As you read this passage, consider the cost of discipleship. Today, what do you need to do or not do in order to follow Jesus more closely?

Dear God, you instruct us to consider the cost of discipleship. Worshipping you alone requires that all else is secondary. We reverse the order of your priorities, making excuses for our upside-down lives. During this Lent we humbly repent and haltingly attempt to put you first. Amen.