

SUNDAY The Gospel of the Unseen

Scripture: Luke 7:36-38

One of the Pharisees asked Jesus to eat with him, and he went into the Pharisee's house and took his place at the table. And a woman in the city, who was a sinner, having learned that he was eating in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster jar of ointment. She stood behind him at his feet, weeping, and began to bathe his feet with her tears and to dry them with her hair. Then she continued kissing his feet and anointing them with the ointment.

MONDAY Luke 12:1-34 From the inside out

From the start of his ministry, Jesus' message challenged his day's religious and political leadership structures. He taught that faith and trust must flow from the inside out, and gave a wide-ranging set of warnings against a "mismatch between ... hearts and lives." Live authentic lives devoted to God, he told his followers. "Don't be afraid, little flock, because your Father delights in giving you the kingdom."

- In Luke 12, tension between the *status quo* and God's kingdom was building. Jesus did two main things: 1) warned his disciples about enemies, and 2) reminded them that God knows and cares about every part of our lives. He challenged his followers, then and now, to avoid a casual, half-hearted faith. How wholehearted is your faith? What does it look like in your life today to follow Jesus whole-heartedly and passionately?
- In verse 34, Jesus said, "Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." True security and satisfaction, he taught, came from seeking God first, not from externals like food, clothing or material possessions. How does Jesus' teaching challenge the ways you think and act about how much security and satisfaction "stuff" can bring you?

Prayer: King Jesus, thank you for offering me eternal security and everlasting fulfillment. It's hard for me to make the inside of me match the outside sometimes. Help me desire your kingdom above all else. Amen.

TUESDAY Luke 12:35-13:9 We are responsible for serving wisely and well At the start of this passage, Jesus compared his followers to servants. Good ones are ready to respond to their master's commands and wishes at all times; bad ones get fired (or, in Roman times, even worse). Jesus was not endorsing those cruel practices, but making the point that choosing to serve God is a matter of eternal life or death. The section ended with a haunting parable—Jesus didn't seem to give it an ending.

- Jesus' words about bringing division rather than peace (12:51-53) may strike us as odd. Isn't Jesus "the prince of peace"? Yes—but his kingdom's principles (including peace) were so unlike the world's that he knew at times division would follow. Have family

members, friends or co-workers ever misunderstood or criticized choices you've made based on your loyalty to God?

- Jesus told what we could call “The Unfinished Parable” (13:6-9). The gardener pleaded for one more year to help the tree bear good fruit—but Jesus never said whether the tree did or didn't bear fruit. Verse 13:5 showed what kind of “fruit-bearing” was really on his mind. So what about you--how will you finish Jesus' unfinished parable in your life?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, you dig up the soil around me, water and fertilize, and watch eagerly for the fruit to appear in me. Help me to work with you, so that my life may indeed bear fruit to your glory. Amen.

WEDNESDAY Luke 13:10-13:35 Healing, and hearts that refuse it

Jesus ended 18 years of disability for one woman “at once.” Since he did it on the Sabbath, that upset the synagogue leader. To him, her case was no crisis—she'd suffered for 18 years. But for Jesus, that made healing, now, even more vital (verse 16). Still making his way to Jerusalem (verse 22), he mourned over a spirit that loved rules above people. One commentary called verses 31-35 “Lament of the Rejected Lover.”

- Someone asked a theoretical question: ““Lord, will only a few be saved?”” (verse 23) Jesus' answer was completely personal. *The Message* rendered it as “Whether few or many is none of your business. Put your mind on your life with God. The way to life—to God!—is vigorous and requires your total attention.” Are you ever tempted to let abstract religious questions distract you from a focus on your own relationship with God? What spiritual practices most help you keep things personal with God?
- Verses 33-35 were the first of four laments Jesus spoke for Jerusalem in Luke. (The others are in 19:41-44, 21:20-24 and 23:27-31.) What do Jesus' sorrowful words about the fate of the city that was rejecting him tell you about his heart? How do you react when trouble comes to a person or group that you might consider an enemy?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, you said you wanted to gather the people of Jerusalem “as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings.” They didn't want that—but I do. Shelter and nurture my life in you, that I may grow strong in your grace. Amen.

THURSDAY Luke 14:1-35 God's great (and costly) banquet

The watching Pharisees surely weren't shocked when Jesus again ignored their Sabbath healing rules. But Jesus shocked them in a different way. They loved to talk about the end-time feast for God's people (verse 15). But in Jesus' feast story, the chosen said “no,” and God called street people instead! Making him your Lord, Jesus said, is costly. Count the cost before you set out on the Journey.

- The picture of a divine feast for God's people came from Isaiah 25:6-10. Isaiah said this banquet would be for “all peoples,” “all nations,” “the whole earth”—but in Jesus' day, the religious leaders wanted to limit it just to their own group of Israelites. What does Jesus' picture of inviting people from “the city's streets, the busy ones and the side streets,” “the highways and back alleys,” tell you about the wideness of God's mercy, and about the church Jesus was creating?

- Jesus at times used extreme words to focus his hearers on priorities. “Hate” (verse 26) didn’t always mean active malice; it could be a Middle Eastern way to describe making something less central to your life. It can be a challenging spiritual exercise to ask in prayer, “Lord, are there any things, people or dreams I love more than you?” If you do this, make sure you’re willing to shift priorities to honor any insights you get.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, of course I want to be one of the guests at your great end-time feast. Give me a heart that will continue to rejoice in being there even if some of the other guests might initially make me uncomfortable. Amen.

FRIDAY Luke 15:1-32 “This man welcomes sinners”—and celebrates it!

It was a familiar charge: “This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.” With sinners and tax collectors gathering around to listen to him, Jesus could hardly deny it—and he didn’t want to. He embraced the “charge” with three vivid stories in which finding a lost sheep, a lost coin and a lost boy set off big celebrations. To the last story, he pointedly added an older son who didn’t want to welcome the lost boy home.

- The Pharisees labeled people “good” or “bad,” and saw “bad people” as unlikely to change. Jesus saw people much more as “lost” (like the sheep, coin or boy), and what’s lost can be found. When have you lost your way spiritually and needed finding? Jesus pictured God rejoicing each time a heart responds to God’s love. Whose model has most helped you see God as more eager to find a lost person than to punish a bad person?
- Like the fig tree parable (cf. Luke 13:6-9), Jesus left the older son’s story open-ended. The last we hear is the father beseeching his resentful older boy: “We had to celebrate and be glad because this brother of yours was dead and is alive. He was lost and is found.” We know most of the “older brothers” in Jesus’ day stalked away into the night rather than welcome prodigals home. If you’ve been at the party of faith for a while, how do you respond to the Father’s appeal to welcome home the lost who are found?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, it’s true—you always had friends in low places. But you were always seeking to draw them to higher ground. Give me the heart and the wisdom to live out both parts of your example. Amen.

SATURDAY Luke 16:1-31 Shrewd swindler, foolish rich man

Jesus told of a swindler whose boss applauded him for his shrewdness in buying off “friends” to watch after him when he’d lost his job. He wasn’t endorsing financial fraud, but asking: if even a swindler can look down the road, wouldn’t you be wiser to use wealth for eternal purposes than for short-term earthly gain? Then Luke shared another “status inversion” story. A rich man ignored a poor beggar at his very gates. But the beggar got to enjoy heaven, while the rich man begged him to warn his brothers away from his hellish fate.

- Jesus again said no one can serve two masters, that it is impossible to serve both God and wealth (verse 13). Which master has your deepest allegiance? His second story used popular ideas about heaven and Hades to say more about values. In verses 27-31, Jesus said Moses and the prophets could show the rich man’s brothers (and the Pharisees) a

better way. What influences have helped you to build your values (social, financial and spiritual) on the teachings of Moses and the prophets—and Jesus?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, deliver me from all of the other masters that try to lure me to make them supreme in my heart. I surrender my life to your gracious and loving rulership forever. Amen.

Family Activity: Gather your family for a few rounds of hide-and-seek. Then read Luke 15:11-32. Ask, “What did you do while you were hiding in our game?” “What did the lost son do when he went away?” “How far away did you go during hide-and-seek?” “How about the lost son?” Say, “No matter how far away you were or what you did while you were hiding, someone always came to find you. The prodigal son went far from home and made some very poor choices while he was away. Yet the father in the story, who stands for God, welcomed him home with great love and joy. God wants us to stay close to him and follow him. But God will always love us, and welcome us back if we stray away.”

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