



September 13–October 11, 2020

Discussion Questions

Discussion Questions for Week 1: We the People

1. What insights did you gain from the message this past Sunday? What was most helpful for you? What did you find uncomfortable?
2. Read John 6:66-68. How do you identify (or not) with Peter and his response to Jesus? Would you describe yourself as a follower of Jesus, and if so, why? What do you find personally compelling about Jesus?
3. Read Luke 8:1-3 and Matthew 10:2-4. Discuss what kind of diversity among the followers of Jesus you see in these passages. How do you think Jesus was able to draw people from such very different contexts? If you can, describe a situation where your own determination to follow Jesus has brought you side by side in relationship with people who are very different to you.
4. Read Matthew 20:17-28 and discuss the following:
 - Why do you think we are told this request is made by their mother rather than directly by James and John?
 - What do you think Jesus means by "Can you drink the cup I am going to drink?"
 - Why do you think the disciples are angry at James and John?
 - How does what Jesus shares in vs 26-28 apply to being a community of followers today? What would such a community look like and how would it behave?
 - How could vs 26-28 influence the way we respond to political, religious or social "enemies"?
5. The speaker on Sunday suggested that the way of Jesus transcends our differences and polarization because it is based on an embodiment of self-sacrificial servanthood rooted in love.
 - In what ways could you help create a deeper sense of belonging for others in our community through this approach – especially those with whom you disagree?
 - Are there any ways in which you feel like an "outsider" in this community? How might taking this approach help you feel a deeper sense of belonging?

Practice for this week: Love Over Fear

Take a few minutes each day this week to meditate on 1 Corinthians 13 (see below). It's a very famous passage and might feel quite familiar but try to listen to it with "fresh ears." Sit quietly and center yourself. Bring to mind conflict situations in your life that revolve around disagreement about issues. These could be relational, political, work-related, on social media or in person. Read the passage once through and then sit quietly reflecting on how this description of love could apply to these situations. Remember this is not an exercise in letting go of your convictions or compromising your own truth – rather what does it look like to honestly hold those convictions with love and compassion? Be open and honest with yourself and invite God's loving presence to help you allow the scripture to read you. After a few moments of reflection read the passage again and then sit quietly inviting God's presence to empower you with love.

1 Corinthians 13 (New Revised Standard Version)

If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.

Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

Love never ends. But as for prophecies, they will come to an end; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will come to an end. For we know only in part, and we prophesy only in part; but when the complete comes, the partial will come to an end. When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways. For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known. And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.

Discussion Questions for Week 2: From Lockdown to Evacuation

1. What stood out to you from the message this past Sunday? Did anything seem particularly relevant to your current circumstances?
2. Read Acts 2:42-47. In this description of the early church, what seems most appealing to you? What seems most unappealing? Why?
3. Given the current restrictions in place, can you think of one way your group can support one another to:
 - Learn and pray together (v 42)
 - Be a place of healing (v 43)
 - Be like family to each other (v 44)
 - Share with those in need (v 45)
 - Help each other experience gratitude (v 46)
 - Welcome newcomers (v 47)
4. Read Acts 6:1-6. What do you think we can learn from this passage about our commitment as a community to economic and racial justice?
5. Read Acts 8:2-4. What can we learn from this passage about hard times? Is there anything about our current situation that you see as potentially leading to growth?
6. Whether on the run, imprisoned, being beaten, or even being martyred, the followers of Jesus in Acts seem to consistently believe that God is present with them. Is there a situation you are facing where you would like a clearer sense of God's presence with you? Take some time to pray for one another.

Practice for this week: The Examen

Take a few minutes each night this week to practice the Examen. Sit comfortably in silence with your back straight, feet planted on the floor, arms relaxed and hands supported in your lap. Close your eyes and relax your shoulders. To begin, listen to your breath as you breathe. Feel your breath in your nostrils, chest and abdomen, inhaling and then exhaling fully and deeply—hold your exhale a bit longer than usual to completely expel air. Continue with regular rhythmic deep breathing. Allow tension to fade away from your body, and your spirit to be at peace.

Think back over the day and observe what happened. As you do so, consider the following two questions but remember not to evaluate or judge yourself—just be honest.

- 1) At what times during your day did you experience God's presence? What happened? How was God present? Were you aware of God being present at the time, or is it only now as you look back that you realize it? What did you do that enabled you to experience God? What was the outcome?
- 2) At what times during your day were you resistant to God's presence? What happened? How did you resist? Were you aware of resisting, or is it only now as you look back that you realize it? What were your feelings or beliefs about the situation and any person(s) involved, including

yourself and God? What was the outcome? How could you have thought, acted or believed in a way that would have embraced the reality of God's presence, and channeled more love into the situation, with the person or yourself?

When you have finished reflecting on your day, continue with deep breathing for a few more minutes. Ask God to help you be more embracing of God's presence tomorrow.

Discussion Questions for Week 3: We Are All In this Together

1. What insights did you gain from the message this past Sunday? What was most helpful for you? What did you find uncomfortable?
2. Read Acts 15: 36-41. Have you ever fallen out like this with a close friend? What was the disagreement, and how did the situation resolve in the end? Looking back, what have you learned from this conflict?
3. Read 2 Timothy 4:9-13 and Colossians 4:10-11. Do these excerpts from Paul's letters suggest how the disagreement with Barnabas resolved? When do you think it's appropriate to agree to disagree in conflicts?
4. Read the following passages from another of Paul's letters: Galatians 2:11-13; 3:1-5; 3: 26-29 and 5:1. What is the disagreement Paul is addressing here? How would you describe the difference between Paul's view of unity and his opponents' view of unity? What are the practical positives and negatives of each approach?
5. The speaker on Sunday suggested that ironically Paul is taking a stand on being inclusive—everybody belongs regardless of their background. But this created tension for some of the religious people who then felt alienated. When is it okay to offend people for the sake of including outsiders? How can we do this without creating more polarization and division?
6. Take a moment to share an issue that you care passionately about.
 - What makes you care so much?
 - What action are you taking?
 - What fears do you have about what others might think of you for your views?
 - What could be a courageous and loving way to respond to those who disagree with you?
7. Now take a moment to each share about what influences your spiritual beliefs and why. (Just be honest about your faith, doubt, belief and disbelief—and everything in between!)
 - How have your traditions influenced you (the bible, religious background, family, church etc.)? How has this been positive for you? How has it been negative?
 - How has your own personal experience of life influenced you? In what ways has this been positive and/or negative?
 - How does reason influence your spirituality—science, serious thinking and reflection? In what ways has this been helpful or unhelpful?

Practice for this week: "Be The Change"

This week take a very conscious and self-aware approach to the issues that you feel most passionately about. Be aware each time an issue comes up that makes you feel emotional. and take a moment to reflect on the following:

- In what ways might you be compromising or holding back because of anxiety about what others might think or because of fear of conflict? Try to let go of the fear and allow yourself to fully embody your passion.
- In all of your passion and conviction are you still embodying love? Try to let go of negative feelings towards those who disagree (whether in person, on social media or in your mind).
- Consciously open yourself to God and invite God's love to fill you.

Discussion Questions for Week 4: Cooperation and Conformity

1. What insights did you gain from the message this past Sunday? What was most helpful for you? What did you find uncomfortable?
2. Over the past two millennia The Church as an institution has often struggled with authoritarianism and resorted to enforcing conformity rather than rely on cooperation. Have you ever experienced this in your own story with church? What do you think motivated the control and why? What was the impact on you and others? What are some ways churches like ours could safeguard against authoritarianism?
3. Throughout history followers of Jesus have also been resisting authoritarianism through movements that sought to return to "the essence of Jesus" and his way. Can you describe a time when you have experienced a period or moment of renewal within a church community or in your own personal life? What happened and how did it impact your life?
4. Read Matthew 10:34-39. What do you think Jesus means here and why does he use such strong language?
5. In the interview on Sunday, Brian McLaren suggested that Jesus was constantly pushing forward into new interpretations of God and new applications for our lives. Describe a time when your perspective and beliefs have changed. What motivated the change? What felt uncomfortable about the transition and what felt refreshing? How did it affect the way you live and act?
6. In the message on Sunday the speaker suggested that hope is not a feeling but an attitude or chosen posture towards life. What do you think: are hope and despair simply rational responses to circumstances? Is it even possible to proactively pursue hope over despair? When you look at our world today as a follower of Jesus, what makes you hopeful? What makes you despair? What would an adjustment to a more hopeful posture look like for you personally?

Practice for this week: "Be hopeful"

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Romans 15:13 (NRSV)

The goal of this week's practice is to lean into a posture of hopefulness. Take a minute or two at the beginning of each day to read the above scripture. Spend a moment reflecting on it and absorbing it. Invite the spirit of God to fill you. Write the scripture down on a piece of paper and keep it with you each day. Whenever you feel disappointed, despairing or negative notice your emotions and read the scripture. Don't try to force yourself into hopefulness, just acknowledge your lack of it in the moment and invite God to fill you. Try to do this each day and at the end of the week spend a moment reflecting on how (if at all) this practice impacted your outlook and/or sense of wellbeing.

Discussion Questions for Week 5: Challenging the New Normal

1. What stood out to you from the message this past Sunday? Did anything seem particularly relevant?
2. How have your eating habits changed because of the pandemic (if at all)?
3. In Maryland, pre-COVID, 1 in 9 people struggled with hunger. Now that figure is 1 in 4. Read Luke 6:20-23. How can these words of Jesus be helpful when we think about food justice? How might these words be applied in a less helpful way?
4. Read Luke 11:2-4. Do you see a connection between “Your kingdom come” and “Give us each day our daily bread”?
5. The speaker on Sunday suggested there were many ways we can combat hunger in Maryland, including
 - Support Cedar Ridge’s food justice work (e.g., farm, Greencastle donations, spread the word)
 - Advocate for food stamps, higher minimum wages, affordable housing, and other benefits to support low-income families
 - Advocate for immigration reform, since >70% of farm workers were born outside the US
 - Be a socially-conscious consumer—buy ethically and locally, and reduce waste
 - Be a good neighbor by sharing food with othersWhat seems realistic for you and your family, given your current situation? Is there something you can commit to trying?
6. Take some time to pray for our neighborhoods, state and country at this time of great need and deep injustice.

Practice for this week: Eating with Gratitude

Many people pray a prayer of thanksgiving before a meal. This is a lovely practice, but can sometimes become rote and lose its meaning. Each time you eat this week, pause for a moment and think about one or more of the following:

- Study the food you are eating: look at the colors and patterns, smell the aroma, feel the textures, taste the flavors. Give thanks for the diversity of our food supply and the creativity—divine and human—that goes into our meals.
- Picture each stage of production, distribution, sale and preparation of the food you are eating. Marvel at the coordination needed to achieve that, and the many people involved—each a key part of the process. Thank God for the interconnectedness of people, and ask God’s blessing on each one of us.
- Think of all the things that have “fed” you since you last ate—interesting things you read, or conversations you had, sunlight on your face, the sight of a bird or flower. Thank God for the little things that strengthen and sustain us each day.