

The Weekly Word
March 20-26, 2017

The March of Lent is moving along and so is our Bible reading. Luke's gospel continues to unfold. Happy reading...
Grace and Peace, Bill

To hear the Bible read click this link... <http://www.biblegateway.com/resources/audio/>.

Monday, March 20: Luke 11- Prayer in its simplicity...

He said to them, "When you pray, say:

" 'Father, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread. Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us. And lead us not into temptation' " (2-4)

At its heart prayer is speaking with God our Father. By calling God Father we begin with the intimacy or connected relationship. God is not some distant 'being' or 'entity' we hope will give us a hearing because of something we have done or some offering we bring Him. No, God listens because He is our Father. As our Father we have a family connection and we can enter His presence anytime because we are family.

Not only is God Father, He is Majestic and King. He deserves all honor and glory because of who He is. None is like Him in splendor. The awe we have for Him will usher us into our prayer and will set the tone for our speaking with Him. He is family but He is also King.

We are invited to ask for what we need... *our daily bread*. God is not a free ATM who gives us everything and anything we desire in the moment. What kind of Father would He be if He spoiled us rotten?! However, God will give us what we need when we need it... *daily bread*. By giving us what we need in the present God invites us to always be present with Him. If He gave us everything we needed forever we would never need to return to Him. We have a loving dependence upon and with God our Father.

One of His great gifts and a gift He can adjudicate because He is King is our forgiveness, our pardon, our release from the burden guilt lays on our backs. This is one of our great needs... forgiveness, pardon, release. God our Father and King lavishes this upon us for the asking.

God our Father will lead us in life and away from pitfalls if we ask Him. Remember He loves to be present with us. He also loves to guide us when He is with us, but He will not force His way, so He invites us to ask and He will lead us away from temptation.

There we have it... prayer in its essence...

Join me...

Father,

Praise be to You... hallowed be your name, your kingdom come...

Give me that which I need today, food, shelter, work, companionship... Give us each day our daily bread.

Forgive my sins and lead me in right living and on a path that avoids sin... Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us. And lead us not into temptation. *Amen.*

Tuesday, March 21: Luke 12- Vintage Jesus...

This chapter is chock full of Jesus' teachings. I could spend a week, even more on this lone chapter. So much good stuff.

It was Jesus' opening that grabbed me and never let me go. Verses 1-3: *Meanwhile, when a crowd of many thousands had gathered, so that they were trampling on one another, Jesus began to speak first to his disciples, saying: "Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy. There is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed, or hidden that will not be made known. What you have said in the dark will be heard in the daylight, and what you have whispered in the ear in the inner rooms will be proclaimed from the roofs.*

Hypocrisy... Selling a 'self' that isn't true. Professing one thing yet doing another. In the last month a high ranking White House advisor resigned because he had inappropriate conversations with Russians before President Trump took office. As the story unfolded he denied it. Other officials even defended him as a man of character. However the wire taps on the Russians showed that he did in fact have those inappropriate conversations. The result... his resignation and egg on the face of those who defended his character.

How many people have been exposed living a lie by a cellphone picture?

Jesus reminds us that *[t]here is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed, or hidden that will not be made known.* While the truth doesn't always come out that quickly it does have a habit of revealing itself. As people of faith we believe that God knows everything, so even if we get away with some hypocrisy this side of eternity, God knows and God will deal with us when this life ends.

Jesus warned *Be on your guard against... hypocrisy.*

His warning is as fresh and true today as it ever has been.

Are you listening? God whispers to me... "Am I listening?"

Lord, show me my failings, my inconsistencies, my areas of weakness so that I will grow. Train me to guard my lips and my heart that I might be a person of integrity rather than falsehood and hypocrisy. I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Wednesday, March 22: Luke 13- Unless you repent...

Chapter 13 begins with a teaching which the editors of my NIV translation titles "Repent or Perish." Mentioning a mass murder Jesus asked if the people thought those who died in that horrendous way were guiltier than other people. *"I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish"* (3). Next discussing a tragic accident where a building collapses and people die, Jesus again asks the people if they think that those who died in that way were more guilty than other people. And again Jesus replies in the same way. *"I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish"* (5).

From God's perspective all people have broken His laws and need to repent or they will perish.

That's a pretty stark word but it is also very clear, gradations of guilty are not the issue. What matters to God is whether we repent. Both cases of the 'you' in verses 3 and 5 is plural. Jesus is looking over everyone saying 'You' as in 'You-all' must repent.

Repent –acknowledge that we have broken God's law of loving God and neighbors wholly – and asking God to forgive us as we turn 180 degrees and change our lives. We begin walking toward Jesus and His will and way rather than away from Jesus. We follow Jesus as Lord and seek to please Him rather than self.

Repentance is required of everyone if we want to avoid perishing.

That's Jesus' word...

Question is, have you repented?

Lord Jesus, thank You for making my need clear. I turn to You. I repent. Please forgive my wrongs and show me the way to live that honors You and the forgiveness You have rendered to me. I pray this acknowledging that You Father, Jesus, and Holy Spirit are my God and I now live to honor You. Through Jesus, my Lord, I pray. Amen.

Thursday, March 23: Luke 14- Counting the cost...

Among today's teachings it was the "the cost of discipleship" portion that drew me in. After reading I sat still considering the multiplying effect of Jesus' teaching. Jesus' call to discipleship should never be entered into glibly.

I am wondering if today's evangelical presentation about accepting Christ by praying a simple 'sinner's prayer' is a distortion and downgrade from Jesus' expectations. It seems Jesus expected a great deal more than a 30-second prayer.

Maybe it is okay to use the 'sinner's prayer' as the entrance into discipleship, but a life of discipleship is much, much more. Too often, it seems, we allow people to think faith is simple and easy; all one needs to be saved is to pray the prayer.

Over and over again Jesus reminds His followers about the implications of following Him.

How hard it is to square Jesus' words, "*If anyone comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, even their own life—such a person cannot be my disciple* (26) with some of the family first and family at all cost teaching out there today.

I believe Jesus is using hyperbole to make a point that following Jesus MUST be our first and highest priority. I believe it is hyperbole because Ephesians 5 and Colossian 3 tell us to love our wives/husbands. Jesus himself chastises the Pharisees for declaring Corban money that should have gone to caring for parents (Mark 7:11). His point, which is still hard to follow, is that obedience to God must never be compromised in the name of family duties. This is only the first of Jesus' words on the subject.

It seems that His intent might be to scare people from being disciples, and if not, that at least He is causing them to 'count the cost' which might cause some to give up. *Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Won't you first sit down and estimate the cost to see if you have enough money to complete it? (28) Or suppose a king is about to go to war against another king. Won't he first sit down and consider whether he is able with ten thousand men to oppose the one coming against him with twenty thousand? If he is not able, he will send a delegation while the other is still a long way off and will ask for terms of peace. In the same way, those of you who do not give up everything you have cannot be my disciples (31-33)*

Stepping out of the past into the present, I need to ask myself if I am compromising my discipleship in any areas for the sake of relationships or pleasures or...

Counting the cost was not only for followers in Jesus' day, it is for followers in every day and age.

Jesus, Father, Spirit, help me be honest with myself about my discipleship of Jesus. In His name, I pray. Amen.

Friday, March 24: Luke 15- Throw a party in heaven...

'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.' I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent (6b-7).

'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost coin.' In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents (9b-10).

For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' So they began to celebrate (24).

The theme of being lost and then being found comes across clearly in this chapter. Lost sheep, lost coin, lost son... the search, the longing and the celebration when the lost is found is also very clear. All heaven rejoices when one sinner repents.

So if we want to throw a party in heaven, search for someone who is lost in their sin and help them find the love, forgiveness and welcome of God when they come home.

Help me, Father, throw many parties in heaven. Lead me to the lost and then fill my mouth with words that honor and show them You. I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Saturday, March 25: Luke 16- God is still in control...

This is a chapter filled with expressions I find difficult to understand. After working to resolve some of my difficulties, I took a deep breath and prayed a brief prayer, "Lord, allow me to climb on your lap and nestle in Your embrace. Allow me something to feed my heart and soul, not just my mind."

As I sat a bit longer with the Lord I realized that whether or not I can unravel the difficulties of this chapter, the Lord is still God. And in the end He will make plain what I cannot now understand due to my human limitations.

Surprisingly this gave me solace and comfort. God is God and He knows more than I. There are times and texts I do not understand. Just because I do not know does not mean all is lost because God knows.

This seems to be a strange lesson from this chapter but it is pouring peace into my life. Why? Partly because there are many things happening in my world today that are causing me to scratch my head in wonder and bewilderment.

The world seems to be growing more and more polarized by the day. What is so troubling is that good people, faithful people, are deeply divided by the various views. I don't understand.

It is as if God is reminding me that He remains in control and I need to trust Him and live faithfully as best I can during these turbulent and often confusing days. The various money themes of this chapter highlight for me that living faithfully means using my money in God honoring ways.

A fitting prayer to conclude today's time with the Lord seems to be the old hymn:

I surrender all. I surrender all. All to Jesus I surrender. I surrender all... Amen.

Sunday, March 26, 2017, Sunday Worship

If any of my thoughts or the Bible readings spark questions send an email reply and I will do my best to answer all questions from people on the list... I will answer personal questions privately; general questions will be answered in a subsequent email installment.

If you are reading along with me from the PCOG website you can send questions or request being placed on the weekly email list by emailing Lisa at office@pcogonline.org.

[Click here for a link to my sermons on the web.](#) Sermons are generally posted within 2 days.