

On the Trail with Jesus

August 8th-September 5th



Discussion Questions

From Nazareth to Cana: Week 1 Discussion Questions

1. Was there anything that caught your attention or resonated with you from the message on Sunday?
2. When someone says the word “Jesus” what image comes to mind, and why?
3. In what ways do you think it is helpful to think of Jesus as a first-century Jewish tradesman? In what ways is it challenging?
4. Read Luke 11:37-41. The speaker on Sunday noted there is archaeological evidence suggesting the focus on religious purity might possibly have been fairly recent in Galilee during Jesus’ lifetime. What does this passage tell us about Jesus’ approach to purity? What religious practices might Jesus find foolish or hypocritical today?
5. Read John 2:1-12. Imagine that you have just started following this young rabbi, Jesus. Read the passage again and imagine how you would have reacted to the events as they unfolded. How would this day in Cana shape your view of Jesus?
6. Read Luke 4:16-21. Here, the local carpenter’s son has returned home for a visit. Imagine you are a neighbor who hears Jesus speaking in the synagogue. How would you react?
7. The speaker on Sunday said that if Jesus was so like us, it gives us hope we can be more like him.
 - Do you agree with this statement?
 - What characteristics of Jesus revealed in Luke 11:37-41 (the meal at the Pharisee’s house), John 12:1-12 (the wedding in Cana), or Luke 4:16-21 (teaching in the synagogue) would you like to be more evident in your own life?
 - Take some time to pray for one another to become more like Jesus in the ways you have identified.

From Cana to Lavi: Week 2 Discussion Questions

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 Matthew 6: 25-34.
 - Why do you think Jesus uses so many analogies from nature in his teaching? What does this tell us about nature?
 - In what ways does the natural world bring comfort to you, and how does that affect your own spiritual journey?
 - In what ways does the natural world make you feel more vulnerable, and how does that affect your spiritual journey?
3. How has the uncertainty and loss of control we have all experienced through the pandemic impacted you? Have you been drawn closer to God, or do you feel further away? What insight does this give you?
4. Read Matthew 5: 38-48.
 - Share about a time you made an aggressive response when someone wronged you. What was the outcome? What is your personal reflection about this in light of Jesus' teaching?
 - Share about a time you made a non-violent response when someone wronged you. What was the outcome? What is your personal reflection about this in light of Jesus' teaching?
5. The speaker on Sunday talked about the cycles of violence and history behind the Israel-Palestine conflict, and the reality that in our own country we have inherited similar violence and injustice in our culture. In light of Jesus' teaching (which came at a time when he walked the trail through oppression, injustice and violence), reflect personally on the following questions:
 - In what ways do we seek to dominate in our own lives? (Reflect on relationships at work or at home, in conflicts or moments of discomfort.)
 - Does our desire for comfort inhibit our willingness to face injustice? (Reflect on how avoidance of guilt, not having solutions, fear, and satisfaction with the status quo might impact this.)
 - We can't change the past, but can we take ownership of it? (What does ownership of historical injustice look like for us, and how could it positively work against injustice today?)
6. After the above personal reflection, spend some time as a group sharing your thoughts and feelings, and then pray for one another.

Practice for the week: Imaginative Reading of Scripture

In this series we are trying to imaginatively walk in the footsteps of Jesus, to see what he saw and feel what he felt. This week try the following Ignatian prayer exercise. Ignatius of Loyola founded the Jesuit movement in the sixteenth century, and pioneered a way of reading scripture imaginatively. The aim is to experience the story, to put ourselves in it, and allow God to speak to us. Have someone in the group read Luke 19:1-10 (the text is below) while everyone else listens. The scripture will be read three times with a 3-minute pause between each. If you are on your own, you can do this by listening at this link

<https://www.biblegateway.com/audio/iaraye/nkjv/Luke.19> - let the reading run until the timing 1:20 (after Jesus says "The Son of Man came to seek and to save that which was lost") and then repeat the reading when you are ready after some silence.

This is a story in which Jesus shows outrageous compassion and acceptance to someone vilified by most others. It's also a story of someone owning their past and seeking to make amends because they have hope in Jesus.

In the *first* reading allow yourself to sink into the story and try to imagine what it was like to be there. Don't try to analyze it, just feel it. What do you hear, what do you smell, what do you see? What does it feel like to be there? Immerse yourself in the narrative. In the silence that follows, place yourself as a character in the story. Don't overthink this—just let yourself be drawn to someone and go with it. This could be an actual character in the narrative, or one of Jesus' disciples, or one of the crowd, or someone that your imagination creates.

In the *second* reading imagine the story from the perspective of that character. How do you experience it now? Just relax and sink into this perspective as you listen. In the silence that follows sink deeper into what you just experienced and remain there.

In the *third* reading pay particular attention to Jesus and how he might respond to you in the story (as the character you were drawn to). If you were to step aside with Jesus for a moment, what might he ask you, and what might you ask him? In the silence that follows sit quietly and invite God to speak you. Don't try to force anything, just rest and reflect on what impressions, promptings or challenges come to you as you experience this scripture.

Luke 19:1-10 (NIV)

Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. A man was there by the name of Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was wealthy. He wanted to see who Jesus was, but because he was short he could not see over the crowd. So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree to see him, since Jesus was coming that way.

When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today."

So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly. All the people saw this and began to mutter, "He has gone to be the guest of a sinner."

But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, "Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount."

Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."

From Lavi to the Sea of Galilee: Week 3 Discussion Questions

1. Was there anything that you found interesting or challenging from the message on Sunday?
2. Read the interwoven stories of the healing of Jairus' daughter and the woman in the crowd in Mark 5:21-43.
 - What emotions does the story of the unnamed, "unclean" woman in the crowd stir up in you, and why?
 - What groups of people are excluded or devalued in (i) our secular society, and (ii) church communities?
 - The speaker on Sunday said that any religious beliefs or practices that exclude, shame or devalue people are contrary to the way of Jesus. Do you agree with that? Or do church communities need to "draw the line" somewhere?
 - How does this passage challenge our own personal perceptions of who is and is not acceptable?
3. Imagine yourself a character in the story of Jairus' daughter. How would you respond when Jesus said, "Why all this commotion and wailing? The child is not dead but asleep"?
4. Why do you think Jesus sent the crowds away, and what does this tell us about Jesus?
5. Reflect for a few moments on one or both of the following:
 - When people encounter you (or metaphorically touch you) in everyday life, are there things that flow out of you that you would like to change?
 - Are there any areas of your life where you feel it is too late for Jesus to bring life and healing?

Share with the group, and spend some time praying for one another.

Practice for the week—the *Examen*

Each evening this week, take a few moments to think about your various interactions with people throughout the day.

- In each case, what do you think "flowed out of you" to the other person or people?
- Where did you express something of Jesus' character?
- Were there any interactions where you could have been more like Jesus? What might you have said or done differently?
- Sit for a few moments in God's presence, knowing you are completely loved and accepted.
- Ask God to fill you with the Spirit of Jesus in preparation for new opportunities to bring love, peace and hope to other people tomorrow.

The Mount of Beatitudes and Capernaum: Week 4 Discussion Questions

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 Matthew 4:12-13. No one knows for sure, but why do you think Jesus left Nazareth? Why do you think he moved to Capernaum specifically? As you imaginatively explore possible reasons, what does this show about who Jesus was?
3. Read Mark 1:14-20. Jesus uses a fishing analogy when he calls his first disciples. How do you think the fishing culture in which Jesus was emersed influenced him, and what insights does this give you about the humanity of Jesus?
4. Read Mark 2:1-12 and let the story imaginatively grow in your mind and heart.
 - What would it have been like to be Jesus in this story? Have you ever been in a situation like this when you are being pressed on all sides with high demand?
 - How do you think the disciples felt in this situation?
 - What strikes you most about the friends of the paralyzed man?
 - How do you think the paralyzed man felt before he encountered Jesus in the story? What about afterwards?
 - Why do you think the “teachers of the law” are so angry?After discussing the above, share what challenges you most about this story.
5. The speaker on Sunday talked about this story in terms of the giving and receiving of forgiveness. Spend some time in quiet personal reflection on the following questions:
 - In what ways could lack of self-forgiveness be paralyzing areas of your own life?
 - In what ways could unforgiveness towards others be paralyzing you?
6. After the above personal reflection, spend some time as a group sharing your thoughts and feelings and then pray for one another.

Practice for the week: Contemplative Reading of Scripture (*Lectio Divina*)

We’ve read the scripture below many times at Cedar Ridge, but this time let’s read in the complete way called *Lectio Divina* (“sacred reading”). It’s a story set on the shores of the Sea of Galilee, and is traditionally associated with one of the locations we visited on the Jesus Trail this week (Tabgha). The passage is printed below. Read it through four times in the following way:

Read the passage twice through, slowly and gently. Let the words flow over you. Savor each phrase, believing that God is present and has something for you. No need to search, simply listen for a word or phrase that somehow speaks to you or touches you. It might attract or even disturb you. Spend some time in silence with the word or phrase, just resting in it and allowing it to sink into your heart. Then read the passage slowly again.

Reflect or meditate on the word or phrase that stood out. How might it be speaking to you or challenging you? Allow memories, thoughts or situations evoked by the word to rise up gently. Allow

God to reveal to you how the word or phrase applies to your life. Ask, "What meaning does this have for me here and now? What does God want me to know or to see?" Spend time in silence, reflecting on the phrase and allowing it to interact with your life. Now read the passage again.

Respond to God. Open your heart to God and openly and honestly share how you feel about your experience with the passage. These may be questions or doubts, or prayers of thanksgiving, petition, confession, lament, or praise.

Rest in God's presence. Allow your prayers to gently fade away. Let go of your thoughts and move into a time of simply resting in God's presence. Open your mind, heart and soul to the fullness of God's love and peace. Rest.

John 21: 1-23 (NIV)

Afterward Jesus appeared again to his disciples, by the Sea of Galilee. It happened this way: Simon Peter, Thomas (also known as Didymus), Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two other disciples were together. "I'm going out to fish," Simon Peter told them, and they said, "We'll go with you." So they went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing.

Early in the morning, Jesus stood on the shore, but the disciples did not realize that it was Jesus. He called out to them, "Friends, haven't you any fish?" "No," they answered. He said, "Throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some." When they did, they were unable to haul the net in because of the large number of fish.

Then the disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" As soon as Simon Peter heard him say, "It is the Lord," he wrapped his outer garment around him (for he had taken it off) and jumped into the water. The other disciples followed in the boat, towing the net full of fish, for they were not far from shore, about a hundred yards. When they landed, they saw a fire of burning coals there with fish on it, and some bread.

Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish you have just caught." So Simon Peter climbed back into the boat and dragged the net ashore. It was full of large fish, 153, but even with so many the net was not torn. Jesus said to them, "Come and have breakfast." None of the disciples dared ask him, "Who are you?" They knew it was the Lord. Jesus came, took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. This was now the third time Jesus appeared to his disciples after he was raised from the dead.

When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?" "Yes, Lord," he said, "you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my lambs."

Again Jesus said, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" He answered, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Take care of my sheep."

The third time he said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, "Do you love me?" He said, "Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you."

Jesus said, "Feed my sheep. Very truly I tell you, when you were younger you dressed yourself and went where you wanted; but when you are old you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go." Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. Then he said to him, "Follow me!"

Peter turned and saw that the disciple whom Jesus loved was following them. (This was the one who had leaned back against Jesus at the supper and had said, "Lord, who is going to betray you?") When Peter saw him, he asked, "Lord, what about him?" Jesus answered, "If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? You must follow me." Because of this, the rumor spread among the believers that this disciple would not die. But Jesus did not say that he would not die; he only said, "If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you?"

Jesus in His Own Words: Week 5 Discussion Questions

1. Share some of your thoughts and experiences from this series over the past few weeks. In what ways has it affected your understanding of Jesus, and the stories about him?
2. What insights did you gain from the message this past Sunday? What was most helpful for you? What did you find uncomfortable?
3. Watch this video of the Lord's prayer spoken by a follower of Jesus from Iraq in his local Aramaic dialect: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zyOoXpboZrl> How what is your emotional reaction to this video? What sense of connection and commonality do you feel with this fellow follower? In what ways do you feel different or distant from him?
4. Jesus uses the terms "Our Father" and "Kingdom of Heaven" frequently in the Sermon on the Mount. In his native language (Aramaic) both words in their root meaning have both masculine and feminine connotations. For each of them discuss the following:
 - How have you tended to view the term previously—through a masculine or feminine lens?
 - In what ways is a feminine interpretation helpful and unhelpful?
 - In what ways is a masculine interpretation helpful and unhelpful?
 - How could the Aramaic interpretation help bring a more balanced and holistic view of God?
5. As followers of Jesus, we seek to understand and respond to the historical teachings of Jesus (what we believe Jesus said). But we also seek a more mystical experience. God might speak to us in this moment in thoughts, promptings, dreams, intuitions, or any other manner of means. Share an instance where you feel God may have "spoken" to you. What impact has it had on you? How might it have led you into a "wordless" experience of God?
6. Below are English translations (NIV) from the original Greek (A) and English paraphrases of translations from the original Aramaic (B) of the first 3 Beatitudes. Take some time to reflect personally on each one and then share and discuss the following:
 - What do you like about this interpretation of the Beatitude—what inspires and encourages you?
 - What do you find most challenging about it?
 - What does it reveal to you about Jesus?
 - Into what kind of change does it invite you?

First Beatitude

- A. Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.
- B. Aligned with the Source of Love are those for whom God's Spirit is their first and last breath, for they are ready to respond with "I can" in the world.

Second Beatitude

- A. Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.
- B. Blessed are those who wander in emotional turmoil for what should be, for they shall see the face of fulfillment in a new form.

Third Beatitude

- A. Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.
- B. Ripe are those who have softened what is rigid within, for they are open to receive power and strength from the whole of creation.

7. After sharing about the Beatitudes above, spend some time praying for one another.

Practice for the week: Breath Prayer

In the Aramaic language the word for “breath” is the same as the word for “spirit” (the same is true in Hebrew). In the culture and language that Jesus spoke there is the sense that our breath is the very presence of God’s Spirit—we are all that intimately connected to and immersed in God!

This week practice this breath prayer (try to do it three times, just for a minute or two each day):

Sit comfortably with your eyes closed and focus on your breathing. As you breathe in and out, imagine you are immersed in God, and you are breathing the mystery of God in and out. You are so loved, so intimately connected to God that nothing can separate you.

If it helps, use a word to focus on the rhythm of your breathing. You could use the Aramaic word for Our Divine Parent: “*ab-woon*.” Breathe in “*ab*” and exhale “*woon*.” Or you could use the Aramaic word for God: “*ala-ha*.” Breathe in “*ala*” and exhale “*ha*.” Or you could use “*Jesus*”: Breathe in “*Je*” and exhale “*sus*.” As you say the word feel the resonance in your body and accept these vibrations as the presence of God in and around you.

As you follow the rhythm of your breath, let yourself sink into the presence of God. Be conscious that your rhythm is part of God’s rhythm in the whole Cosmos. Be conscious that you share this rhythm with everyone else on our planet—both friends and enemies, people you love and people you don’t like, people you know and people far away around the world.

Then just let go of all thoughts and simply “be” as you breathe in the love of God.