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**Concept:** Rebekah Lowe

**Writing:** Erika Marksbury

**Illustration:** Adam Walker Cleaveland and Corby Ortmann

**Editing:** Arianne Braithwaite Lehn and Rebekah Lowe

**Layout:** Adam Walker Cleaveland

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[illustratedministry.com](http://illustratedministry.com)

[info@illustratedministry.com](mailto:info@illustratedministry.com)



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## WELCOME TO *GENEROUS GIVING: AN ILLUSTRATED DEVOTIONAL*

Our Illustrated Devotionals are meant to be colored in and doodled and drawn on. You will see opportunities to color, doodle and draw throughout the devotional, and we invite you to allow the illustrations and spaces for creativity to draw you deeper into reflection.

As we journey through this season of Lent together, we invite you to focus intentionally on the spiritual discipline of giving. We hope our Lenten devotional will help you share conversations about your understanding of giving. Each week's reflection explores a Gospel passage and a form of giving that will help us examine why we give, what we give, the power of our gifts, and the impact our gifts have on those around us.

We encourage you to explore how those understandings influence the way you view God, your faith, and the world. This Lenten devotional is written so it can be used individually, intergenerationally, by youth groups or adult studies.

So grab a pen, some crayons or colored pencils, and start working through *Generous Giving*.

And as you use these resources in your ministry or your home, we would love to hear what was helpful and meaningful and what suggestions or comments you have for us. We desire to create quality resources for faith formation and we appreciate your comments and feedback. You can always reach us at [info@illustratedministry.com](mailto:info@illustratedministry.com).

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We also love to see photos and hear stories about how you are using our products. When you post photos or comments online, please use the hashtag [#anillustratedlent](https://www.instagram.com/explore/tags/anillustratedlent) or tag us in the photos so we can see them. That allows us to be part of the conversation and you to be part of our online community. Additionally, checking the hashtag on social media is a great way to see how other families and churches are creatively using our resources.

Blessings on your Lenten journeys!

The Illustrated Ministry Team



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If you purchased this product by selecting "*Ministry Use: Making ## Copies,*" we've found that there are three good ways to share our files with your community.

**Email:** Depending on the size of your congregation, you could email the PDF to people who are interested in it. Another option is to put an announcement in your bulletin, asking those interested in receiving the files to email the person with access to the PDF.

*Note: Do not include links to download or attachments of our files in any emails/newsletters that are posted publicly online.*

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*Note: Do not post the password in your bulletin or newsletter that gets posted publicly online.*

**Print:** Most congregations who purchase our digital files choose to print out the materials for their community. You can put the documents in folders, use a staple, or have them bound. Making a hard copy for the people in your congregation is a popular method.

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The Illustrated Ministry Team

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• MATTHEW 25:34-40 •

*Then the king will say to those at his right hand, "Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me." Then the righteous will answer him, "Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?" And the king will answer them, "Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me."*

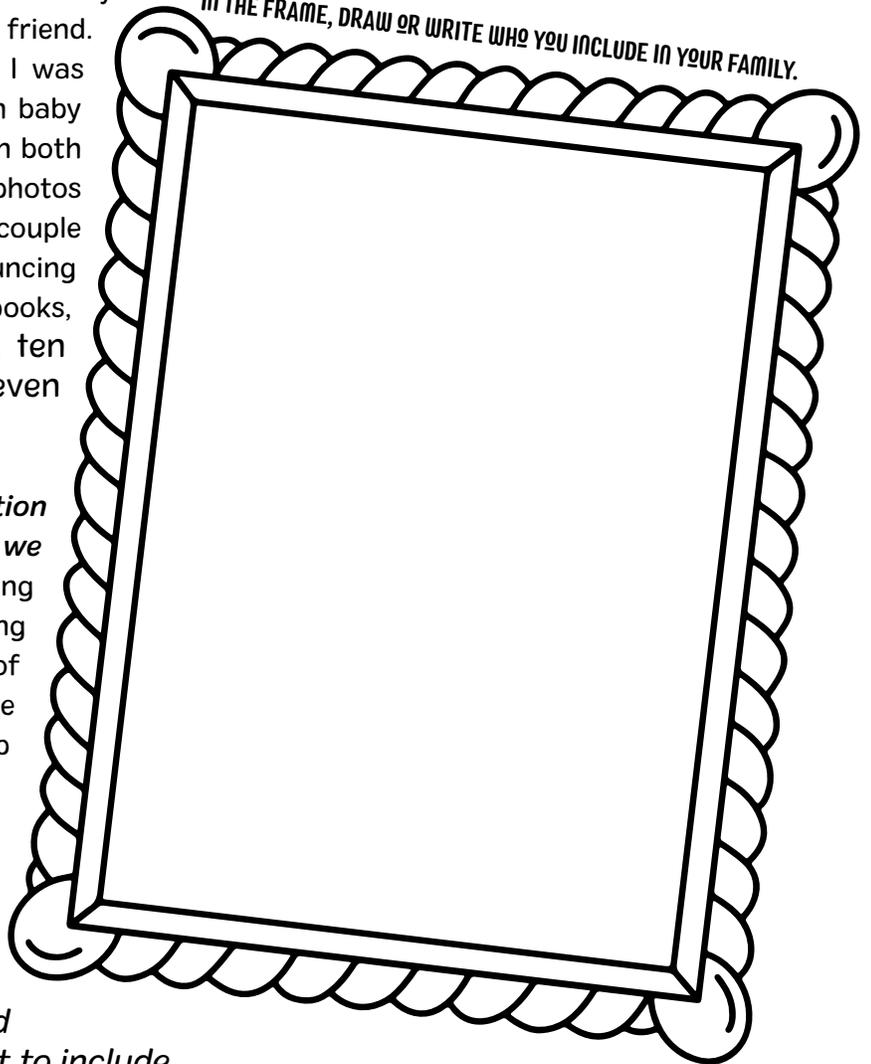
My kids have an "Uncle Chris." He's not actually related to my husband or me. He is a good friend. He lived down the street from us when I was pregnant and spent time looking through baby name books with us. He was present when both our boys were born and snapped some photos that we cherish to this day. He spent a couple of evenings every week at our house, bouncing the babies on his knees, reading them books, teaching them silly dances. Still today, ten years later, those bonds remain, even though they're not blood.

*We do this sometimes – we extend our notion of "family" to include those for whom we care deeply.* Calling someone "uncle" or saying they're "like a sibling" is a way of expressing how deeply they matter to us; it's a way of saying we choose closeness with them, we choose to be identified by our relationship to them.

**Jesus does this and MORE.**

*Instead of just extending the notion of family to those he's close to – his disciples, traveling companions, and friends – in these verses, he widens it to include...*

IN THE FRAME, DRAW OR WRITE WHO YOU INCLUDE IN YOUR FAMILY.



**ANYONE IN NEED.**

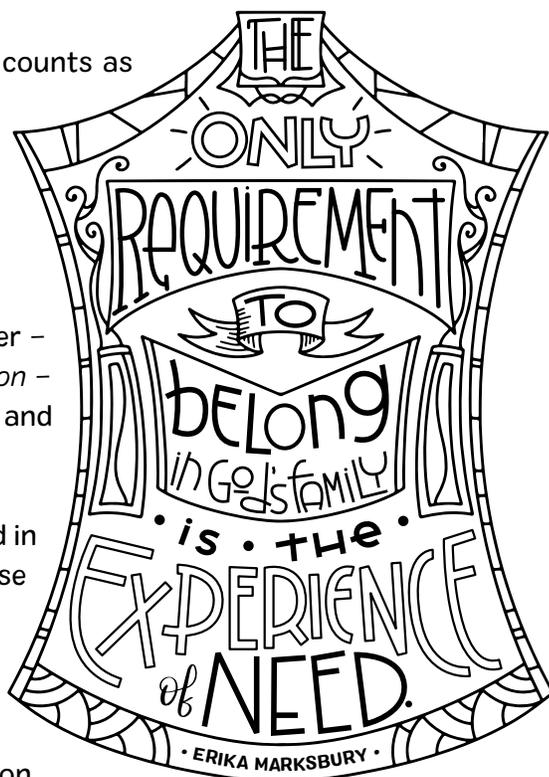
Anyone hungry, thirsty, far from home, naked, or imprisoned counts as part of his family. *The only requirement to belong is the experience of need.* Which means, of course, everyone belongs.

## BECAUSE EVERYONE NEEDS.

Whatever else we might imagine separates us from each other – age or gender or school or faith tradition or ethnicity or location – we all share the same basic needs for nourishment, protection, and care Jesus mentions here.

It gets messy, this notion of a family to which we all belong, and in which we all are one. Jesus says, in essence, not only are all these people his brothers, sisters, siblings, all these people are him.

Each and every one of us – every person needing a sandwich or a cup of water, every person whose shoes and socks have been soaked through from walking in the rain all day, every person behind bars – **EACH ONE IS A WAY EVERYONE ELSE CAN KNOW JESUS.**



**But then,**

Who

**is “the least of these”?**

In this story, where everyone is valued, where everyone is elevated to the status of family, why does Jesus refer to some as “the least of these”? It’s troubling...and maybe it’s an honest reflection of how we consider one another, or how some experience the world.

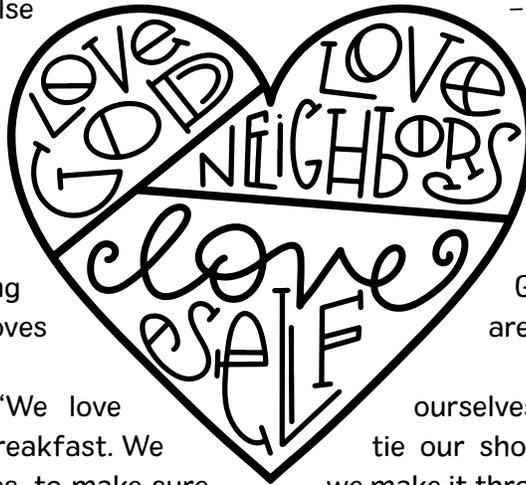
There are those among us that are noticed least, that others are least comfortable around.

Those least likely to be recipients of **compassion,**  
**or justice,**  
**or attention.**

Those least able to speak or fend for themselves.

Those least able to **thrive** in the world  
*as it’s been arranged.*

Perhaps Jesus' comment isn't to be understood as an assessment of value – no one is less worthy, or less beloved, than anyone else where privileges exist, and hierarchies leaving some what it is to be "least."



– but as a call to recognize to challenge a system of feeling, or experiencing,

The greatest commandments, and to love our neighbors as we Jesus makes clear that loving separate activities. All those loves

we're told, are to love God love ourselves. In this story, God, neighbor, and self are not are connected.

A friend told me recently, "We love we don't feel lovable. We eat breakfast. We ways that we care for ourselves, to make sure

ourselves even when it's hard, or when tie our shoes. All those simple acts are we make it through the day."

What if it's that simple to **care** for each other, too?

## questions to discuss

Can you list the ways you care for yourself each day? Can you list the ordinary, everyday ways others care for you?  
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### STORY TIME

Can you remember, and share about, a time when you were *hungry*, or *thirsty*, or *sick*, or *in need*, and someone took care of you?

Blank space for writing a story.

*going deeper*

What are some ways caring for another person, or letting them care for you, erases some of the differences between you and that person?

How do you think the people listening to Jesus felt when he heard them say they were caring for him any time they cared for anyone?



William Sloane Coffin once said,

**“I am not my brother’s keeper, my sister’s keeper, [my sibling’s keeper]. I am my brother’s brother, my sister’s brother, [my sibling’s brother].”**

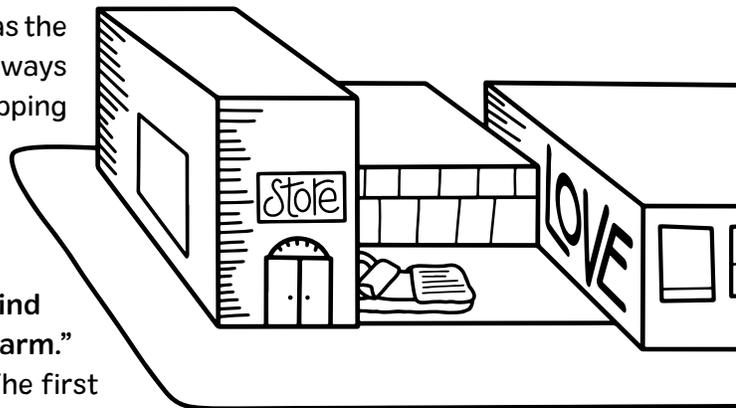
What’s the distinction he’s making here? Why is it important?

• MARK 12:41-44 •

*He sat down opposite the treasury, and watched the crowd putting money into the treasury. Many rich people put in large sums. A poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which are worth a penny. Then he called his disciples and said to them, 'Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the treasury. For all of them have contributed out of their abundance; but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on.'*

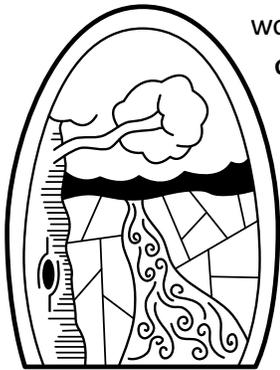
Could you count up everything you have? Could you carry all you have to live on in your pocket?

I was in a conversation with two other women recently. I was the only one with a home, a bed to sleep in, a bathroom I can always count on being available. The other women were swapping stories and advice about where to stay at night, how to keep a make-shift pillow dry, which buildings unlock their bathrooms early in the morning for the public.



One woman said to the other, “You can have my spot behind the store for the rest of this week. It’s safe and it’s warm.”

The other woman said, “Will you be there?” The first woman told her, “No, the store owners only allow one person to stay at a time. But I’ll find somewhere else.”



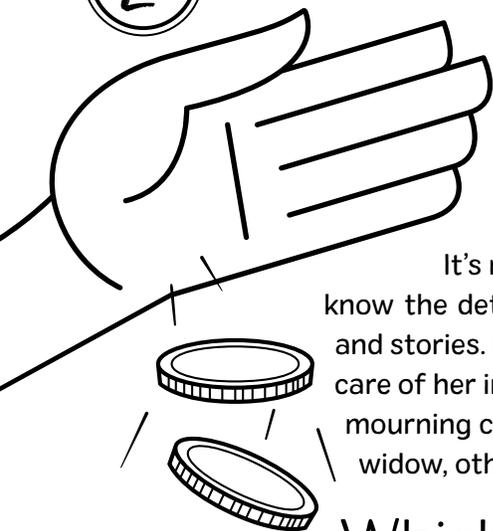
I asked that woman later, “Why did you give up your spot?” She told me, “That lady is sick. If she stays somewhere in the woods or by the creek she’s just going to get sicker. If she stays in town and somebody wakes her up in the middle of the night to tell her to move on and she has to roam the streets, she’s just going to get sicker. If she stays where I was, at least she’ll get a few nights of good rest, and maybe she can start to feel better.”

I was amazed at how this woman, with literally nothing to give, was able to be so incredibly...

**GENEREROUS**

**for someone else in need.**

The exchange may have looked like nothing: no money changed hands, no goods or services were received, nobody posed for a picture with a giant check. **AND IT MAY HAVE SAVED A LIFE.**



How did Jesus know the woman he saw put in everything she had to live on? Surely she didn't announce that as she came by to drop her coins in the plate. Surely she didn't proclaim, "This is it, guys; this is all I've got!" *Can you imagine?*

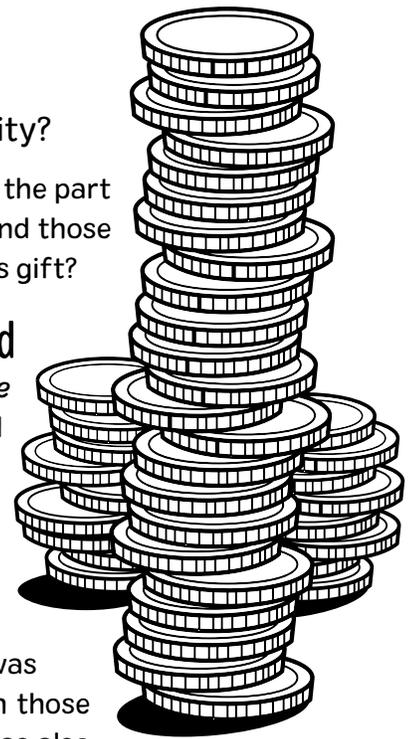
It's more likely that, in this community, people knew each other. They might not know the details of each other's bank accounts, but they knew each other's situations and stories. Maybe they had mourned her husband with her; maybe they had helped take care of her in the weeks and months following his death; maybe they had seen her, in her mourning clothes, walking the streets alone. If Jesus knew this woman was poor and a widow, others probably knew the same.

Which makes me wonder...when Jesus tells the disciples this woman put in "everything she had, all that she had to live on,"

is that comment in **PRAISE** of her,  
or in **CONDEMNATION** of her community?

It's extraordinary generosity on her part. Is it also neglect, or selfishness, on the part of those who would receive it? If those two coins are all she had to live on, and those in charge of the treasury agree to take them...what becomes of her after this gift?

Jewish and Christian Scripture reminds its readers and hearers, **over and over again**, of their *responsibility to care for those who are vulnerable* – in the language of that time, it was "widows and orphans" who were named as deserving of special attention. Cut off from family support from which others benefitted, widows and orphans were to be cared for by the people of God – the church, in essence, was to become their family, to ensure their survival, and their thriving.



...she gave them the chance to become her **FAMILY...**

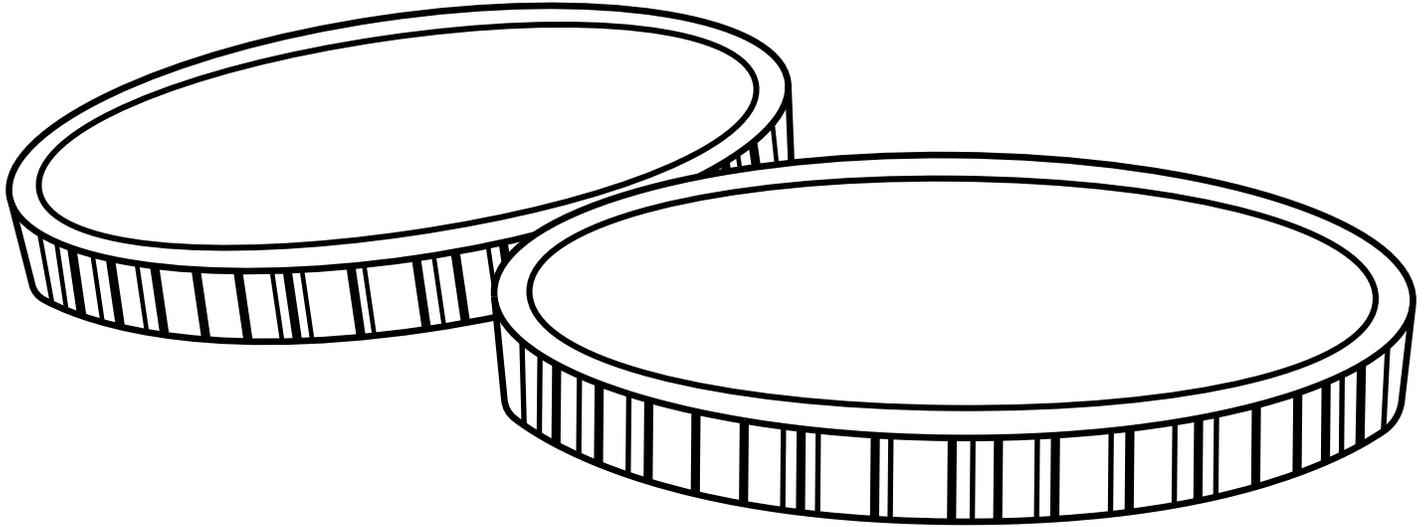
I wonder if the woman's gift to this community was even more than those two coins. I wonder if, with those two coins – "all she had to live on" – the woman was also committing all her hope, and all her trust, to her community.

She gave them all her money, and, in so doing,  
**she gave them the chance to become her family,**  
to care for all her needs,  
to live out the calling God had placed on them long ago.

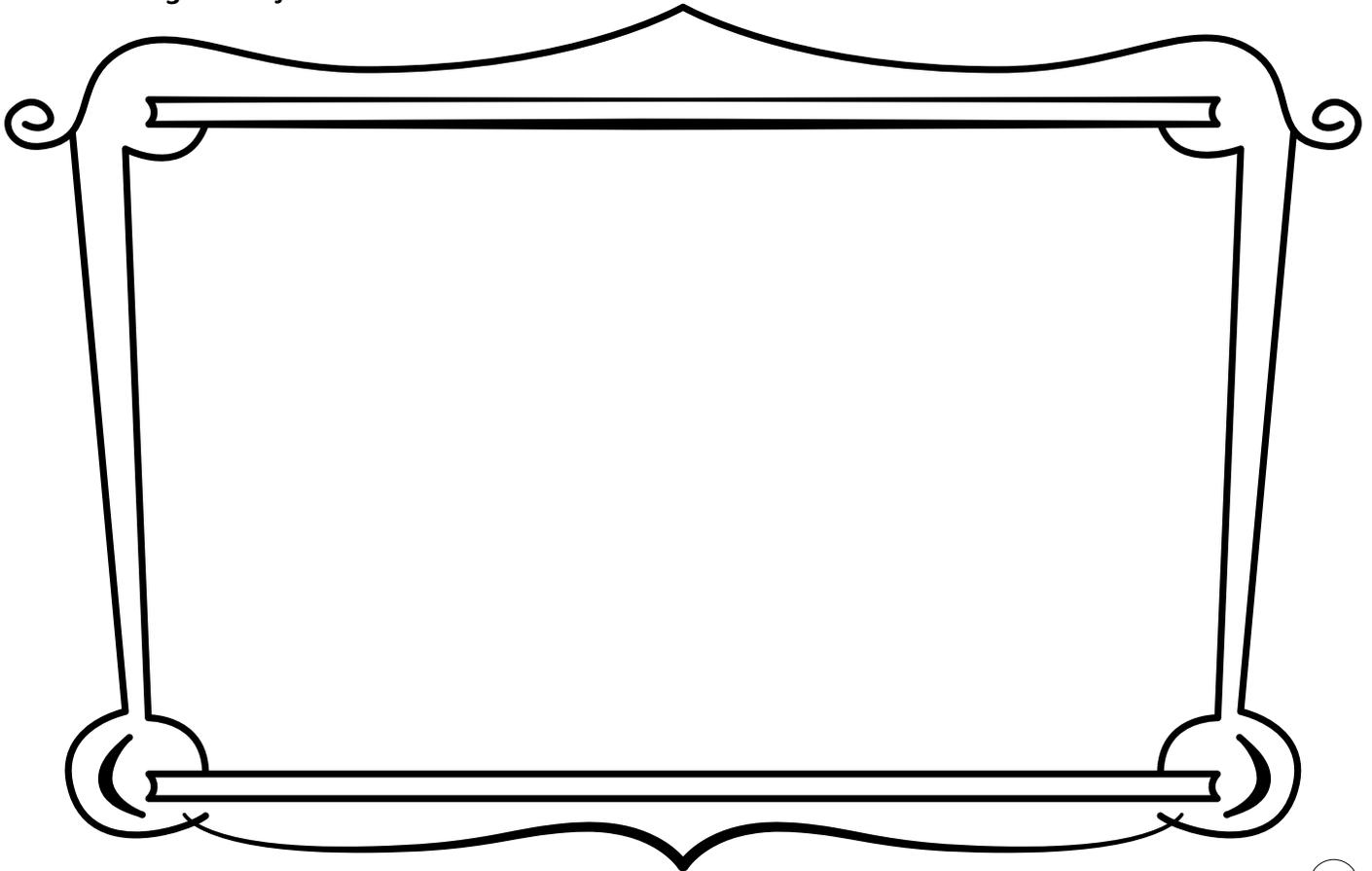


# questions to discuss

What do you think was going through the woman's mind, or heart, as she dropped those two coins in the offering? Write your answers in the coins below.



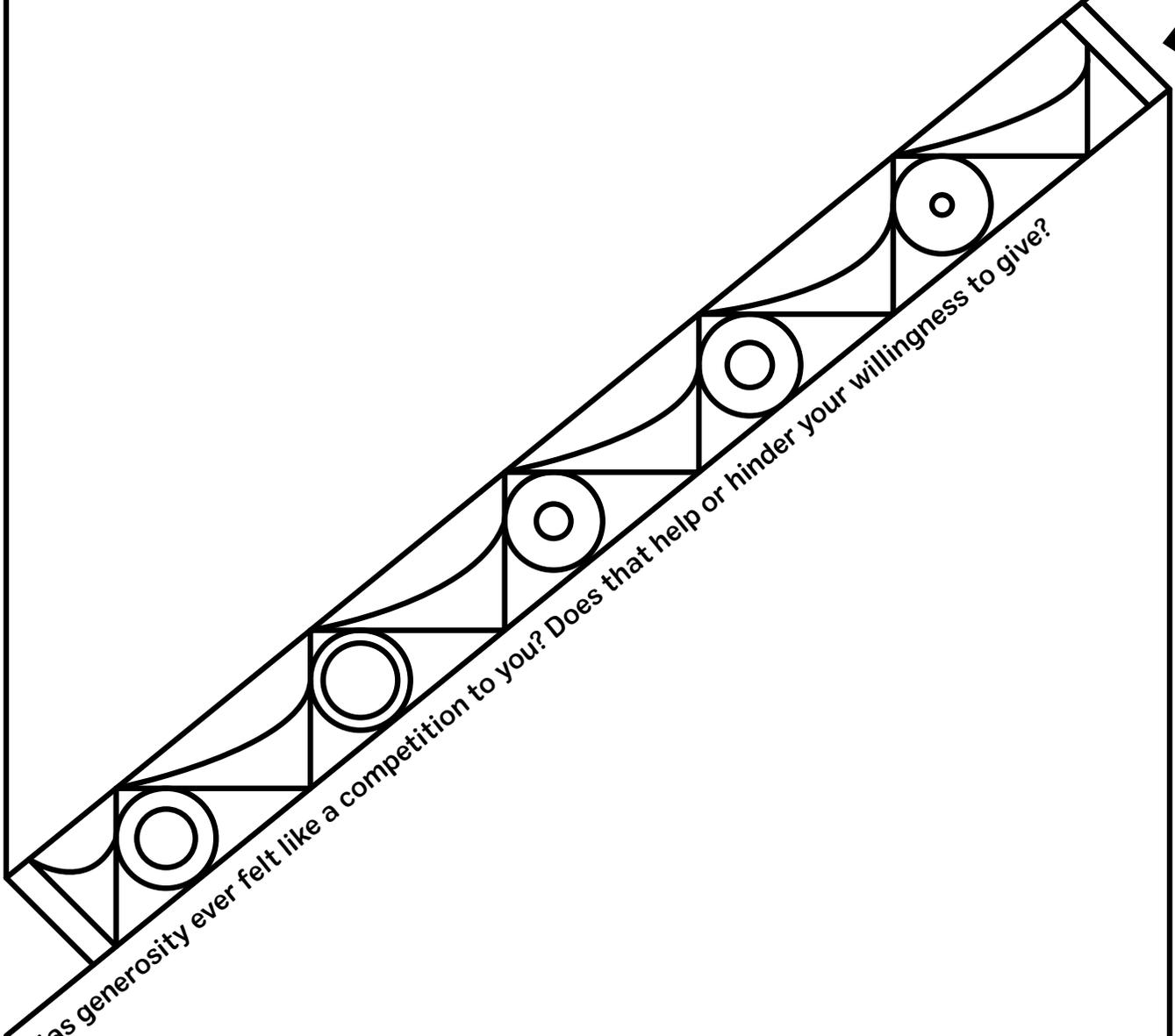
In the space below, tell the story of a time you've given – or received – something really significant, even though it may have seemed small.



# going deeper

If you had just two coins to live on, what would motivate you to give them away?

COLOR ME



• MATTHEW 22:15-22 •

Then the Pharisees went and plotted to entrap him in what he said. So they sent their disciples to him, along with the Herodians, saying, 'Teacher, we know that you are sincere, and teach the way of God in accordance with truth, and show deference to no one; for you do not regard people with partiality. Tell us, then, what you think. Is it lawful to pay taxes to the emperor, or not?' But Jesus, aware of their malice, said, 'Why are you putting me to the test, you hypocrites? Show me the coin used for the tax.' And they brought him a denarius. Then he said to them, 'Whose head is this, and whose title?' They answered, 'The emperor's.' Then he said to them, 'Give therefore to the emperor the things that are the emperor's, and to God the things that are God's.' When they heard this, they were amazed; and they left him and went away.

Sometimes there's really no good answer.

Sometimes whatever you say will get you in trouble.

Sometimes, when faced with a 'yes or no' question, you know that neither 'yes' or 'no' are acceptable responses.

In times like those, it's best to

REIMAGINE

the question.

The tradition of Buddhist koans teaches us this. Koans are short stories, questions, or riddles meant to challenge narrow ways of thinking. One of my favorites is this:



SOMEONE SAYS TO YOU, "IF YOU STAY SEATED, I WILL HIT YOU WITH THIS STICK. IF YOU MOVE FROM YOUR SEATED POSITION, I WILL HIT YOU WITH THIS STICK." **WHAT DO YOU DO?**

follow the path for the answer...



The tradition of Jesus' sayings teaches us this, too. **There is always a third way**, an option we haven't yet imagined, a way of opening that makes something new, other, better – or at least more complicated – possible. That's what he does in this encounter here.

ANSWER: YOU TAKE THE STICK.

He couldn't answer the question as they'd posed it. He knew that as well as they did. He recognized the trap. To be fair, much of Jewish life under Roman occupation felt like a trap: Jesus' community's loyalties were given to God, and they were also commanded by the Roman empire.



If he said, 'yes, pay taxes to the emperor,' he's advocating a loyalty to an unholy regime, a kingdom other than God's. He was already compromised by holding the coin in his hand – a coin that bore the image of the ruler and a stamp declaring that ruler to be divine. If Jesus said, 'no, don't pay taxes,' he was in big trouble with the empire...and, let's be honest, he was already in big trouble with the empire.

~ SO JESUS CHANGES THE QUESTION. ~

And though he responds with a seemingly simple answer – “give to the emperor the things that are the emperor's, and to God the things that are God's” – what he really does is open up a lot more **questions**.



The first question is: **what is the emperor's?** Jesus' time was no less complex than ours is today – they, too, saw sales tax and inheritance tax, taxes on importing and exporting of goods, land taxes, even taxes on specific small products – like nails – were a part of daily life. Revenue from taxes went to build roads and aqueducts and public buildings and public baths, and to support education. But the empire also believed that to stay in power, they needed to stay in the good graces of the gods and in absolute military control, so money paid by their citizens also went to fund temple projects and to build up armies. **How should a Jewish person understand their role in that system?**



It was also true, then as now, **the system was set up to benefit not just the public but particular people – namely, those already wealthy and powerful grew more so by imposing taxes on those who were not.** Jesus and his friends watched the rich grow richer and the poor grow poorer. They wrestled, knowing their paying of taxes made them participants in that system.

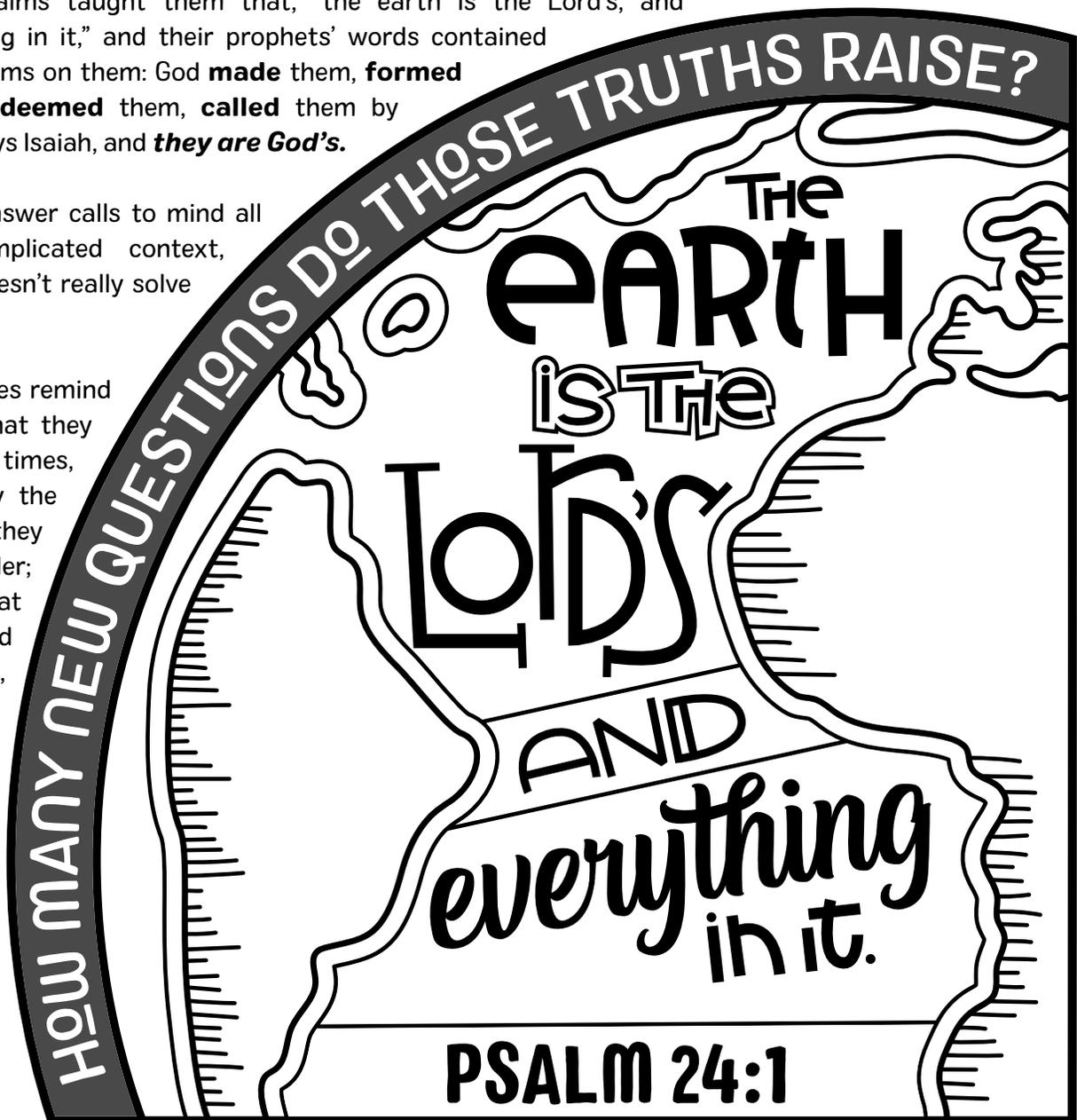
**And the second question: what is God's?** During this time there were some prescribed offerings. Jewish people were expected to give **half a shekel** in the form of a temple tax, and to tithe on their income – to give the “first fruits” of their produce – to support the priests and to honor God.



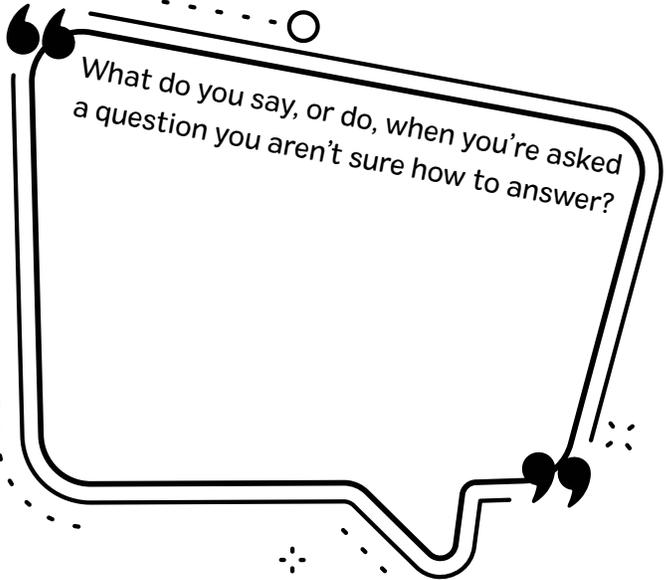
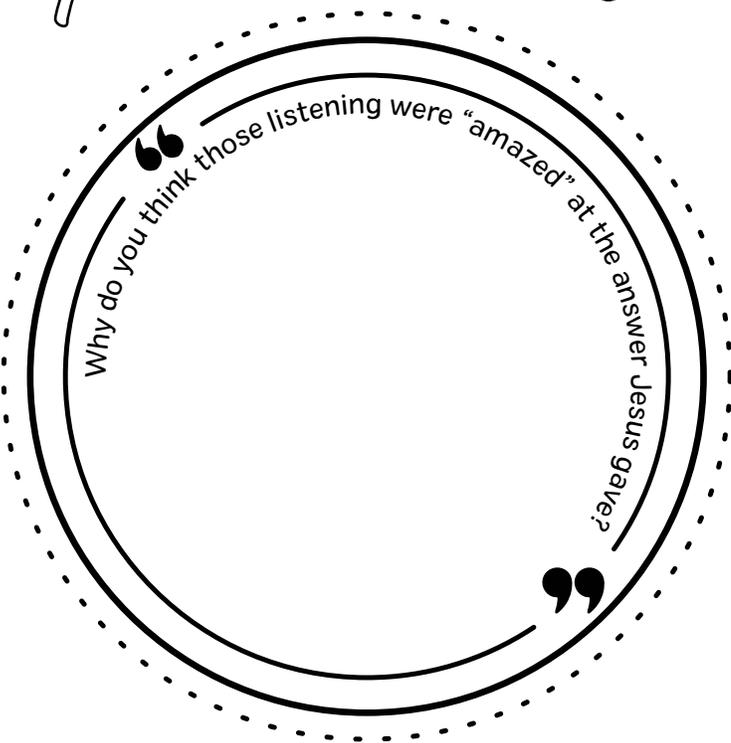
But Jesus and his community didn't only think about belonging to God in terms of financial obligation. Their Psalms taught them that, “the earth is the Lord's, and everything in it,” and their prophets' words contained God's claims on them: God **made** them, **formed** them, **redeemed** them, **called** them by name, says Isaiah, and **they are God's.**

Jesus' answer calls to mind all this complicated context, and it doesn't really solve anything.

But it does remind people that they are, at times, bound by the system they live under; and that they, and all things, always, entirely belong to God.



# questions to discuss



## going deeper

How does your belonging to God influence the ways you think about ownership, belonging, and generosity?

How do you wrestle with knowing that you don't always control the outcomes of your giving - that what you pay in taxes might be used to fund war, for example?

What might your response be to someone who says that if everything belongs to God, nothing belongs to the empire - or anyone/ anything other than God?

• LUKE 8:1-3 •

Soon afterwards he went on through cities and villages, proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God. The twelve were with him, as well as some women who had been cured of evil spirits and infirmities: Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, and Joanna, the wife of Herod's steward Chuza, and Susanna, and many others, who provided for them out of their resources.

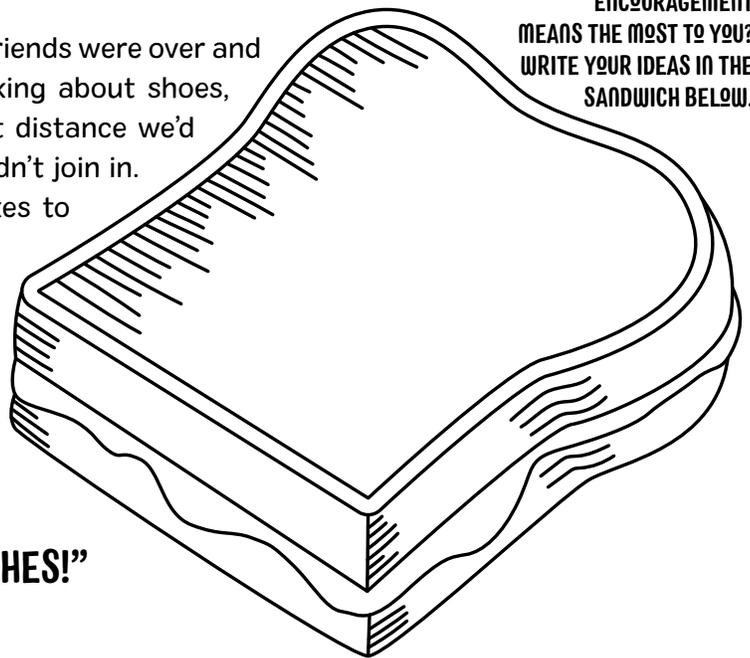
Who makes what you do easier? Who makes it more fun?  
Who makes it possible?

My husband is not a runner. When a group of friends were over and we were planning a race to do together, talking about shoes, stretches, and training runs, wondering what distance we'd be in shape to run by late springtime, he couldn't join in. He doesn't get excited about the work it takes to prepare for an event like that.

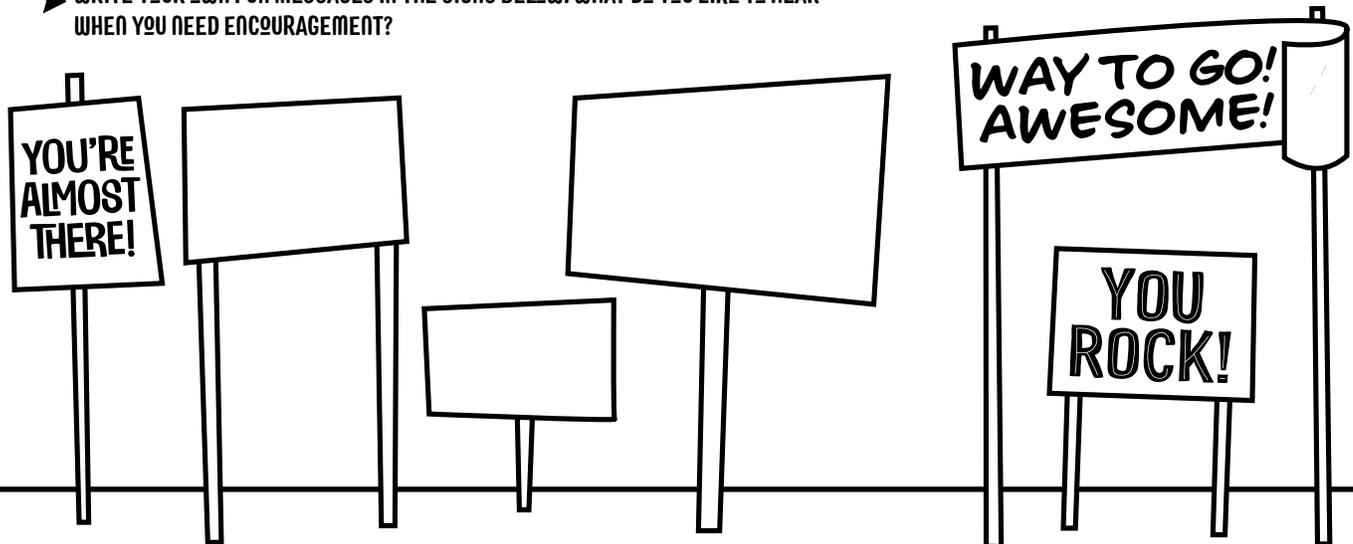
But he **did get excited** about the idea that his friends were doing it, and **they** were excited. So after we'd made some decisions about training and moved to planning the details of the race day, he pitched in,

**"I'LL MAKE SIGNS AND SANDWICHES!"**

MAYBE GRILLED-CHEESE-ENCOURAGEMENT ISN'T YOUR THING. WHAT KIND OF ENCOURAGEMENT MEANS THE MOST TO YOU? WRITE YOUR IDEAS IN THE SANDWICH BELOW.

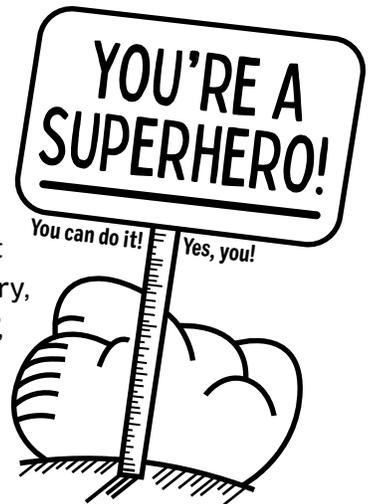


WRITE YOUR OWN FUN MESSAGES IN THE SIGNS BELOW. WHAT DO YOU LIKE TO HEAR WHEN YOU NEED ENCOURAGEMENT?



If you've run a race, you know how much those details mean. If you've never run a race, let me tell you – **signs along the way and sandwiches at the end make the whole thing better.** Cheering and the promise of grilled cheese can make you forget all about shin splints.

Throughout the Gospels, we see the importance of what other people brought to Jesus' ministry – so much so that it wasn't just his ministry, but their ministry, together. And the "they" who made the ministry probably easier, and likely more fun, and maybe even possible, *were a crowd gathered from a variety of identities and experiences:*



# PEOPLE OF ALL GENDERS; POOR AND RICH;

THOSE WHO'D NEVER HEARD OF HIM BEFORE AND THOSE HE'D CURED FROM DISEASE;  
THOSE WHO **STOOD AGAINST THE EMPIRE**  
AND THOSE WHOSE LIVELIHOODS WERE GAINED BY CONNECTION TO IT.

Jesus traveled the countryside with the aid and companionship of these friends. They went to cheer him along, and more – **they made possible the work that he did:** paying their own way, and his, *through these cities and villages.* It was the gift – or one of the gifts – they could bring to this effort, and the effort would not have continued, at least not in the same way, without their investing in it.



We still see models like this today, where people bring together different gifts to **make important work happen**. The church I'm part of supports a ministry that trains health care workers and clean water promoters in rural **NICARAGUA**. Only a small number of people from our church have visited Nicaragua and met the people there who deliver the care and educate their communities about clean water.

But even people who can't make that long trip help **SUPPORT** the efforts: they learn about what's happening in Nicaragua; they send money directly there to buy medicine and water filters and to pay salaries of the local staff; they support the members of our congregation who can make the trip to walk alongside the rural community members and learn from them about ways we can partner.

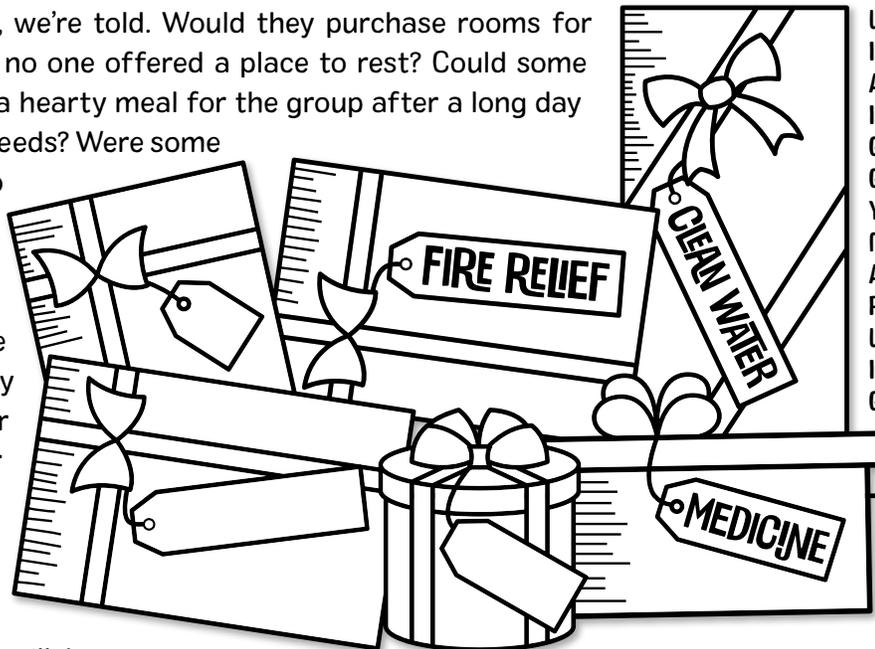
And I think about the kids I keep hearing about, who learn about the fires in Australia, or the famines in Sudan, and decide that in place of presents at their birthday parties, they ask their friends to donate to help people and animals suffering in those places. **Their generous impulses connect those with means and those in need in ways they might not have been connected before.**

## CHANGE AND HEALING BECOME POSSIBLE.

I wonder about the traveling band of folks that followed Jesus. **I wonder about the gifts each of them brought.**

Some of them had money, we're told. Would they purchase rooms for the group to stay in when no one offered a place to rest? Could some of them cook and prepare a hearty meal for the group after a long day of meeting other people's needs? Were some poets, or musicians, who would gather the group after dinner and spin stories or play songs for them to enjoy? Were some of them handy – could they mend shoes, or carts, or rig up make-shift tents or whatever was needed on these journeys?

In the **GOSPEL OF JOHN**, Jesus tells his disciples they will do even greater things than he did. I used to think that meant they, too, would heal and teach and challenge empire – and maybe it does. But maybe it also means that Jesus could only do so much alone, and the community that they created together, that sustained him and then carried on the work after him, was even greater.



WHETHER IT'S WITH A LOCAL OR INTERNATIONAL GROUP, WHAT GIFTS CAN YOU BRING TO MAKE CHANGE AND HEALING POSSIBLE? WRITE YOUR IDEAS ON THE GIFT TAGS.

## questions to discuss

What resources and gifts do you have?

How do you **share** your resources and gifts?

## going deeper

Can you name ways people are generous with you that help make your life possible, easier, and more fun?

Why is it important that it wasn't just the twelve disciples who were part of the community that Jesus helped create? What does the mention of the women and "many others" add to our understanding of the story?

• MARK 10:13-16 •

People were bringing little children to him in order that he might touch them; and the disciples spoke sternly to them. But when Jesus saw this, he was indignant and said to them, 'Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it.' And he took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them.



**THOSE POOR KIDS.** It probably wasn't their idea to come, and then they're in trouble – one set of grown-ups pushing them toward Jesus, another set pushing them **away**.

I wonder how much they'd been told about why they were there, and what they were doing.

**I wonder how much of it they understood.**

**AND THOSE POOR DISCIPLES.** They were probably just trying to protect Jesus, don't you think? They knew people were tugging at him all the time; they'd seen him sneak off when he got overwhelmed; they'd been on boats with him when he tried to sail away from a needy crowd, only to be greeted by another throng of people once he reached the other shore.

*They're chastised here*, but I wonder if they were just trying to create some breathing room for their friend.



**AND THOSE POOR PARENTS AND CARETAKERS.** We don't know why they've brought their children, but we can guess. We can guess they've heard about the good Jesus has been doing for people – offering bread and healing and promise – and **those are things they want for their children**.

**We don't know if they're desperate or just hopeful.**



**PROBABLY THEY, LIKE ALL OF US,  
ARE TRYING TO DO THE BEST THEY CAN.**

## But then the **voice of Jesus** breaks through the confusion and criticism of this scene.

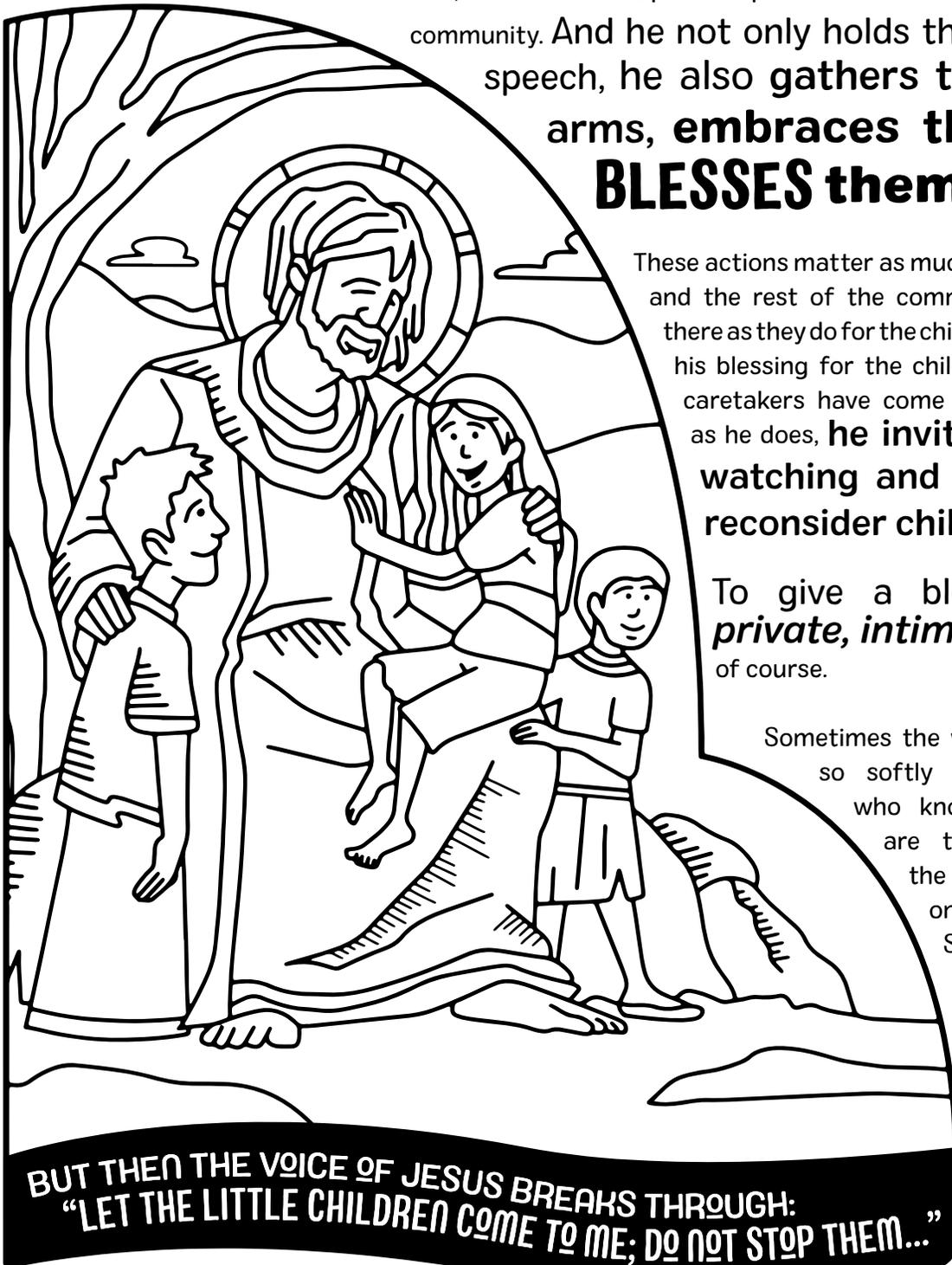
Jesus not only affirms the children for being there, he **WELCOMES** them. He not only welcomes them, he holds them up in his speech as models for the rest of the community. And he not only holds them up in his

speech, he also **gathers them in his arms, embraces them, and BLESSES them.**

These actions matter as much for the disciples and the rest of the community assembled there as they do for the children. Jesus offers his blessing for the children – what their caretakers have come asking for – and as he does, **he invites all those watching and listening to reconsider children.**

To give a blessing is a **private, intimate matter**, of course.

Sometimes the words are spoken so softly the only people who know what is said are the one offering the blessing and the one receiving it. Sometimes there's an element of touch connecting the giver and receiver of the blessing.



**BUT THEN THE VOICE OF JESUS BREAKS THROUGH:  
“LET THE LITTLE CHILDREN COME TO ME; DO NOT STOP THEM...”**

**At the same time, to give a blessing is to make a public display.** Even if witnesses don't hear the words exchanged, or aren't part of the bond formed through the touch, they see the meaning being made in that moment: the one offering conveys not only good fortune but also honor and approval to the one who receives.

Jesus' welcoming, embracing, and blessing of these children – and his exhortation that everyone else be like them – **GRANTS THEM A SOCIAL POWER**, a respected status, they haven't known before this scene. After this encounter, at least the instruction seems to be not only to protect children but to give them some **FREEDOM** too; not only to give them lessons but to let them be teachers as well. Jesus encourages the crowd to acknowledge and appreciate the gifts of children, and to adopt their stance toward the world.

# JESUS USES HIS POWER HERE TO GIVE POWER TO THOSE LEAST LIKELY TO EXPERIENCE IT.

HAVE YOU RECEIVED A BLESSING THAT WAS ESPECIALLY MEANINGFUL?  
IS THERE A BLESSING YOU'D LIKE TO GIVE SOMEONE ELSE?  
TAKE A FEW MOMENTS AND WRITE A BLESSING IN THE SPACE PROVIDED BELOW.

A large, rounded rectangular box with a decorative border and a central flourish, containing several horizontal lines for writing a blessing.

He gives everyone a glimpse of the kingdom he's bringing: a world where old categories like "least" and "most" are reimaged into a structure where **everyone** can flourish.

There's some debate about the lesson Jesus leaves his hearers with in this scene. Some say he's suggesting that receiving the kingdom of God must be done as a child: like, it must be received how a child receives – wide-eyed, eager, trusting, without judgment or pretense. And some say the kingdom must be received as one would receive a child: with recognition of, and care for, all the vulnerability contained there. **Maybe both are intended. Maybe both are invitations for all of us.**

# questions to discuss

## STORY TIME

Whatever your age now, tell a story about a time you learned something from a child.

## going deeper

WHAT'S AN EXAMPLE OF A TIME WHEN YOUR VULNERABILITY WAS RECOGNIZED AND RESPECTED?

How might God's kingdom be **vulnerable**? And how might thinking of it as such change our orientation toward it?

If you knew you could offer a blessing and it would change the lived experience of the receiver in some way, who would you bless and why?

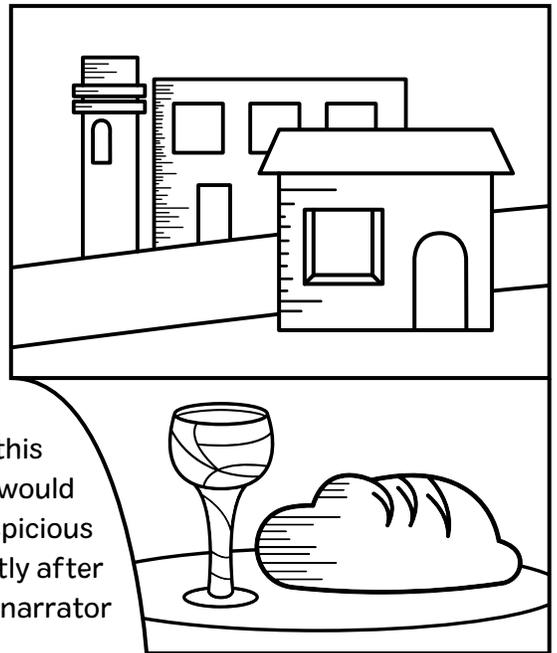
What are some ways you can use your own privilege to grant social power to others?

• JOHN 12:1-8 •

Six days before the Passover Jesus came to Bethany, the home of Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. There they gave a dinner for him. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those at the table with him. Mary took a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard, anointed Jesus' feet, and wiped them with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (the one who was about to betray him), said, 'Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and the money given to the poor?' (He said this not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief; he kept the common purse and used to steal what was put into it.) Jesus said, 'Leave her alone. She bought it so that she might keep it for the day of my burial. You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me.'

**There are so many ways to show kindness.** There are endless ways we can love one another. Even in just a few verses, this story mentions several of them: friends **opened** their home to Jesus. Martha **served** him dinner. Lazarus **offered** the gift of his presence. Mary **anointed** Jesus' feet. Judas **reminded** those gathered of other ways they could love, of their responsibility to the poor. Jesus reminds those gathered the opportunities to show kindness are abundant.

The story prejudices us against Judas, with that side note that he doesn't care about the poor, and that spoiler that he was about to betray Jesus. If he had made this comment during this scene, and not ended up betraying Jesus, I wonder if the story would still be written this way. I wonder if we're just trained to be suspicious of everything Judas says because of his turning on Jesus shortly after this. I wonder, if the bigger story hadn't ended that way, if the narrator of this little story would've been more generous with Judas.



## BECAUSE HE MAKES A DECENT POINT, RIGHT?

People are suffering all around them. Jesus and the disciples have made it their mission, at least in part, to relieve some of that suffering by offering hope, and healing, and bread. And here they're enjoying a nice meal, while at least some of those outside the walls of this home are probably hungry. How do they respond to those people? How do they take care of themselves, and of other people? When Jesus leaves this home later in the evening, if someone smells the perfume on him, how will he explain it?

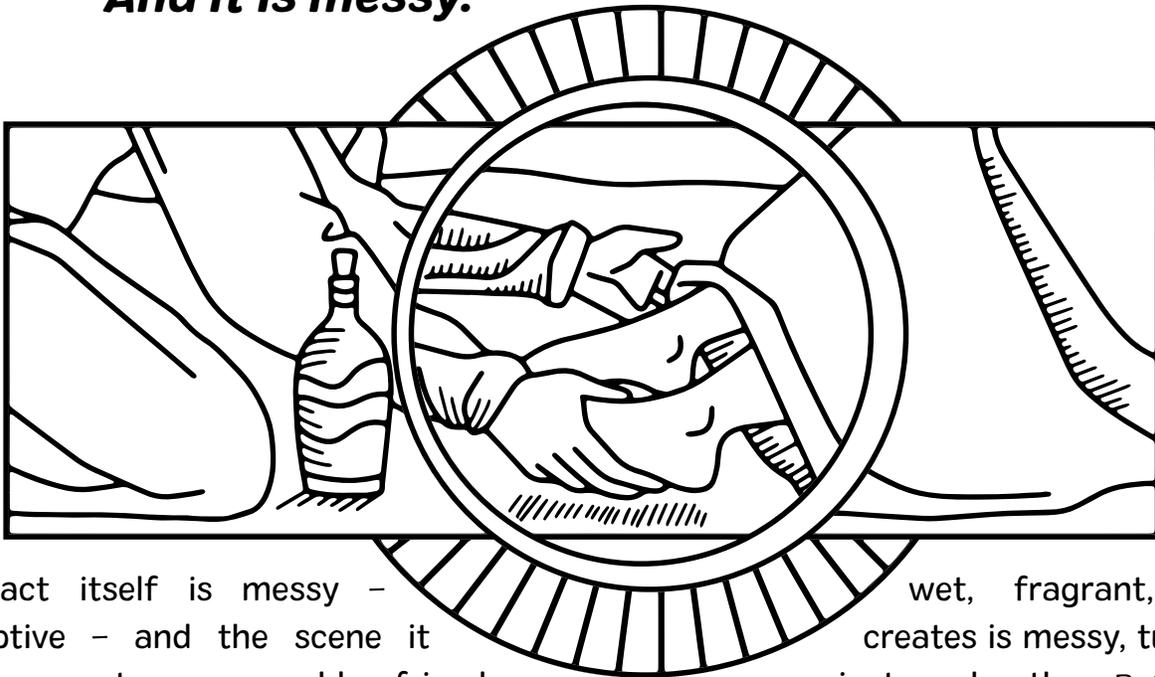
**St. Ambrose long ago said,** "If you have two shirts in your closet, one belongs to you and the other belongs to the person with no shirt. If you have two coats, you have stolen one from the poor." I open my own closet door, am greeted by a variety of colors and sleeve lengths and fabrics and patterns, and am ashamed to see, according to those standards, what a thief I am.

Still, there are lots of ways to show kindness. **What Mary does in this story**, wiping Jesus' feet with this expensive oil, **is considered an act of mercy in Hebrew culture.** It is a tender, ritualized kindness to anoint someone for burial.

**It's not her idea;** it doesn't come from nowhere. It's part of what is to be done, among people of this time and place and faith, for those who are dying. Jesus knows he is going to die, and he's been telling his followers this. Mostly, they haven't believed him, and they've argued with him whenever he's mentioned it.

# BUT MARY HAS BELIEVED HIM,

and so she honors his life with this generous act.  
***And it is messy.***



The act itself is messy – wet, fragrant, and disruptive – and the scene it creates is messy, turning dinner guests, presumably friends, against each other. But when Judas says, “this is a waste; we should’ve used this perfume for the good of the poor,” ***Jesus doesn’t say Judas is wrong.*** He just says Judas is thinking too narrowly. It’s not as though this one act of **EXTRAVAGANT** generosity makes other acts of generosity impossible.

**There will always be need,** Jesus reminds Judas (and all of us). There will always be ways, places, and chances to be helpful. Mary pours out perfume this night, and still the next day, there would be cups of water and bowls of soup to pour out for those thirsty and hungry, extra shirts and coats to drape over the shoulders of those cold or naked, time and space to sit or to walk with those lonely and in need of a friend. **Even if we’ve never known extravagance, or we pour out all the expensive oil, or we only have one shirt hanging in our closet, each one of us will always have something to give.**

*questions to discuss*

What is a generous gift you've given, or received, or been witness to?  
What feelings did the generosity stir in you?

In what ways are the poor "with you"?

*going deeper*

Imagine being a guest at this dinner party. Would you find yourself indignant, like Judas, or defending Mary, like Jesus, or somewhere in between? **WHY?**

What are some of the ways our thinking about giving is narrow?  
How might we open ourselves up to a more abundant way of thinking?

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# week seven

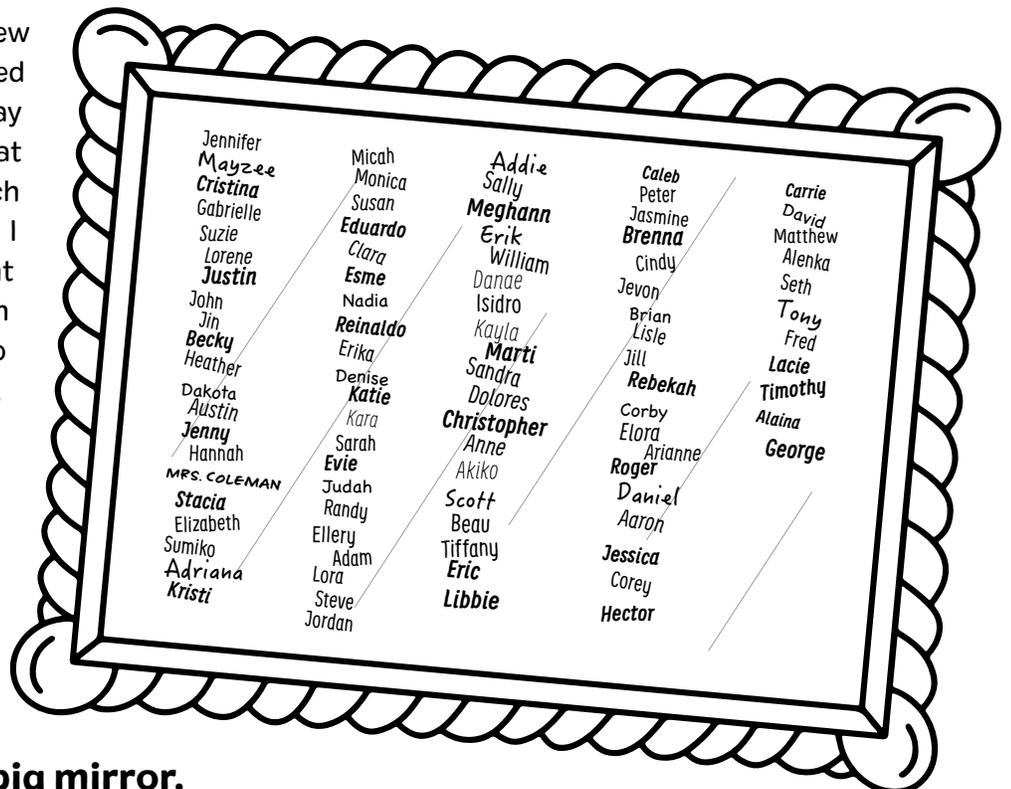
## • JOHN 21:1-14 •

After these things Jesus showed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias; and he showed himself in this way. Gathered there together were Simon Peter, Thomas called the Twin, Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of his disciples. Simon Peter said to them, 'I am going fishing.' They said to him, 'We will go with you.' They went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing.

Just after daybreak, Jesus stood on the beach; but the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to them, 'Children, you have no fish, have you?' They answered him, 'No.' He said to them, 'Cast the net to the right side of the boat, and you will find some.' So they cast it, and now they were not able to haul it in because there were so many fish. That disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, 'It is the Lord!' When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on some clothes, for he was naked, and jumped into the lake. But the other disciples came in the boat, dragging the net full of fish, for they were not far from the land, only about a hundred yards off.

When they had gone ashore, they saw a charcoal fire there, with fish on it, and bread. Jesus said to them, 'Bring some of the fish that you have just caught.' So Simon Peter went aboard and hauled the net ashore, full of large fish, a hundred and fifty-three of them; and though there were so many, the net was not torn. Jesus said to them, 'Come and have breakfast.' Now none of the disciples dared to ask him, 'Who are you?' because they knew it was the Lord. Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. This was now the third time that Jesus appeared to the disciples after he was raised from the dead.

When I was visiting a friend in New York City, she graciously offered me her room, saying she'd stay on the couch. I'd arrived late at night and wasn't paying much attention to my surroundings; I stumbled into bed and fell right asleep. The next morning when I woke up, I brought myself to the mirror, rubbed my eyes, and realized the reflection staring back at me was broken up by markings – my friend had written all over her mirror. Nosy, I looked closer, and saw that it was a list of names.



**Five columns, twenty or thirty names each. It was a big mirror, and it was nearly covered, though there was some space in the bottom right corner.**

My friend knocked as I was still reading the names, so I asked her to come in, and to tell me about it. She said, “**That’s the list of people who got me here – both to New York, but also just to who I am today. I ALWAYS WANT TO REMEMBER.** Looking at that list every morning reminds me of everyone I carry with me, everyone that has called **who I am** forth from me.”

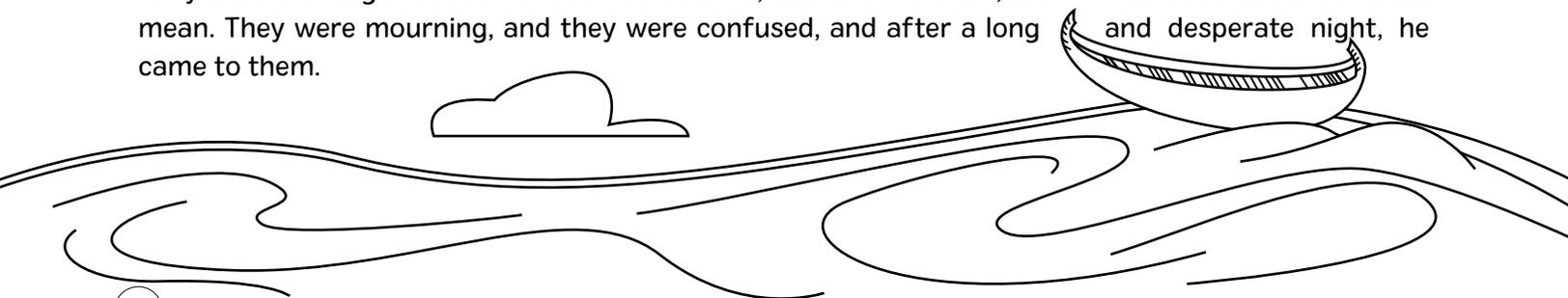
She said, “**I KNOW THAT I’M HERE – AND WHEREVER I WILL BE AFTER HERE – BECAUSE OF THEM, BECAUSE OF WHAT THEY SAW IN ME AND WHAT THEY ENCOURAGED FROM ME, EVEN BEFORE I REALLY KNEW WHO I WAS.**”

WHO ARE THE PEOPLE IN YOUR LIFE WHO SEE YOU AND ENCOURAGE YOU? WHO HAS HELPED YOU GET "HERE"?

WHO SAW SOMETHING IN YOU BEFORE YOU REALLY KNEW WHO YOU WERE? FILL IN YOUR MIRROR WITH THEIR NAMES.

• WHO SEES YOU? •

Maybe the disciples out on the sea also had long lists of names that brought them to the place where they were on the morning of this story: others who had **welcomed them, fed them, housed them, taken them in as they journeyed with Jesus.** But they weren’t making lists out there on the boat. They were thinking of Jesus – of who he had been, with and for them, and of what his absence would mean. They were mourning, and they were confused, and after a long and desperate night, he came to them.



He came in ways they had known him before: **HE CAME AS TEACHER**, suggesting they throw their nets on the other side of the boat; **AND AS HOST**, preparing bread and fish for them at the shore; and **AS ONE WHO CALLED OUT AND WELCOMED THEIR GIFTS**: “bring what you have.”

In a story given to us by the Gospel of Luke, **Jesus also came as teacher and host** to the ones he journeyed alongside on the road to Emmaus, opening the scriptures to them and breaking the bread for them. In another story from the Gospel of John, **he came to Mary Magdalene as one who welcomes**, calling her by name in the garden, reminding her that she is known, *even in the deep unknowing of her grief*.

After Jesus’ death, **ONE WAY RESURRECTION HAPPENS IS THROUGH THESE GIFTS OF PRESENCE**, where he is known again, where those he walked alongside during his life realize, and trust, that even though he’s gone they do not walk alone – that every time they learn something new about God’s world or God’s words; every time they are welcomed and invited in; every time they are really seen for who they are, even through their sadness; every time their gifts are called forth from them – **IN ALL OF THOSE TIMES, AND MORE, THEY CAN KNOW JESUS’ PRESENCE.**

Throughout his life, Jesus was generous – creating feasts of bread and fish for thousands, tossing his teaching around to all who would listen, offering healing freely. **Easter is a celebration of the way that generosity continues to be known in the world – a celebration of the way his presence nourishes, teaches, and heals, and an invitation to each of us to embody that, too.**

In the resurrection stories, none of the people to whom Jesus comes know it’s him at first. They don’t recognize his face. They recognize his presence. *Which might mean any one of us could offer resurrection hope*, if we commit to showing up where we are needed, bringing bread, and wisdom, and calling people by name.



# questions to discuss

## STORY TIME

Tell a story of a time when someone's presence made a difference for the good in your life.

What was it about their encounter on the boat, and the shore, that made the disciples so sure this person was Jesus?



## going deeper

Why, in times of deep confusion or grief, does presence seem to matter more than anything else we could offer?

What are the tasks, actions, or moments in your life where you feel the presence of someone else with you?



## · CONTRIBUTORS ·

**WRITING** ERIKA MARKSBURY is Senior Pastor of the creative and welcoming First Baptist Church of McMinnville, Oregon, and mom to two exhausting, inspiring boys.

**EDITING** ARIANNE BRAITHWAITE LEHN is a mother, one half of a clergy couple, writer, and ordained minister with the Presbyterian Church (USA). As a South Dakota native, Arianne originally planned on Law School until God called her to Taiwan where everything changed. She later graduated from McCormick Theological Seminary (Chicago). She and her family live in Wilmette, Illinois. Arianne is the author of *Ash and Starlight: Prayers for the Chaos and Grace of Daily Life*. You can connect with Arianne and her writing at her website [ariannebraithwaitelehn.com](http://ariannebraithwaitelehn.com).

**ILLUSTRATION** CORBY ORTMANN is a digital illustrator and animator, whose work includes caricatures, graphic design, children's books, and animated commercials/music videos. He currently lives in Fargo, ND with his wife and daughter, who help him to step away from the art table every so often. You can find more of his work at [www.corbyortmann.com](http://www.corbyortmann.com).

**CONCEPT & EDITING** REBEKAH LOWE, a local of Kansas City, Southern California, and Austin, Texas, earned a BA in Biblical Studies from Azusa Pacific University and served as the Director of Children's Ministry at Brentwood Presbyterian Church (USA) in Los Angeles, California. She resides in Austin, TX with her husband and their two children.

**ILLUSTRATION FOUNDER + CEO** ADAM WALKER CLEVELAND is an artist, pastor, pastor's spouse, and father of four (two living). Adam is an ordained Teaching Elder in the Presbyterian Church (USA), and after doing youth ministry for over 15 years, he founded Illustrated Ministry, LLC in 2015. He resides in Racine, Wisconsin with his wife and their two children.