

Lent

WEEK TWO: WHOSE AUTHORITY?

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 25 – WEDNESDAY, MARCH 3

Faith requires the humble recognition that we are not God.

It's a simple enough thing to say but a very challenging belief to put into practice.

The default human posture toward authority is rebellion – unless, of course, we are the ones with the authority! This week's theme in our journey to Jerusalem is willingness – following Jesus who, despite being in the very form and nature God, humbled himself...

READ

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 25

It is already the second week of Lent! It is not easy learning a new pattern of daily devotions and prayers but here you are – back to the first activity each week: Reading from the Bible. This week's theme picks up on the relationship of authority and faith with the story of the Centurion. We will reflect through the relationships between faith, authority and willingness (also known as 'humility'). Let's go...

Before you read the following verses pray for the Holy Spirit to befriend you in your reading and teach you from these passages.

Mark up the passages below as you read them:

- **UNDERLINE** any words or actions related to faith or humility/willingness
- **CIRCLE** any description of authority or demonstration of authority in these stories from Luke's gospel
- ★ After you've read the passages once, read them again slowly – maybe out loud – then **STAR** one word or phrase that really seems to capture your attention at the heart

LUKE 7:1-10

(Our Focus Passage for this Week – The Centurion as an Example of Faith)

After Jesus had finished all his sayings in the hearing of the people, he entered Capernaum. ² A centurion there had a slave whom he valued highly, and who was ill and close to death. ³ When he heard about Jesus, he sent some Jewish elders to him, asking him to come and heal his slave. ⁴ When they came to Jesus, they appealed to him earnestly, saying, "He is worthy of having you do this for him, ⁵ for he loves our people, and it is he who built our synagogue for us." ⁶ And Jesus went with them, but when he was not far from the house, the centurion sent friends to say to him, "Lord, do not trouble yourself, for I am not worthy to have you come under my roof; ⁷ therefore I did not presume to come to you. But only speak the word, and let my servant be healed. ⁸ For I also am a man set under authority, with soldiers under me; and I say to one, 'Go,' and he goes, and to another, 'Come,' and he comes, and to my slave, 'Do this,' and the slave does it." ⁹ When Jesus heard this he was amazed at him, and turning to the crowd that followed him, he said, "I tell you, not even in Israel have I found such faith." ¹⁰ When those who had been sent returned to the house, they found the slave in good health.

LUKE 22:39-42

³⁹ Jesus came out and went, as was his custom, to the Mount of Olives; and the disciples followed him. ⁴⁰ When he reached the place, he said to them, "Pray that you may not come into the time of trial." ⁴¹ Then he withdrew from them about a stone's throw, knelt down, and prayed, ⁴² "Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me; yet, not my will but yours be done."

PHILIPPIANS 2:5-11

In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:

- ⁶ Who, being in very nature God,
did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage;
⁷ rather, he made himself nothing
by taking the very nature of a servant,
being made in human likeness.
⁸ And being found in appearance as a man,
he humbled himself
by becoming obedient to death—
even death on a cross!
⁹ Therefore God exalted him to the highest place
and gave him the name that is above every name,
¹⁰ that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
¹¹ and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

These questions are asked to take us back to the text to look closer each time at what is happening there. They mainly focus on Jesus and the Centurion.

1. How is the Centurion described by the Jewish leaders in Luke 7?

How does the Centurion describe himself?

What is Jesus' description of the Centurion?

2. In Luke 7 how does the Centurion define authority?

PRAY

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 26

Not my will but Yours be done

Willingness is hard. We naturally rebel against control or authority over us. The willing recognition of Jesus' authority was central to the faith of the Centurion. So how gracious is God that when humanity is stubbornly resisting God's authority Jesus dies for us. Jesus willingly subjects himself to stubborn people – willingly trusts the Father in the face of the agony of the cross – a demonstration of love and care so complete that it makes a way for us to willingly entrust ourselves in the time of trial from without and rebellion from within.

So our prayer today and this week is to be willing. I want to encourage you to use Jesus' prayer from the garden – **Not my will but Yours be done** – as a breath prayer today and in the days to come. A breath prayer is a short phrase that we can repeat over and over as we inhale and exhale. Take 5 minutes to pray this prayer in God's presence.

As you pray this prayer right here and now for a few moments, what situations does the Holy Spirit bring to mind? Where can you feel yourself resisting surrender to God's will? Offer this resistance to God. Sometimes the first prayer we need to say is, "Lord, make me willing..."

FAMILIES

A **breath prayer** is a short, memorized prayer that we can use to open our hearts and minds and especially our willingness to God's Holy Spirit. It is a wonderful spiritual practice to teach children. Maybe this week practice a breath prayer – breathe on while thinking "not my will" and breathe out on "but yours be done". Or even easier "Lord Jesus Christ" – "make me willing." I often use the psalm "When I am afraid" – "I will trust in you."

REST

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 27

Why should we entrust ourselves willingly – wholeheartedly – to God in Christ? Today as you rest in God's deep love for you read Psalm 23 as a reminder that Jesus is a Good Shepherd whose will for you is rest, restoration and blessing.

PSALM 23

The Lord is my shepherd;
I shall not want.

² He makes me to lie down in green pastures;
He leads me beside the still waters.

³ He restores my soul;
He leads me in the paths of righteousness
For His name's sake.

⁴ Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil;
For You are with me;
Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.

⁵ You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies;
You anoint my head with oil;
My cup runs over.

⁶ Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me
All the days of my life;
And I will dwell in the house of the Lord Forever.

WORSHIP [GATHER]

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 28

If your group gathers on Sunday then use the "Gather" section (Wednesday) for your group time together.

Our theme in worship today is Faith and Willingness – take a few notes for yourself during the service that will help in the next few days.

Where did Jesus really get my attention in the worship time today?

What stood out to me in the sermon?

What did the Holy Spirit call to mind during the reflection time after the sermon?

Who do I want to remember to pray for in this coming week?

PRACTICE

MONDAY, MARCH 1

THIS WEEK'S PRACTICE: HUMILITY FROM ABOVE, BELOW AND ALONGSIDE

Last week we considered the practice of fasting. This week's practice is humility – the willingness to follow Jesus' downward way. How do we live out our faith in a willing relationship with those who hold authority over us – with those over whom we practice authority – and with partners in Jesus' gospel mission?

Practicing Humility from Above

Jesus had a lot to say as well about how we use our authority – remember when he told his disciples not to be like the Gentiles who lord it over people? When Jesus washed his disciples' feet? Write down the names of people over whom you hold a position of authority.

What is one prayer that you can say for each of these persons daily?

What is a practical way this week that you can serve this person / persons with humility?

Practicing Humility from Below

People of faith in Jesus are encouraged to respond to those in authority as if we are responding to the God to whom that person in authority is going to give account for their actions. Who are the authorities in your life? We are not reflecting here on civic authorities or systems – write down actual relationships. A boss, for example, or the chairperson of your condo association, a Teacher, a Coach, etc.

What is one prayer you can say for them daily?

What is a practical way this week that you can practice willingness in this relationship?

Practicing Humility Alongside

We live in a far more egalitarian society than traditional cultures and so many of our relationships are lived out alongside others – our lives influence theirs, and their choices influence us, but we do not really think in terms of ‘authority’.

Name 3 people that you live alongside who have a great deal of influence – for good or bad – over how your life goes day to day. How specifically can you pray for them this week?

What is a practical way this week that you can respond with humility alongside these 3 people?

FAMILIES - LIKE A CHILD

Remember the time Jesus put a child in the middle of all of the disciples and said, “Whoever becomes humble like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.” (Matthew 18:4)? How do we guard and encourage and cultivate the humility God has given children as a gift they retain into adulthood? Church – how do we continue to learn this lesson from Jesus as we welcome and love the children in our faith family?

REFLECT

TUESDAY, MARCH 2

Today is for reflection in Jesus' presence – a chance to recall the past week and regather for the next week of the journey.

Read Luke 7:1-10 again.

This past week where have you been most aware of the tension between authority and willingness with your faith?

Where has Jesus met you with grace in your journey this past week?

What ongoing prayers do you carry into the next week of Lent?

THE METHODIST COVENANT PRAYER – WILLINGNESS...

I am no longer my own, but yours.

Put me to what you will, place me with whom you will.

Put me to doing, put me to suffering.

Let me be put to work for you or set aside for you,

Praised for you or criticized for you.

Let me be full, let me be empty.

Let me have all things, let me have nothing.

I freely and fully surrender all things to your glory and service.

And now, O wonderful and holy God,

Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer,

you are mine, and I am yours.

So be it.

And the covenant which I have made on earth,

Let it also be made in heaven. Amen.

GATHER [RECONNECT]

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 3

If your group met on Sunday take the opportunity on Wednesday to check in with your prayer partner(s) midweek, supporting each other in this journey.

Reconnecting

All of us get stubborn about certain things – what is one thing that you are ridiculously stubborn about? (For example, Laurie is stupidly stubborn about how a bed is to be made...)

How did your Lenten practices or prayers go this past week? Did anyone choose a special practice for Lent?

Each week we will come back to the question of what it means to live as people of faith in Jesus. This week, how would you answer that question? Make a note so you can follow your progression of thought and practice over this Lenten journey.

Read Luke 7:1-10 together

What struck you in your own reading and prayer this past week on this passage?

What struck you from Laurie's sermon on Sunday?

What questions or convictions surface from this story as we begin this Lent journey?

Faith and Practice

Faith is the willingness to submit ourselves to God's call and God's purpose for us. What is one place in your life that we can pray for humility and willingness this week?

Close out your time as a group in prayer for one another.