



Discussion Questions

Discussion questions for week 1: Citizens of the Kingdom

Before discussing these questions, read through this week's passage in Luke 14:1 – 15:32.

1. What insights did you gain from the message this past Sunday? What was most helpful for you? What did you find uncomfortable?
2. In your reading of the whole passage, which stories or sections jump out to you most and why? What would you say is the general theme of this section, and why do you think the author is emphasizing this?
3. There is a lot of eating going on in this section! Why do you think eating together was so important in Jesus' culture? How does this compare with our culture here and now? What does this tell us about Jesus? How might we emulate Jesus in this way?
4. Read Luke 14:1-6. Why do you think the Pharisees are watching Jesus closely? Have you ever felt watched closely? How did this feel? Are there any people who you find yourself watching closely? Why? The Pharisees remain silent throughout this section—why do you think that is?
5. Read Isaiah 25:6-9. What might be the relevance of this prophetic vision to the story Jesus tells in Luke 14:12-23? In this story Jesus has shifted from "how to be a guest" (in Luke 14:7-11) to "how to be a host". In this "new kind of kingdom" Jesus seems to be saying citizenship is not just defined by being accepted but by the personal practice of accepting others. The story is full of excuses—what excuses do you have for not accepting and including certain people?
6. Read Luke 14:25-35. Why do you think the author includes these statements of Jesus in the middle of all these stories?
7. There are three stories in Luke 15. How are they similar? How are they different? What is one issue from this section that you find most challenging or compelling?
8. Jesus is demonstrating a new kind of kingdom based on a fresh understanding of God. Some are finding it hard to let go of their presuppositions and previous perspectives. How is your understanding of God being challenged currently? In what ways do you need to let go? Share your thoughts and feelings together and then spend some time praying for one another.

Practice for the week: Imaginative reading of scripture

Set aside some time this week to read the story in Luke 15: 11-32 using your imagination. This is a modified form of an ancient method of reading scripture developed by Ignatius of Loyola in the 16th century.

Read the scripture 3 times. Don't try to think about it or analyze its meaning, but just try to feel it. In the first reading, let yourself sink into the story, immerse yourself in the scene and become aware of what you see, hear, smell, taste and touch. Who is there, and what are they doing? How does the situation

make you feel? Let the story wash over you, and take some moments of silence afterwards. Let yourself become aware of who you identify with in the story. This could be one of the specific characters or someone just present and observing. Who are you drawn to?

Then read the story again. This time allow yourself to be that person with whom you identified. Experience the story from their perspective, through their eyes, and let your imagination engage with their thoughts and feelings. Again, take some moments of silence after this reading to reflect on the experience.

In the third and final reading imagine that Jesus is communicating with you in this scene. How does Jesus look at you, what does he say? What do you hear, and how does it make you feel? Sit in silence for a moment after the reading, and invite God to speak to your heart.

Discussion questions for week 2: Kingdom Currency

Before discussing these questions, read through this week's passage in Luke 16:1 – 19:27.

1. What resonated with you from the message this past Sunday? Was there anything about sitting in the open air and listening to the parables (rather than reading them) that influenced your thinking?
2. In your reading of the whole passage, which stories or sections jump out to you most and why? What would you say is the general theme of this section, and why do you think the author is emphasizing this?
3. The speaker on Sunday spoke about the hunger and threat of destitution faced by most people in first century Palestine. Have you experienced a time of particular financial hardship? How did this impact your view of life, of community, and of God?
4. Read Luke 16:1-15. What do you think this parable means? Why do you think Jesus told it, and what might it mean for us today?
5. Read Luke 16:19-31. The speaker on Sunday said this parable was based on an Egyptian folktale. How might that impact how we understand this parable? What do you think Jesus was saying to the Pharisees through this parable? How might that message be similar or different for us, living in a very different time and culture?
6. Read Luke 19:11-27. The speaker on Sunday said this parable tells the story of Herod Archelaus, a brutal and much hated noble who ruled Judea from 4 BCE to 6 CE. How does that history impact your understanding of the characters in the parable?
7. In Luke 18:14, Jesus says, "All those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted." This is a recurrent theme in Luke (see Luke 1:52, and 14:11). What message does this give to the poor? To the rich? To us?
8. In what ways do you feel challenged currently? Share your thoughts and feelings together and then spend some time praying for one another.

Practice for the week: Generosity and humility

"No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money." (Luke 16:13)

"All those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted." (Luke 18:14b)

Set aside some time this week to identify one way you can show

- **Generosity**—giving your money, time, friendship, or hospitality to someone with no expectation of anything in return.
- **Humility**—giving privilege away to make room for others, spending time listening to someone, or some other means of putting the needs and interests of others ahead of yourself.

Discussion questions for week 3: Kingdoms in Conflict

Before discussing these questions read through this week's passage in Luke 19:28-22:6.

1. What insights did you gain from the message this past Sunday? What was most helpful for you? What did you find uncomfortable?
2. In your reading of the whole passage, which stories or sections jump out to you most and why? What emotions does the passage arouse in you? What would you say is the general theme of this section, and why do you think the author is emphasizing this?
3. Why do you think Jesus weeps in Luke 19:41-44? What emotions (positive or negative) would be stirred in you if you were in Jesus' situation here? Are any of those emotions real for you right now and why?
4. Read Luke 14:1-6. Why do you think Jesus points to John the Baptist when his authority is questioned? Look back at Luke 3:15-22 and Luke 9:7-9—what do these passages say about the kind of authority and power Jesus embodies? In what ways do you find this kind of authority compelling and in what ways off-putting? When it comes to the challenge of changing the world, would you follow someone like that?
5. The "apocalyptic" section in Luke 21: 5-36 is difficult to interpret. The speaker on Sunday suggested Jesus is referring to the future destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple that eventually happened in 70 CE. Jesus is not painting a rosy picture of the future! Looking at the poetic language in this passage, how might our circumstances compare today? What insights can you glean from how Jesus calls us to respond in such circumstances?
6. In Luke's gospel Jesus is bringing a message of peace, love and inclusion ("a new kind of kingdom"). But paradoxically this means conflict because he challenges the status quo. Reflect on this quote from Dr. Martin Luther King's Nobel Prize lecture in 1964: "Nonviolence is a powerful and just weapon. Indeed, it is a weapon unique in history, which cuts without wounding and ennobles the man (*sic*) who wields it. I believe in this method because I think it is the only way to reestablish a broken community." In what ways do you see Jesus wielding this kind of weapon in this week's section of Luke (and in previous weeks)? In what ways do you feel you have been passive about peace, love and inclusion? How do you need to take up a weapon?
7. At the end of this section Judas gives up on Jesus and goes to the religious authorities. When have you been tempted to give up on Jesus? When you look at the state of the world, have you ever felt despair; have you felt violence towards certain people or groups and wished someone would give them a taste of their own medicine? Have you ever felt this or behaved this way in personal relationships? Have an honest discussion about your thoughts and feelings, and then spend some time praying for one another.

Practice for the week: The Examen

We all experience and/or avoid conflict in daily life. Often our response to it comes from unawareness because we are not conscious of our thoughts and feelings in the present moment. The Examen is an exercise to help us become more conscious and can be practiced at the end of each day.

Sit quietly alone and take a moment to center yourself. Then “relive” your day in your imagination by allowing your thoughts to guide you through the day’s events. As you do this, focus particularly on interactions where you experienced conflict or where you avoided it. In the times of conflict, reflect on what was motivating and driving you—were you centered in love or fear? How could you have been more loving and courageous in this situation, without compromising your truth? In times of conflict avoidance, what was driving you—love or fear? How could you have responded more lovingly and courageously?

When you have finished reflecting on your day, continue to sit quietly without self-judgment. Invite God’s presence and allow yourself to sink deeply into God’s total acceptance—feel this love as the source of your own love and courage as you let go of fear. Invite God’s love to empower you to live more consciously from this center tomorrow.

Discussion questions for week 4: The Heart of the Kingdom

Before discussing these questions, read through this week's passage in Luke 22:7-23:49. Note what is included and what is left out of this well-known story of Jesus' last meal, arrest and crucifixion.

1. What resonated with you from the message this past Sunday? Was there anything you found difficult or disagreed with? Were you surprised by anything that was included or excluded from Luke's account?
2. Read Luke 22:14-23.
 - What significance, if any, do you think there is to Luke's mention of two cups (or two references to the cup)?
 - Communion can be understood in many ways. How do you view communion? Has your view of communion changed over time? What motivates you to take communion (or to not take it)?
 - Unlike the story in Matthew and Mark, in Luke's gospel Judas also takes the bread and the wine. What point might Luke be making by telling the story this way? At Cedar Ridge, we invite everyone to take communion. In what ways do you find this a helpful or unhelpful approach to communion?
3. Read Luke 22:31-38. How do you think Luke's first readers would have understood this passage? What might it mean for us today?
4. Read Luke 22:39-53. (Note: verses 43 and 44 are not found in the earliest manuscripts, and appear to have been added later.) How does Luke portray Jesus on the Mount of Olives? Why do you think he might want to portray him this way?
5. Luke presents a series of hearings Jesus was subjected to in Luke 22:66-23:25. For each of the following characters, what emotions do they display towards Jesus, and why do you think that was? How does Jesus respond? Why might that be?
 - The chief priests and teachers of the law
 - Pilate
 - Herod
 - The crowd
6. Read Jesus' encounter with the women in Luke 23:27-31. Why do you think Jesus responds the way he does? Think about your own life: is there an area of pain or hardship that makes you more sensitive to the needs of others? Is there an area where pain or hardship makes you less sensitive?
7. Have someone in the group read Luke 23:26-49, or use the audio function on www.biblegateway.com to have the passage read to you. Before you listen, quiet your heart and invite God to speak to you. Listen to the reading three times, pausing between each reading. Spend some time in silence, and then close in prayer.

Practice for the week: Meditation on the words from the cross

In Luke's gospel, Jesus makes three statements from the cross. In contrast to Matthew and Mark, the statements Luke records are full of faith, hope and forgiveness. Take some time to meditate on these words during the week. In what ways can you "take up your cross and follow Jesus" in reflecting the attitudes you see in these words?

Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." (Luke 23:34)

Jesus answered him, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise." (Luke 23:43)

Jesus called out with a loud voice, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." (Luke 23:46)

Discussion questions for week 5: The Victorious Kingdom

Before discussing these questions read through this week's passage in Luke 23:50-24:53.

1. What insights did you gain from the message this past Sunday? What was most helpful for you? What did you find uncomfortable?
2. How do you find yourself responding to this passage as you read it? What jumps out at you; what thoughts and feelings does it evoke in you? What do you find most inspiring or exciting? What do you find most confusing or difficult to comprehend?
3. The speaker on Sunday suggested that in this final section the author of Luke frequently alludes to the birth narratives at the beginning. Why would they do that? How might it affect the way we relate to and interpret Jesus' resurrection?
4. Read Luke 24:1-12. How would you describe the response of the three different groups in this part of the story—the women, the apostles, and finally, Peter? Why do you think they each respond this way? With which group do you most closely identify, and why?
5. Read Luke 24:13-35. Why do you think they don't recognize Jesus? Why do you think Jesus doesn't just tell them who he is? Why do you think the author tells us they recognize Jesus when he breaks bread? Can you describe a time or situation when you felt abandoned, but later realized God was with you all along?
6. Read Luke 24:36-53. In what ways is Jesus' body like ours, and in what ways is it not? How do you account for this? With respect to the meaning of the resurrection, what are the implications of both—the physical and the mystical? What might be the downsides of only emphasizing one?
7. In the same passage above, Jesus says an outcome of his resurrection is the proclamation of "repentance and forgiveness" to the whole world (v47). What does this mean to you? How does it relate to the "new kind of kingdom" Jesus has been teaching about and his greeting of peace at the beginning of the passage? What could repentance and forgiveness look like in humanity at a personal level? What could it look like at a societal level?
8. Going back to the two walkers on the road to Emmaus, what are some areas of your life where you would like Jesus to "come up and walk alongside you" (Luke 24:15). Each share how you feel you need Jesus' resurrection and new creation in your own life right now, and then spend some time praying for one another.

Practice for the week: Receiving the Risen Christ

The closing section of the Gospel of Luke is dramatic and exciting, but there is also lots of surprise, confusion, unbelief, and struggle to understand. One theme is how it can be hard to "see" the risen Christ. Another theme throughout Luke, and here at the end (Luke 24:49), is that we need God's Spirit

(the very Spirit of Christ) and this is how we experience (and “see”) the risen Christ in any given moment.

This week take a few minutes at the beginning of each day to consciously receive God’s Spirit. Find a place of quiet seclusion and silently focus on your breathing as a way of receiving God. Just relax and don’t try to force anything to happen, but simply breathe in God’s presence and infinite love, and breathe out fears and worries. Let go of the need to make yourself loveable. Let go of attachment to belief that any situation in your life is hopeless. Breathe in the resurrected Christ. Let new creation take root deep within you.

Allow yourself to simply remain in this posture as you go about daily life. Reflect at the end of the day on how this affected the way you see things—in nature, in people, in problems, in conflict, in yourself.