

Monday, July 30 – Read 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?

Tuesday, July 31 – Read Luke 14:1-35. 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 endtime feast for God's people (verse 15). But in Jesus' feast story, the chosen said "no," and God called street people instead! Allowing him to be 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.

Wednesday, August 1 – Read Luke 15:1-32. 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?

Thursday, August 2 – Read Luke 6:17-6:49. 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?

Friday, August 3 –Read Luke 18:1-30. Jesus contrasted God with an unjust human judge. The real issue, he said, was not if we can trust God, but if God can trust us: “Will the Human One (or, Son of Man) find faithfulness on earth?” Jesus’ culture devalued tax collectors and children. Jesus said those “nobodies” were more likely to receive God’s favor than a self-satisfied Pharisee or a ruler who loved things more than God. “Who then can be saved?” his startled hearers asked. Jesus replied, “What is impossible for humans is possible for God.” In 18:1-8 Jesus used a common rabbinic teaching device: a “how much more” image. “If even an unjust judge will do justice if pressed hard enough,” he asked, in effect, “how much more can we trust God to do justice?” Then he asked if he will find faithfulness on earth. In other words, can we keep trusting God to do justice even in the face of disappointments or delays? How is your heart answering Jesus’ question about faith? Most people in Jesus’ day thought material riches ALWAYS meant God’s favor. When the wealthy young ruler whose possessions “owned” him turned away, Jesus said that it was very hard for the wealthy to enter God’s kingdom. His hearers, reflecting their belief, replied, “Then who can be saved?” Are you confident that, whether you are a somebody or a nobody, your salvation is “possible for God”? What difference does that make in how you live each day?

“And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. “This, then, is how you should pray: “‘Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.’ For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.” (Matthew 6:5-14)