

Sunday Scriptures and Study for March 22, 2020

Friday, I had a young man come by the church for food. The first words out of his mouth was, "Did you hear, the National Guard is coming to each town to shut us down." My first reaction was, "Really." Then I realized that I had not heard that and later told him that I don't think that is going to happen. It was a rumor. Be very careful what you listen to and repeat.

For the next two weeks we are going to be doing church from home. I will be sending materials out to help our congregation of the Albany Methodist church have church at home. I realize that some will be with family and some may be by themselves. I also realize that you can choose from many sources on TV and the internet. My hope is that you will take time to read the following and reflect on it individually and with family members where possible. Use what information and format that is helpful to you.

John Wesley, founder of the Methodist movement, succinctly described the plan of discipleship in what he called The General Rules. As Christians, we are to (1) **do no harm by avoiding evil of every kind**; (2) **do good to all people**; and (3) **attend upon all the ordinances of God like participating in worship, taking Communion, reading the Bible, praying, and loving God and others.**

With that in mind, let me lay out a possible plan for you Sunday morning. Use the parts that work for you and help you spend time worshipping, reading scripture, reflecting/discussing and praying.

1) Start with prayer (Use your own words or use these to help you get started)

Holy Spirit we invite you to be with us this morning and we need you to guide us as we worship and have church here this morning. We ask for the Spirit of wisdom and revelation so that we might know Jesus better. (Eph 2:17) Jesus we invite you to be with us this morning. Bless this time of worship in our homes and bless the church during this time of crisis. Amen.

Also consider reading Psalm 91

2) Listen to a favorite Christian hymn or song. For those of you musically inclined, you can sing yours.

2b) Follow this with the tithes/offerings

3) The Theme for the morning is "**Press In.**" Before reading scripture pray again, asking the Holy Spirit to open your hearts and minds and reveal God's truths to you this morning.

4) Read scripture: **Luke 19:1-9 & 10:38-42 (NIV)**

Note: Jesus' goal is to go to Jerusalem where he will be mocked, spit upon, tortured, crucified, and die. And, to be resurrected. Yet, he found time to minister and be with people on his way.

4b) Apostles Creed:

I believe in God,
the Father Almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.
I believe in Jesus Christ,
his only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the
Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died,
and was buried;
he descended to the dead.
On the third day he rose again;
he ascended into heaven,
is seated at the right hand
of the Father,
and will come again to judge
the living and the dead.
I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body
and the life everlasting. Amen.

5) Read and discuss/reflect on the following: *(A portion of this is a repeat of what I sent out on the Lent Study)*

Let me start by encouraging you to keep your focus on Christ today. Easy for me to say that, however harder to do than I like to admit. For Lent, one of the things I choose to fast was TV. I have done well, but last night I felt the need to watch the news and see what was being said about the coronavirus pandemic. After I watched it, my focus was no longer on Christ, but on the circumstances of pandemic and the mess our country is in.

Obviously, fear and anxiety began to well up in me as my imagination got carried away with what if's. So, about 7:15 p.m. I went to the church sanctuary, and began to pray and worship God. Five minutes was not enough. Thirty minutes was not enough. Most of you know that I am an early morning person. So, I was getting into what would be my usual bedtime preparation most days. But, I kept praying. It was only after about thirty minutes that I begin to feel the peace of God come over me. After about an hour, I was at peace and could stop and go to bed.

Even though the outside circumstances had not changed, God's presence changed me. The fear and anxiety fell away to be replaced with His peace and reassurance. I was reminded, regardless of what happens, and yes changes are coming, I have all I need. I have Jesus now and in eternity and I have my family. This morning, the news and circumstances are still there and I am in need of being reminded again, I have all I need.

So, each day I realize we will need to "press in" and spend time in the secret place with God. Jesus called it abiding with Him and He promised to abide with us.

John 15:5-8 (NKJV)

⁵ I am the vine, you *are* the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.

⁶ If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw *them* into the fire, and they are burned.

⁷ If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you.

⁸ By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples.

In James 4:8, It says, draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Let's look at the story of Zacchaeus pressing in in Luke 19.

Luke 19:1-10 (NKJV)

¹ Then *Jesus* entered and passed through Jericho.

² Now behold, *there was* a man named Zacchaeus who was a chief tax collector, and he was rich.

³ And he sought to see who Jesus was, but could not because of the crowd, for he was of short stature.

⁴ So he ran ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see Him, for He was going to pass that way.

⁵ And when Jesus came to the place, He looked up and saw him, and said to him, “Zacchaeus, make haste and come down, for today I must stay at your house.”

⁶ So he made haste and came down, and received Him joyfully.

⁷ But when they saw *it*, they all complained, saying, “He has gone to be a guest with a man who is a sinner.”

⁸ Then Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, “Look, Lord, I give half of my goods to the poor; and if I have taken anything from anyone by false accusation, I restore fourfold.”

⁹ And Jesus said to him, “Today salvation has come to this house, because he also is a son of Abraham;

¹⁰ for the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost.”

1. Notice that Zacchaeus was a tax collector and rich. Two strikes against him. Tax collectors were considered to be the worst sinners among the Jews. Traders to their people.

Jesus said something to the effect that it is easier for a camel to squeeze through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter into the Kingdom of God. (Matt 19:24) However, he also said, “with men this is impossible but with God all things are possible.”

2. God is about to do the impossible with Zacchaeus. However, what was needed was an interest on Zacchaeus’ part. He sought to see who Jesus was, even if he had to look foolish and climb up in a tree.

3. Jesus noticed him and told him that he was coming to his house. Wow! Zacchaeus’ interest and press in got him noticed and Jesus even came to his house. Then the impossible did happen.

4. Despite the grumblings of the Jews, Jesus went to be with a sinner. Praise the Lord! That means you and I can expect the same! Regardless of our past, Jesus will respond to those who seek him.

5. We see a picture of salvation and a new creation taking place in Zacchaeus even though Christ still has to go to the cross for the full effects. When one surrenders to Christ, there is always repentance. That leads to a different way of living as we see in what Zacchaeus said verse 8.

6. When Zacchaeus sought to see Jesus, it changed his life forever. Jesus said, "today salvation has come to this house."

As we consider today the state of the world and what we face with the coronavirus, we need to ask a few questions. Has salvation come to our house? Are we right with God through the reconciliation of Christ? Is Christ our savior? If not, seek the Lord as Zacchaeus did. If so, then who do we need to share this story with? Who do we know that needs the "possible" of God? In tough times people are generally more open to the gospel. Ask God to give you the words to share this simple story or your own story about Christ love and salvation.

Let's continue to ask God to do the impossible in our country and world right now. He is our hope and confidence.

Luke 10:38-42 (NIV)

³⁸ As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him.

³⁹ She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said.

⁴⁰ But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!"

⁴¹ "Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things,

⁴² but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her."

As you read these scriptures ask yourself these questions:

1. Are my prayers too often like Martha's request? Notice the word "me" and "myself."
2. Despite all that was going on in this story, what was Mary doing?
3. What are we doing in light of what is going on around us? What are you worried and upset about?
4. Can you take it to Jesus and sit at His feet and listen?

The promise I see here is that Jesus will not take that time away from us if we will just take time to press in and sit at his feet. Only one thing is needed according to Jesus. What Martha was doing, serving wasn't wrong, and will be needed. But what Mary did, Jesus said was better.

7) Prayer Concerns: Judy Draper, Latham Staples (Betsy's son), those suffering from the effects of the coronavirus, pray for God's love to flood families that are spending time together like never before

8) End with prayer and/or a song

Next week we will look at more stories from the Bible about those who pressed in. God bless you and keep you. May He protect you and your family. In the name of Jesus. Amen.