

**First Fifteen: April 11-15**  
**Focus Scripture: Luke 19:28-40 – Palm Sunday**

**Monday: Luke 18:1-8**

**Going Deeper:** We begin this week that will lead us to Easter Sunday, just yesterday we celebrated the “triumphal entry” of Jesus into the city of Jerusalem. These verses as Luke situated them in his gospel take place just prior to Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem and he knew it was going to change the lives of his followers forever. If Luke intended this to be chronological, we should assume Jesus shared this parable with his followers for exactly as Luke tells us, *“Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up.”* (Luke 18:1 – NIV) Jesus knew the coming events would as they say, “Rock their world!” and he sought to fortify their faith and trust in his message of hope. But is there more here we need to consider? As you read this teaching from Jesus some 2000 years after the fact, where is your focus drawn? We know the story of Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem, as well as what came next, so what does this parable mean for us? There are the storylines of the persistent widow and the judge who seems to care neither for the ways of God or the needs of people whose lives collide to form the core message for Jesus’ followers... God does hear and care about our needs and concerns. Another storyline is God will bring justice and reconciliation to and for those who seek it but is that what we really seek from God. Do we want justice or favoritism? Then there are the first and last verse of this parable that seem to call us to something else. Not only does Jesus tell us to pray “always, consistently, or continuously” depending on your translation, he then added as the conclusion of this parable, *“But how much of that kind of persistent faith will the Son of Man find on the earth when he returns?”* (Luke 18:8 – The Message) This question is somewhat haunting, calling us to question how we are to stay true to our faith through all the movements and moments of our lives. What is needed from us to remain persistent? One answer is found by asking how do we understand prayer, is prayer more than a morning and evening remembering, a word of thanks before meals, or a listing of our needs? I wonder if to pray always is not also a way of living with intention and presence throughout our day; seeking with intention to become more aware of where and how God shows up calling us to be present as well. Would this not create within us a continuous connection of prayer with God and for others?

**Prayer:** All knowing and all hearing One, as this week begins open my eyes, heart, and mind so I may be more present and aware of your movement and leading. Help me seek to live through persistent prayer, praying throughout my day by being more present within my day... knowing you hear my prayers and help me carry the burdens of my day. Amen.

**Tuesday: Luke 18:9-14**

**Going Deeper:** I believe this parable builds upon the last as we continue to consider Jesus’ question of what persistent faith look like and how do we nurture it in our lives. At first glance this parable appears to have a villain and a hero, the Pharisee, and the tax collector. But if we assume the “self-righteous” Pharisee is the villain, do we not also

fall into the trap of self-righteousness ourselves... assuming "God, I thank you I am not like the Pharisee." (This idea is presented in [The Jewish Annotated New Testament](#) – an excellent study bible resource!) We must ask what does Jesus want us to know about our faith in God's mercy and our need for and understanding of grace. Again, through the lens of persistent faith and its characteristics what is Jesus pointing to in this parable? Humility is what comes to mind for me. Humility grounded in a self-understanding of God's gracious nature knowing we are forgiven and accepted, held tightly within God's love. There is no need to compare ourselves with others, nor is there a desire to keep track of "how much good" we do, because quite honestly... there is always more we could have done. Within the Kingdom of God's love and mercy there is no need to be more than we already are, no need to prove our worth or potential. All we must do is accept who we are and what we have and then use these gifts to share kindness, mercy, justice, and love with all whom we meet... realizing neither God's work nor ours for the Kingdom is ever really done.

**Prayer:** Lord of mercy, help me see my own abilities and how you have used and continue to use me in your work. Help me focus on what you have opened my eyes to see about myself and where I need to work in my own life, deepening my faith rather than pointing out the places others have fallen or need to grow. Lord I humbly receive your love and mercy and I am ever thankful for your grace. Amen.

### **Wednesday: Luke 18:15-17**

**Going Deeper:** Luke uses this familiar story in the life of Jesus to further illustrate the point of the verses from yesterday... but they also reveal a tenderness within Jesus, he sees even these little ones as having great value. He was more than willing to stop and be attentive to the needs of these parents, and their infants, realizing there is always more than enough time to accomplish what is truly important. The disciple's reaction would not have been uncommon, these children and their parents would have been seen as a distraction, if they were even noticed at all. Often the primary lesson of this story is focused on what Jesus said about the importance of a childlike faith, with its lessons on dependence, trust, vulnerability, and sincerity, as the prime example of the faith God desires. While I believe this to be true, I also see Jesus' reaction as a reflection of God's character, and love for everyone within creation. None are to be excluded or overlooked. Think about the stories in the Gospels where Jesus stops to interact with and engage those who were often neither seen nor understood. He took the time, he made the effort, he was intentional to see everyone he came across. This too is often a childlike quality is it not? Children will stop and notice the wonder and beauty in our world and within each other, they have an unfettered curiosity about people, things, and nature... unafraid to venture into the deep questions of why? Their focus is rarely if ever why not. They do not live their lives on a schedule, or a list of what needs to be accomplished... they simply live.

**Prayer:** Lord of life, wonder and beauty... this day I desire to be more childlike, to take time to notice the wonder you have put in front of me. I long to be free to enjoy the moments and

people you bring into my life... help me release myself from the clock, or schedule or need to produce something long enough to simply be and find your joy within these moments. Amen.

#### **Thursday: Luke 18:18-27**

**Going Deeper:** As you read this story from Luke what do you hear? What aspects of the story draw you in and cause questions to arise? What is your reaction to this teaching of Jesus? Some see this teaching as extreme, some even hearing a universalizing and negative perception of faith and wealth. I get that, but I do not believe that was Jesus' intention. This story must be seen within its context, what does it tell us about Jesus' question of "persistent" faith? This story is about Jesus' interaction with one person and the actual focus in my opinion had very little to do with his wealth, and everything to do with how he saw himself and his relationship with faithful behavior. He comes to Jesus looking for an answer to what may have been a burning question... am I good with God, are my accounts settled and balanced, am I in God's good graces. He came as a follower of Moses whose understanding had been grounded in following the Law of God, the Torah and what we know as the 10 commandments. He comes to Jesus honestly believing he had done well by his understanding of faith. The key to their interaction is found in his greeting and Jesus' response in verse 19... *"Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone."* (Luke 18:19 – NRSV) Jesus' words distinguish himself from this person and their views, as well as reveal his own understanding and self-awareness as the Messiah who revealed the incarnation or embodiment of God. He understood the balance of his relationship with his "Father", and he was clearly aware of his call to surrender and serve the only One who is truly good. Jesus' teaching simply invites this individual to see himself and his faith more clearly; challenging him to truly see where his faith was actually grounded. He would do the same with each of us, calling us to see ourselves clearly and understand how we use our faith and where we do not, opening our eyes to help us see where we hold on and where we hold back from fully surrendering our lives into God's love and care.

**Prayer:** Loving Savior, your words are at times comforting, and at other times confronting. Help us hear your love for us even within the heard teachings. Help us trust your love always seeks to lead us to our best selves, to lift us up from where we have decided to remain hidden, and to lead us into the arms of our loving God who is good, all the time. Amen.

#### **Friday: Luke 18:35-42**

**Going Deeper:** This story takes place on the road to Jericho where Jesus meets, but quite honestly who appears to be by a blind man who hears the approach of the crowd. When he discovers it was Jesus who approached he did everything he could to get Jesus' attention. This story is in some way a reversal of the one about the rich ruler. This man when he was brought before Jesus, Jesus asked *"What do you want me to do for you?"* (Luke 18:41a – NIV) What do you hear in Jesus' question? What is the tone of his voice? Can you imagine what you see in his eyes as Jesus looks at you? I sense Jesus was tired. He knew he was on his last journey to Jerusalem, and he was aware of the conflict that awaited his arrival. I also sense his eyes were clearly focused on this desperate one

standing in front of him, and even within his weariness they were still filled with compassion and invitation... *“What is it that you want from me?”* His answer was quick, this individual knew exactly what he wanted, hoped for, it was his deepest desire... *“Lord, I want to see.”* (Luke 18:41b – NIV) In my mind that is the deepest cry of faith, the desire to see clearly who I am, who you are, who God calls each of to be. To see for me does not merely refer to our vision, to see clearly also refers to our ability understand our place within God’s will and Kindom. To see refers to our knowing that I am, you are and we together, each of us with our individually self-perceived needs and differences are part of God’s desire to share the message of hope, acceptance and restoration that is our faith for all people. Sunday begins our journey with Jesus through Holy Week, what is it that you need to see?

**Prayer:** God of us all, gather me up into your loving gaze, help me trust you see me with tender eyes calling me to see who I am as your beloved child. As we gather for worship this week we will remember and celebrate the resurrection. Lord of mercy we will hear once again of the empty tomb and the wonder of your love which transforms death into life! Let my eyes be open to see the wonder of your love and how it works with all who follow your leading for our world into your desired peace for those with persistent faith. Amen.