

Daily Readings

Please note: This week we look at Jesus' parable of the judgment. In this parable, we see a different kind of power. These passages are recommended for your daily reading. Each deals with a different aspect of God's way to power.

Monday, June 30 – Read Genesis 1:1-2:24.

The story of creation reminds us of God's dominion over heaven and earth. God created all that is. As you move through this day, pay special attention to God's hand in creation. Take special notice of the sun, moon, winds, trees, flowers, sky and clouds. Notice the special differences in the way God has made members of your family, your colleagues or school mates. Give thanks for at least five things in God's creation that has blessed you today.

Tuesday, July 1 – Read Romans 12:1-2.

Chapter 12 of Romans is rich with reminders of what is really important in life. Paul encourages the reader to be **“transformed by the renewal of your minds.”** When Paul says, **“Present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God,”** he is referring to the change that comes when we offer our lives to Christ. He continues by saying, **“Do not be conformed to this world.”** Paul understands that the powers and authorities of this world are temporary. Only the things of God last forever. What one thing did you do for Christ this day? Did you treat someone as if they were the Lord Jesus Christ? If not, why? If you did, how?

Wednesday, July 2 – Read Isaiah 40:28-31.

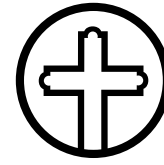
The prophet Isaiah states power comes from God. **“He shall give power to the faint.”** Often we interpret power as a by-product of strength and might. Isaiah speaks to a different kind of power that comes from God and is given to the strong in faith. **“Those who wait upon the Lord, shall renew their strength.”** What gives you power? In what area of your life do you need to wait upon the Lord?

Thursday, July 3 – Read Matthew 19:16-22.

In this dialogue with a rich young ruler, Jesus teaches his disciples a lesson about “power” in God's Kingdom. He asked Jesus a question about how to get to heaven. Jesus' answer is confusing for his disciples. For them, money, youth and position were evidence of God's blessings. Not unlike our culture, in Jesus' day, these things were power. When Jesus asked the man to give up everything and follow him, the rich young ruler was unwilling to make this sacrifice to follow Jesus. Does this passage mean that money, youth and position will keep you from the Kingdom of Heaven? Or is this passage reminding us that money, youth and position can get in the way of commitment to Christ? Is there anything getting in the way of your commitment? If you are unwilling to give it up for Christ, then it stands in your way of being a disciple of Christ.

Friday, July 4 – Read John 1:1-18.

Read this passage out loud to begin your day. Let the words of John speak to your soul. How did Jesus become flesh for you this day?



TRIETSCH

June 29, 2008

Study Guide & Daily Readings

Front Porch Stories

Gleaning the Truths from the Parables of Jesus

Real Power

Matthew 25:31-46

The parable of “the last judgment” is one of the most read passages in the United Methodist Church. Our denomination has more universities, colleges, hospitals, jail ministries, children's homes, community centers and missionaries per member than any other Christian group in the world. The United Methodist Church works very hard trying to reach “the least of these.”

What about our members? Do we spend our days treating each person as if they were Jesus? This parable ultimately is about priorities and values.

The Last Judgment

This is the last parable told in the gospel of Matthew. It does not appear anywhere else in the New Testament. Yet there are two common themes that are repeated elsewhere in the Old and New Testament in a variety of forms.

First, the care for those less fortunate is a theme we see through out the biblical witness.

Second, it addresses the issue of judgment and salvation.

As Christians, we believe our salvation comes as a gift through faith in the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus.

At first it seems as if caring for “the least of these” is the criteria for the judgment. But notice that he refers to them first as righteous and then to their behavior. In this sense, the action for the “least of these” is a result of the transformation that making a faith commitment to Christ makes in our lives.

Interpretation

The Son of man appears here as the judge, which is his traditional role in the traditional view of the last days. All the nations are judged, not merely Israel. Those being judged are separated into the categories of sheep (those who are righteous) and goats (those who are deemed unacceptable).

The criterion for the judgment is whether they have performed acts of mercy toward the least of these. Some have argued that Jesus was originally referring to a specific group of people, but it is more likely Jesus is referring to all of humanity.

The “least of these” refers to any human being who is in need. To receive such a person is to receive Christ; to refuse to aid such a one is to refuse Christ.

The surprising element in this parable is that those who are welcomed into the kingdom have no consciousness that the acts of mercy had any relationship to Christ, much less to their eternal destiny. They acted because there were those who were in need – not to earn a reward or to merit admission to the kingdom.

Because they had no knowledge of the value of their action puts the emphasis on the motivation behind the action. There was not command or law to guide the behavior of the individuals in the parable. Instead, there is an assumed condition of the heart and intent of those who care for those who are in need.

Discussion Questions

Please note: These questions are intended to be used in any way that is helpful for you. You may use them as a means of personal reflection. Or you may want to use them as a family to further discuss the issues of patience.

- How do you experience power in your life?
- How does wealth and position (yours or others) influence how you view others?
- In what ways could the power of treating others like Jesus change the world?
- Can you identify the reason or reasons why you might fail to treat another person with love?

- What does this parable tell us about God?
- What are some of the simple ways you can show God’s love to others?
- List some words or phrases of love and encouragement that people do not say enough.
- If you dressed as a person who is homeless, and sat on the sidewalk or in a park in your city or town, how would you be treated?
- When someone treats you with love and respect, how does that make you feel? In treating one another with love and respect, what are the benefits to our community, to our nation, and to our world?
- What are the traits and characteristics of the “righteous” people of the world as seen in this parable?
- How has God’s love changed your life?
- How does this parable challenge you?

Next Week’s Worship: “A Generous Nation...”