

SUNDAY Gospel of the Unseen

Scripture: Luke 5:12-15

Once, when he was in one of the cities, there was a man covered with leprosy. When he saw Jesus, he bowed with his face to the ground and begged him, 'Lord, if you choose, you can make me clean.' Then Jesus stretched out his hand, touched him, and said, 'I do choose. Be made clean.' Immediately the leprosy left him. And he ordered him to tell no one. 'Go,' he said, 'and show yourself to the priest, and, as Moses commanded, make an offering for your cleansing, for a testimony to them.' But now more than ever the word about Jesus spread abroad; many crowds would gather to hear him and to be cured of their diseases.

MONDAY Luke 4:14-44 Jesus announced good news to the poor

In Nazareth, Jesus defined his mission by claiming that God was fulfilling the words of Isaiah 61:1-2 through Jesus' healing, liberating actions. There he met rejection and anger. In Capernaum, on the other hand, the townspeople wanted him to stay there and be their local healer (verse 42). But Jesus steadfastly followed a course that he and God chose. He did not allow either human popularity or rejection to govern his actions.

- As you read about Jesus in the synagogue in Nazareth, what seems to have changed people's reaction from verse 22, where they were "impressed by the gracious words flowing from his lips," to verse 28, where they were filled with murderous anger? In what ways did "This is Joseph's son, isn't it?" express doubt about Jesus' messianic claim (cf. Mark 6:1-6)? In what ways did Jesus' mission address both physical and spiritual bondage, poverty and blindness?
- Jesus was a supreme example of servant leadership, yet Luke said he also practiced good self-care (or, perhaps more accurately, soul care). In verse 42 today, and again in Luke 5:16 tomorrow, Luke said Jesus left the crowds to pray in solitary places. Solitude—just you and God—is hard for most of us. How could you create fifteen minutes of solitude each day by design? How might you occasionally find longer periods of solitude?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, you were (and are) so much more than just "Joseph's son." Help me to find and value time alone with you. Nourish my spirit as I practice the same discipline you practiced here on earth. Amen.

TUESDAY Luke 5:1-32 Healing the hurting, calling followers

Luke (probably Paul's companion called "the dearly loved physician" in Colossians 4:14) catalogued many different ills Jesus healed. No wonder people were "filled with awe" (verse 26)—clearly an awe-inspiring spiritual power was at work in Jesus. And it's important to know that in Jesus' day, illness was not just physical—many people thought it was a sign of God's

curse. Jesus' healing acts bore powerful witness to God's forgiveness and love, as well as God's power.

- The book *Serving from the Heart* defines the gift of healing as “the divine ability to bring wholeness—physical, emotional or spiritual—to others.” What signs can you find in these stories that Jesus healed in all of these ways? In which of these ways do you most need healing right now? How can you open your life to Jesus' healing power?
- In verses 17-21 and 30, a shadow fell over the joy Jesus' healing, liberating power brought. Israel's religious leaders, who should have led the people in recognizing and welcoming Jesus, were shadowing him, not to learn, but with a critical, fault-finding spirit. In what ways did Jesus' ministry pose a threat to those leaders? In what ways can you keep yourself from feeling threatened by anyone whose service to God attracts attention or shows spiritual power?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, you called fishermen and tax collectors to follow you. You've called me to follow you, too. Give me a heart that responds to you as those Galileans did. Amen.

WEDNESDAY Luke 5:33-6:16 New wine meets old wineskins

Jesus was challenging the *status quo*, and he used a parable to do so. (The word “parable” occurs 26 times in Luke—5:36 is the first time.) Goatskins often held wine and other fluids in Palestine, but new wine would burst a rigid old skin. Through Jesus, God was establishing new ways of working in the world that would burst old cultural norms. The response to Jesus' Sabbath healing showed that his message could burst old, rigid spirituality, too.

- Old ways of doing things aren't necessarily bad, but they aren't necessarily good, either. With the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, God was establishing new ways of working in the world—new wine that required new wineskins. Think back on your own spiritual journey: how has God transformed you from old ways of living to new ways?
- There were 12 tribes of Israel. So when Jesus chose, not 6, 8 or 10, but 12 of his followers as “apostles,” the symbolism was clear—he was creating a new Israel. (Scholar Robert Mounce wrote that the word “apostle” meant “an emissary of God ... with special authority and status in Christ for the sake of the gospel.”) Luke said Jesus spent an entire night in prayer before finalizing the choice. Do you make prayer as important when you face a significant decision as Jesus did?

Prayer: King Jesus, it's easy for me to resist change, even when you ask me to change. Help me resist the temptation to grow rigid in my spiritual journey, but to keep growing in my ability to know, love and serve you. Amen.

THURSDAY Luke 6:17-6:49 The “Sermon on the Plain”

After choosing the Twelve, Jesus laid out his “platform,” to use a modern political analogy. These are the principles of life in his Kingdom. Luke used much (but not all) of the material from “The Sermon on the Mount” (cf. Matthew 5-7) in this passage. That is not a conflict, however—most scholars believe these ideas were likely the core of most of Jesus' sermons as he proclaimed “the good news of the Kingdom of God” (Luke 4:43).

- Jesus spoke here about “status inversion.” Like Mary’s song in Luke 1:46-55, this sermon offered God’s favor and comfort to people we typically see as unfortunate, while warning those we see as particularly elevated. For us, in a rich community in the richest country on earth, Jesus’ words can be disturbing. Which parts of his sermon most challenge our culture’s wisdom on how to “succeed”? Which of Jesus’ promises in this sermon mean the most to you?
- From Francis of Assisi to his namesake Pope Francis, from Martin Luther King, Jr. to Mother Teresa, many Christ followers have stood with the poor and oppressed. In *The Message*, Luke 6:46 says, “Why are you ... always saying ‘Yes, sir,’ and ‘That’s right, sir,’ but never doing a thing I tell you? These ... are words to build a life on.” How are you building your life on Jesus’ values, as so many of his followers through the centuries have done?

Prayer: Lord God, I want to build a life with you that can stand firm no matter how fierce life’s storms become. Guide me as I seek to put your words into practice daily. Amen.

FRIDAY Luke 7:1-35 Jesus’ powerful acts; John’s puzzled question

A Roman commander trusted Jesus implicitly, and Jesus healed his valued servant. Jesus brought a widow’s dead son back to life, and the people of Nain said, “God has come to help his people.” But in prison (Luke 3:20), stalwart John the Baptist began to wonder. When was Jesus going to “clear his threshing floor,” “burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire” (Luke 3:17)? Was he “the one,” as John had preached? He sent the question to Jesus.

- We tend to experience Jesus first in terms of what we know best. How did the Roman centurion draw on his military command and control knowledge to express his trust in Jesus’ power? How did Jesus’ response to that foreign military officer point ahead to a church that welcomed Gentiles and Jews as equals before God (e.g. Galatians 3:29)?
- How did Jesus’ words in verses 22-23 respond, in a gentle, Bible-based way to John’s troubled question? (Remind yourself of how Jesus quoted Isaiah in Luke 4:18-21 to see how well his answer here meant that he was indeed “the one.”) Then he added a forceful, loyal defense of John’s ministry. How can Jesus’ gracious way of dealing with John’s question give you confidence in going to him when you have questions or struggles?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, at times I can identify with the faith-filled Roman officer, and at times with your struggling forerunner. Thank you that whether full of faith or filled with questions, I always find in you the loving person who truly was “the one.” Amen.

SATURDAY Luke 7:36-8:21 Finding fertile soil for faith

A religious leader invited Jesus to eat at his house, but he seems to have treated Jesus quite rudely (Luke 7:44-46). A “woman from the city, a sinner” found Jesus there, and poured out her love in tears and perfume. Jesus told a story that taught that he sowed the seed of God’s love and grace everywhere. Human eyes can’t always tell where it will find fertile ground in which to grow, and where it will land on rocky ground that causes it to wither away.

- When Jesus explained the parable of the farmer sowing seed, he listed four kinds of human “soil” who hear the good news (8:11-15). Which soil type do you think best described Simon the Pharisee? Which most characterized the “woman from the city, a

sinner” who anointed Jesus’ feet? Which of the four soil types has best described your spiritual journey so far? What spiritual practices can help you continue growing your capacity to be “good soil” in the months ahead?

Prayer: God, please grow a bountiful crop of your love, your purity, your goodness and compassion in the soil of my heart. Let me be full to bursting with the fruit of your Spirit. Amen.

Family Activity: As a family, look through your Bibles to find stories where Jesus heals people. (Examples include Mark 8:22-26; Luke 8:43-48; John 4:46-54). What do these stories have in common? What differences do you see? Choose one story to act out as a family, or if you prefer, draw the scene(s). As you divide the story into smaller scenes, what do you notice or learn about Jesus? What about the people involved in the story? Maybe someone you know needs healing (physical, emotional or spiritual). How can you be a part of their story in such a way that they feel the presence and love of Jesus? Could you decorate a card or prepare a meal? Maybe you could offer a hug or a smile. Always offer your prayers.

This study was adapted from The United Methodist Church of the Resurrection.